

## **On the deaths of some eminent philosophers of modern times / [Anon].**

### **Contributors**

Halford, Henry, Sir, bart., 1766-1844.

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183 Euston Road  
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HAA FORD, Sir H.

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ON  
THE DEATHS  
OF  
SOME EMINENT PHILOSOPHERS  
OF  
MODERN TIMES.

[1836]





ON THE DEATHS,

&c. &c.

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GENTLEMEN,

IN order to interest your attention this evening, I shall repair again to that vast mausoleum of mortality which modern times have accumulated; and select from the mass of eminent persons dead within the last two centuries, some of the Philosophers of this country, who have carried the distinguishing prerogative of man—his reason—to a greater extent than their contemporaries, and have made their researches subservient, not to an increase of our knowledge only, but of our happiness also, by bearing disinterested testimony to the truths of our holy religion. Disinterested did I say?—

Not that I intend to disparage the assurances of those whose pleasure and whose office it is to confirm our faith in Christ; for though I mean to confine myself to recalling to your minds the deaths of Lord Bacon, Mr. Boyle, Sir Isaac Newton, Mr. Locke, Mr. Addison, Sir William Jones, and Dr. Johnson, I could dwell with equal pleasure on the names of Jeremy Taylor, Isaac Barrow, Archbishop Tillotson, Bishops Berkeley and Butler, Archdeacon Paley, and a host of divines, whose powers of reasoning were not less remarkable than those of these philosophers. But human nature is wayward, and is often disposed to receive with greater favour evidence which is voluntary than that which is proffered from a sense of duty.

Lord Bacon, in the indulgence of his fancy, conceived a notion, whilst taking an airing in the winter, that snow would preserve animal matter from corruption, and



bought a hen with which he might make the experiment immediately. As soon as the fowl had been disentrained, he filled it with snow, and deposited it in a large snow-ball. By this operation he was chilled, but nevertheless continued his airing until he became so ill as to be obliged to stop at the house of Lord Arundel at Highgate, where he desired to be put to bed. He died of an inflammation of the lungs there, in a week afterwards, in the sixty-sixth year of his age.

It may be presumed that the state of his mind gave the disease a great advantage over him. The degradation which he had suffered by the King and Parliament—I dare not say unjustly, though I cannot conceive that his morality was of that Spartan kind which made the crime consist in allowing it to be detected, or of that Venetian character, in later days, whose best con-



science was, according to the poet, not to leave undone but to keep unknown;—but the humiliation had broken his spirit; and although his punishment had been remitted by the same authorities, no doubt that such dilapidation of frame, as care and sleepless nights were sure to give rise to, facilitated that dissolution which might not otherwise have taken place for years.

To the learning and philosophy of Lord Bacon his posterity has done ample justice. The reasoning by induction, first and exclusively propounded by him as applicable to natural philosophy, is now the only mode of reasoning held to be legitimate in physics; and his writings abound so much in imagery and good sense, as well as knowledge, that it is difficult to lay down the book when once one has taken it up. His disquisitions upon ecclesiastical polity are so luminous and just, and his proposals for simplifying



the law so intelligible and practical, that if we may judge by what has lately been done by the wisdom of Parliament, they must have furnished the model for its recent improvements. But his piety is poured forth in such strains of simplicity and beauty, that I must quote one specimen of it from an address which he was accustomed to utter in his devotions :—

“ I have delighted in the brightness of  
“ thy sanctuary ; thy creatures have been  
“ my books, but thy scriptures much more ;  
“ I have sought thee in the courts, fields,  
“ and gardens, but I have found thee in  
“ thy temples.”

To Lord Bacon's genius succeeded a kindred spirit, the ornament and glory of his age, the Hon. Robert Boyle, who was born on the day on which Lord Bacon died. He was of a very delicate habit, and so pale



and thin as made it appear wonderful to his friends of the Royal Society, then lately established, that he was able to occupy himself, so laboriously as he did, in making the numerous experiments which were required in his investigations. Nevertheless he lived to sixty-five years of age, and died exhausted and worn out by natural decay, rather than by any notable, well-characterized disease, though it is not improbable, from such details as have reached us, that it was the climacteric malady which destroyed him.

