

**BIRTH AND WORTH, AN
INQUIRY INTO
THE PRACTICAL
USES OF A PEDIGREE**

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Birth and worth, an inquiry into the practical uses of a pedigree by Robert Phipps Dod

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ROBERT PHIPPS DOD

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INTO THE

PRACTICAL USES

OF

A PEDIGREE.

BY

ROBERT PHIPPS DOD, ESQ.

ASSOCIATE OF KING'S COLLEGE,
LONDON.

*Stemmata quid fecerunt, quid prodest, Postice, longo
Sanguine censer, pictosque ostendere vultus
Majorum?* *Juv. Sat. viii.*

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MDCCCLIX.



BIRTH AND WORTH.

A DISQUISITION upon pedigrees! why the very name smells mustily. The faint perfume of decayed parchment overcomes the fastidious reader. He expects to see it printed in "black letter," or in the mystical flourishings of ancient "court-hand." He throws it aside unopened,—not roughly, but daintily, lest its native dust be shaken off in a cloud, and he be compelled to sneeze—at the author.

The date perhaps meets the eye of some more practical man. But he *never had a grandfather*, and is scarcely "wise child" enough to know his paternity. Pedigrees

are therefore fictions. He washes his hands of them. They are inventions to feed the vanity of those who have nought else to be proud of. They are lying baubles, to be bought any day for a few pounds. He is too knowing to be "taken in" by any such goods. He is descended from Adam, as well as the best of you. What are pedigrees to him, or he to pedigrees?

Some wag may pounce next upon us, brimful of merry quips and cranks. He has a fat story or two about the virtue of introducing new blood to revive and perpetuate an ancient house. He is very facetious about the "bend sinister," and professes to believe only in "umbilical pedigrees." He will not forget the bumpkin who expected to see George III. with a lion and unicorn on either shoulder, as the only brachial appendages of royalty—since these were the "king's arms." He will ask you whether the crest of Bob Acres was a hand and dagger, with the motto

“Strike home,” or a winged spur, inscribed “The better part of valour.” He will define heraldic terms mischievously—point to the iron hooks and wooden limbs of every mutilated beggar as “arms of adoption,” and show you the pickpocket, as possessing “arms of augmentation.” He will ask if it be not traitor-like treatment for an armorial coat to be always drawn and quartered before it is hung—up.

Or we may meet some stern man of the world, soured by discontent, and indurated with selfishness, who perhaps knows just enough of Pope to quote his words about “the tenth transmitter of a foolish face;” and has heard of some Mr. Charles Surface knocking down his ancestors to a man named Premium. He is not very clear about these points, but he has a long catalogue of veritable spendthrifts, who have ruined their relations and their tradespeople, in spite of an old pedigree and a great rent-roll. Will an

ancient descent, he asks us, clothe the back or fill the stomach? Will an emblazoned parchment soothe the tax-gatherer, or satisfy the bailiff? That indeed would be "a new way to pay old debts." Men appear to him far more anxious to know where they come from, than whither they are going. He never saw any merit in a pedigree. Did not the noble blood of the great Dukes of Northumberland flow in the veins of Percy the trunkmaker? Did not the princely house of Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, with the blood of the Plantagenets, centre in a cobbler at Newport? What then can there be in pedigrees when to such vile uses they do come at last?

Sentiments like these are not rare; the men who indulge in them may be met with in crowds from sunrise to sunset; and if the curious observer will only visit the right locality, he will find them,—in more senses perhaps than one,—to be "every-day people." But their number is nevertheless far exceeded

by another class, who, if pressed, will half acknowledge "a sneaking kindness" for men of good descent—who never mention pedigrees, or their own fair family honours, without much hesitation, a small blush and a large apology—who store up in a dark closet, and within a tin box, some ancient roll, to moulder in solitary blessedness as a thing too selfish or shameful to be "aired;" yet they know not precisely why. These men seldom fail to cover, by an outward indifference, the real respect which they feel for ancestral honours, and are ever ready to indulge in the mock modesty of "*nolo Episcopari*." Nor does this laborious inconsistency owe its birth to a more dignified cause than a degree of indolence which is eventually more troublesome than inquiry, or a want of moral courage in boldly maintaining that which commands an inward conviction. Seldom have men condescended to ask themselves—in sober earnestness for an answer—what are the real uses and merits of a pedigree?