With some of Mr. Boyle's works we are all acquainted. Boerhaave, who ought to be authority with physicians, said, "Which  
" of Mr. Boyle's writings shall I recommend  
" to you? All of them—to him we owe the  
" secrets of fire, air, water, animals, vege-  
" tables, fossils; so that from his works may



“ be deduced the whole system of natural  
“ knowledge.” He did, indeed,

“ Look through Nature, up to Nature’s God.”

And to the accomplishments of the scholar and philosopher, he added the most exalted piety, and the purest sanctity of manners ; and the end and aim of all his inquiries into nature was to do honour to its great Maker\*.

Sir Isaac Newton was born so puny and sickly a child, that his mother thought he could not live many days. Yet his life was protracted to eighty-four years. Does this appear marvellous to any of you ? Let him recollect that it is probable extraordinary care was thrown around this diminutive helplessness ; that close attention to all the

\* As a proof of Mr. Boyle’s zeal for the Christian religion, we may mention his foundation for lectures in defence of the Gospel against infidels of all sorts, the effects of which have been so conspicuous in the many volumes of excellent discourses which have been published in consequence of that noble and pious foundation.



imperfections of its tender frame would be continued to the period of its complete development; that such habitual watchfulness over all its movements would, at length, render its life more secure than that of a robust habit, which might, by negligence, be surprised into danger and death. The uncertainty of human life, of which we all complain, is rendered more uncertain by our own improvidence and inattention, and by a misuse of our strength, which, under certain indispositions, allies itself with disease, and aids it in the destruction of the vital spirit. This is most observable in inflammations, and in apoplexies. The natural abundance of blood, if circulated quietly, constitutes health, but in the slightest excess and hurry becomes a dangerous plethora.

Sir Isaac died at last of the stone. This evil did not manifest itself until a very short time before his death. He had taken a house at Kensington, in hopes of remedy-



ing a slight embarrassment in his breathing, and having occasion to come to town to attend a council of the Royal Society, he suffered torments the next day, which never ceased till they had destroyed him. Dr. Mead and Mr. Cheselden, who were called to him, were of opinion that the stone had been imbedded in the substance of the bladder, and was moved from its quiet position by the jolting of the carriage. Whatever had occasioned his distress, Sir Isaac never betrayed an impatient feeling, but was entirely resigned to the will of the Almighty, and sought and found comfort, not in his philosophy; not in the fame of his optical experiments, and of the demonstration of the planetary orbits from the principle of gravity, for he knew that—

“Nec quicquam tibi prodest,  
Aerias tentasse domos, animoque rotundum  
Percurrisse polum, morituro\*.”—HOR.

\* Vid. Od. ad Archytam, Lib. i., Ode 28.



No, but in contemplating the benevolence and mercy of God, and in a humble hope of the intercession of His Son.

It is recorded in his epitaph, that he asserted in his philosophy the majesty of God, and exhibited in his conduct the simplicity of the Gospel\*. And a philosopher of high credit of modern day has remarked that it is one of the proudest triumphs of the Christian faith, that he who, among all the individuals of his species, possessed the highest intellectual powers, was not only a learned and profound divine, but a firm believer in the great doctrines of religion.

I should be glad to assist in refuting the allegation made originally, I believe, by Huygens, a foreigner, upon the authority of a letter from a young man at Cambridge,

\* Dei Opt. Max. Majestatem philosophia assensit  
Evangelii simplicitatem moribus expressit.

See *Epitaph*.

and lately repeated by a most respectable periodical publication\*, of Sir Isaac Newton's having been insane. It was said that he had suffered a severe mental emotion by the loss of his papers, containing calculations which it had cost him the labour of many years to make. A candle had been left incautiously upon the table on which these papers lay, and a favourite little spaniel having overturned the candle, had set fire to them, and burnt them, and this occasioned a temporary loss of his reason.

I confess I am not satisfied that, whatever degree of disappointment and vexation such an accident might occasion, the result amounted to insanity. It is the business of those who make such a charge to substantiate it by proof. Accordingly, a letter of Sir Isaac's to Mr. Locke has been called up

\* See Foreign Quarterly Review of Mons. Biot's Life of Sir I. Newton.



amongst the arguments in proof of the derangement of the author's mind. The letter manifests, indeed, a great deal of irritation, such as intense thought upon an abstruse subject, long continued, without the intervention and refreshment of sleep might occasion; but a subsequent one, written a fortnight afterwards, apologizes for the rudeness and discourtesy of the former, and refers it to his not having slept for an hour together any night, and for five successive nights, not a wink. Mr. Locke's reply to this does not convey the slightest suspicion that he entertained such a notion, and is written with so tender and unaffected a veneration for the good, as well as great qualities of the excellent person to whom it is addressed, as demonstrates at once, the conscious integrity of the writer, and the superiority of his mind to the irritation of little passions. On Mr. Locke's construc-



tion, therefore, of Sir Isaac's letter, and on the view which so good a judge of mind as Mr. Locke took of the state of Sir Isaac's faculties, I rest the decision of this question.

What I have now said of Mr. Locke may, perhaps, incline you to desire to hear more of this great man. Besides, he was one of you, for he took his degree of M.B. at Christ Church, Oxford, when he had been a Westminster student, and owed his first introduction to the world to having administered to the health of the Lord Ashley, afterwards Earl of Shaftesbury, who had come to Oxford for the purpose of consulting Dr. Thomas, an eminent physician there. The doctor, being called out of town, requested Mr. Locke to attend his Lordship till his return. This was the foundation of an intimacy between Mr. Locke and his patient ever afterwards.

I may remind you, moreover, that by the



kindness of the late Lord King, a paper was read here, in the year 1829, containing the details of a case of tic douloureux in the person of the Countess of Northumberland, at Paris, treated by Mr. Locke; and we have also the testimony of Sydenham to Mr. Locke's medical knowledge, who says,—  
“ Nosti præterea quam huic meæ methodo  
“ suffragantem habeam, qui intimius per  
“ omnia perspexerat, utrique nostrum con-  
“ junctissimum Dominum Joannem Locke,  
“ quo quidem viro, sive ingenio judicioque  
“ acri et subacto, sive etiam antiquis, hoc  
“ est, optimis moribus, vix superiorem quem-  
“ quam inter eos qui nunc sunt homines  
“ repertum iri confido, paucissimos certè  
“ pares.”

Locke, then, was a physician; and who amongst you does not feel a pleasure in remembering that the honourable profession to which he had attached himself was the

profession to which Mr. Locke applied the powers of his great mind ? And why should we not all take pride in the observation of that eminent scholar and statesman, the late Lord Grenville, that “ from the very first “ dawn of reviving letters to the present “ moment, there never has been a period, in “ this country, when the masters of medi- “ cine amongst us have not made manifest “ the happy influence of that pursuit on “ the cultivation of all the other branches of “ philosophy.”\*

Mr. Locke's health was always delicate, and he was subject to attacks of asthma, which sometimes compelled him to go abroad in search of a less fickle atmosphere than that of his own country. He lived, however, to seventy-three years of age, and died on the 28th of October, 1704, at the

\* See ‘Oxford and Locke,’ a pamphlet by Lord Grenville ; 1829.



house of Sir Francis Masham, at Oates, in Surrey, where he had been domesticated any time within the last fourteen years of his life. He was perfectly aware, it seems, that his days were numbered, and was well prepared for the awful moment of separation from this world. We have, from the authority of Lady Masham herself, the best account of the last hours of his life. Having desired that he might be remembered at evening prayers, she asked him if he had any objection to the domestics of the family attending the service in his chamber?—to which he replied, that he had none. When prayers were over, he gave some orders with great serenity of mind ; and an occasion offering of speaking of the goodness of God, he especially extolled the love which God showed to man in justifying him by faith in Jesus Christ. He returned Him thanks in particular for having called him to the



knowledge of that Divine Saviour; he exhorted all about him to read the Holy Scriptures attentively, and to apply themselves sincerely to the practice of all their duties; adding, expressly, that by these means they would be more happy in this world, and secure to themselves the possession of eternal felicity hereafter. He passed the whole night without sleep, and desired, next day, to be carried into his closet, where, after dozing a little, he ceased to breathe about three in the afternoon, without any indication of pain or suffering.

Mr. Addison died, at the age of forty-seven, of dropsy, brought on, probably, by a disease of the liver. The habits of life of the higher orders of society, in Mr. Addison's time, were less cautious, less compatible with health than they are at present. In proof of this, we may notice the greater comparative longevity at the beginning of



this century than was found at the commencement of the last. The Northampton Tables, which were published in the middle of the eighteenth century, give only four as the average number of those who had arrived at a hundred years of age and upwards out of a million ; whereas the population returns of 1821 and 1832, give twenty-six as the average number of those who had reached a hundred and upwards out of a million. Habitual suppers, and more wine drunk after dinner and after supper, contributed something to the formation of diseases which shortened life ; and where these potations were indulged in by literary men, who took no exercise, it is probable that their effect was still more pernicious. Pope has given us a detail of Addison's familiar day, by which it appears that he studied all morning, then dined at a tavern, and went afterwards to Button's ; from the coffee-house



he went again to the tavern, where he often sat late, and drank too much wine.

But these nocturnal symposia, however protracted and unwholesome, did not prevent nor retard those effusions of graceful humour which the next morning's study produced; nor was there reason, we hope, for remorse, which is sure to accompany the slightest admixture of depravity with an inveterate habit. Accordingly, when the hour of his dissolution approached, he sent for his son-in-law, the Earl of Warwick, that he might see in what peace a Christian could die!

As a describer of life and manners, Dr. Johnson observes, that Addison must be allowed to stand the first of the foremost rank; and it is his peculiar merit to have made his wit subservient to virtue. All the enchantment of fancy, and all the cogency of argument are employed to recommend to



the reader his real interest—the care of pleasing the Author of his being.

Sir William Jones, after a protracted evening walk in an unwholesome quarter in the neighbourhood of Calcutta, was seized with a shivering fit, which was followed by fever, and by symptoms of an abscess in the liver, a common disease in Bengal, and died on the ninth day of his illness, in the forty-seventh year of his age. It is difficult to withhold an expression of one's wonder at the extent of knowledge he had acquired in languages, arts, and sciences in the course of so short a life. His acquaintance with Grecian literature was extensive and profound; and in the modern dialects of Europe—French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and German—he was thoroughly conversant. The language of Constantinople also was familiar to him; and of the Chinese character and tongue he had learned enough



to enable him to translate an ode of Confucius. His skill in the idioms of India, Persia, and Arabia, has perhaps never been surpassed by any European; and his compositions on Oriental subjects display a taste which we seldom find in the writings of those who had preceded him in these tracts of literature.

In his eighth anniversary discourse to the Asiatic Society, he remarks that theological inquiries are no part of the subject he was then discussing; but he could not refrain from adding that the collection of tracts which, from their excellency, we call "The Scriptures," contain, independently of a divine origin, more true sublimity, more exquisite beauty, purer morality, more important history, and finer strains both of poetry and eloquence, than could be collected within the same compass from all other books that were ever composed in any



age or in any idiom. The two parts, of which the Scriptures consist, are connected by a chain of compositions which bear no resemblance in form or style to any that can be produced from the stores of Grecian, Indian, Persian, or even Arabian learning: the antiquity of these compositions no man doubts; and the unstrained application of them to events long subsequent to their publication, is a solid ground of belief that they were genuine productions, and consequently inspired.

Of Doctor Johnson it will be much more difficult to say too little than too much. The very interesting book of his life is to be found upon every gentleman's table, and with his works many of you are better acquainted, perhaps, than I am. He died of dropsy brought on by repeated asthmatic attacks, which had annoyed him many years, and had often driven him from the pure air

of Streatham, where he spent a good deal of time by the friendship of Mr. Thrale, into the solitude and closeness of Bolt Court, Fleet Street, in which he found his respiration more easy than anywhere else. So much for the caprice of asthma, of which my experience has furnished me with many instances.

I remember a gentleman subject to fits of asthma, who built himself a house in an elevated beautiful situation in Surrey, and whilst it was building, lived in a cottage in a valley beneath it. The first night he attempted to sleep in his new residence, he suffered so much from distress in his breathing, that he returned to the cottage, intending to make a second experiment, under better auspices, he hoped, when he should have recovered from his late suffering and alarm. The same experiment was made again and again with the same unhappy



consequences, until at length he was obliged to abandon his new abode entirely, and to dispose of it.

Another example occurs to my recollection, in the person of a patient who consulted Sir George Baker, as well as myself, upon an asthma which had distressed him grievously. We advised him to travel, as it was in his power to do so, in search of an air that would suit him; and wherever he should find it, there to fix his residence, for some time at least. In the course of his travels he arrived at Lyme, in Dorsetshire, where he breathed with unusual comfort. After a sojournment of three weeks at Lyme, he was able to walk up a considerable hill out of the town, at a quick pace.

Dr. Johnson was born of a melancholic temperament, and of a scrofulous habit. Such a constitution of mind and body would render a man prone to act upon impulses,



and to disclose one of the characteristic symptoms of insanity; particularly if he did not entertain a strong religious principle, which might be ready to interpose between the purpose and the deed, and to arrest violence, until reason, in abeyance for a while, should recover its proper authority and sway. Dr. Johnson had this religious principle in its most lively vigour, and a power of reasoning also, beyond that of most men of his time. From dejection of spirits he found relief in society, and it was as happy for his associates and for the world at large, as for himself, that he sought it there; for his powers of conversation were extraordinary, and furnished inexhaustible instruction to those who listened to him. And there is scarcely a writer, whose profession was not divinity, that has so frequently testified his belief of the sacred writings, has appealed to them with



such unbounded submission, or mentioned them with such unvaried reverence.

Thus have I laid before you an account of the deaths of some of the most eminent philosophers of the two last centuries, in this country ; and it cannot have escaped your observation, that in giving also their religious sentiments, I had it in view to bring to your recollection such their invaluable testimony to the truth of the Gospel. I know that, in matters of eternal concern, the authority of the highest human opinions has no claim to be admitted as a sufficient ground of belief. It is every man's duty to weigh well, and to consider for himself the reasons of his faith. But it cannot fail to encourage, and to confirm his own conclusions to know that these, the best, the wisest, the most learned of mankind, who devoted much of their time to the study of the Holy Scriptures, arrived at

the same results. Bishop Horsley has observed that the man of science and speculation, the more his knowledge enlarges, loses his attachment to a principle to which the barbarian steadily adheres, that of measuring the probability of strange facts by his own experience.

And shall physicians want these subjects of speculation, to encourage their hopes, and to enlarge their faith in the promises of the Gospel? Might not Mr. Locke have been led to his lofty contemplations, which ended in so solemn a conviction of divine truth, by those early studies of the nature of "man's small universe\*," which were to prepare him for our profession? And did not their daily converse with the awful circumstances attending the last scene of human life suggest to Sydenham, to Boer-

\* Milton, Par. Reg.



haave, to Heberden, and to Baillie, (what, blessed be God! it has suggested to myself,) not the hopes only, but the assurance of another and a better world, of which they have testified to us and to posterity?

But I must not avail myself of the opportunity to pursue this theme further.

I thank you for the indulgence with which you have heard me on this, and on former occasions.





