

**PIOZZIANA; OR,
RECOLLECTIONS OF
THE LATE MRS.
PIOZZI, WITH REMARKS**

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Piozziana; or, Recollections of the late Mrs. Piozzi, with remarks by Edward Mangin

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EDWARD MANGIN

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PIOZZIANA;

OR,

RECOLLECTIONS OF THE LATE
MRS. PIOZZI,

WITH REMARKS.

BY

A FRIEND.

E. F. Moxon Mangini Rev.

Perception quick, and luxury of thought.

And spirits light to every joy in tune,
And Friendship, ardent as a summer's noon,
And conscious Honour's keen, instinctive sense,
And smiles unforced, and easy confidence,
And vivid Fancy.

MRS. BARBAULD.



LONDON:

EDWARD MOXON, DOVER STREET.

1833.



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P5P5
1833
MAIN

PIOZZIANA.

I HAVE now lived long, and though I have suffered somewhat, I have enjoyed much of what constitutes the pleasure of existence: but among the "changes and chances" which have fallen to my share, I cannot remember anything which proved a higher source of indulgence to me than my intimacy with the late Mrs. Piozzi.

My object in writing the following recollections of her is, to afford myself the gratification of recording all I can, of scenes and circumstances of a most agreeable kind; not without a hope of contributing, in some degree, to the amusement of others, who may be at the trouble to peruse my memoranda.

I pen these without confining my undertaking to any very methodical plan, and prescribe to myself

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scarcely any other limits than those of truth. But before I proceed to my chief subject, I crave permission of my reader to offer an observation in defence of what is properly termed, but very improperly condemned as such,—egotism. Egotism it needs must be in a writer who uses the personal pronoun I; yet surely nothing more enhances the value of any narrative, than that same consequential pronoun. But a man who says “I did,” “I saw,” and “I heard,” is not, on that account, to be stigmatized as an egotist. He must write or speak thus, in the spirit of vain-glory, and self-approval, before the odium of coxcombry can justly attach to him; and even then, his statements are secure of being much more highly relished than if he had told his tale, like Julius Cæsar, or Lord Clarendon, in the third person singular. My heedless style of writing will probably not be found palatable; but what may be thought of it, is to me a matter of indifference: should my book prove welcome to the public, the public will be satisfied and so shall I; and not aiming at literary reputation, I am regardless of the censure which may be passed by critics on my performance.

Some apology may be considered requisite on another point; I mean for the apparent partiality, and occasionally an approach to compliment, discoverable in the letters of Mrs. Piozzi, addressed to myself and my family, from which I shall transcribe such portions as seem suited to my purpose. Mrs. Piozzi's nature was one of kindness; she derived pleasure from endeavouring to please; and if she perceived a moderately good quality in another, she generously magnified it into an excellence; while she appeared blind to faults and foibles, which could not have escaped the scrutiny of one possessing only half her penetration. But, as I have said, her disposition was kindly. It was so; and to such an extent, that during several years of familiar acquaintance with her, although I can recall many instances, I might say, hundreds, of her having spoken of the characters of others, I never heard one word of vituperation from her lips of any person who was the subject of discussion, except once when Baretti's name was mentioned. Of him she said that he was a bad man; but on my hinting a wish for particulars, after so heavy a charge, she seemed unwilling to explain herself, and spoke of him no

more. I may offer, as a further evidence of her natural suavity, and of her freedom from those weaknesses, to which so many of both sexes are liable, the following anecdote.

She, one evening, asked me abruptly if I did not remember the scurrilous lines in which she had been depicted by Gifford in his "Baviad and Mœviad." And, not waiting for my answer, for I was indeed too much embarrassed to give one quickly, she recited the verses in question, and added, "how do you think 'Thrale's gray widow' revenged herself? I contrived to get myself invited to meet him at supper at a friend's house, (I think she said in Pall Mall), soon after the publication of his poem, sat opposite to him, saw that he was 'perplexed in the extreme;' and smiling, proposed a glass of wine as a libation to our future good fellowship. Gifford was sufficiently a man of the world to understand me, and nothing could be more courteous and entertaining than he was while we remained together." This, it must be allowed, was a fine trait of character, evincing thorough knowledge of life, and a very powerful mind.

Mrs. Piozzi can never be forgotten by the British

public, were it only because her name is closely connected with that of Johnson, whose reputation will endure as long as the language—and the nation he adorned. And were it possible that the most amusing book ever written, Boswell's account of him, could have dropped into neglect,—that now can never happen,—Mr. Croker's edition of his entertaining work having communicated new interest to his pages, on many of which the accomplished editor's pen has shed light and lustre. But fidelity obliged Mr. Croker to preserve unaltered, all that Boswell, &c., had accumulated respecting Mrs. P. in which there is not only a great proportion of gossip, but of malignity and affected derision. My wish is to exhibit her, or at least make her show herself in a different and more favourable point of view, which I hope to do in the course of this slight essay.

In direct contradiction to Boswell, Beloe, and others, I venture to assert that it was not in the power of any one who knew her to find aught in her character to despise, nor to refuse the meed of admiration to her benevolence, her talents, and her acquirements, or to the fascinating courtliness of her manners. The worst which could be said of her, with truth, by the

moralist or the critic, is that some passages of her life were marked by singularity; and that in her (prose) writings especially, she frequently assumed a childish style, to avoid, as I believe, being thought laborious and pedantic. But, on the other hand, did I contemplate a formal defence of her, I could bring proofs in abundance, that various parts of her conduct, in circumstances the most trying, were in rigid conformity to the principles of sound sense; and that the world of letters has obligations to her for many a beauteous page.

On the event of her death, which took place in May, 1821, and in her eighty-second year, an article was published in a Bristol newspaper, very well written, and I apprehend, by Mrs. Pennington of the Hot-wells, Clifton, in which her last words are mentioned. They are remarkable; and Mrs. Pennington spoke to me of the scene on the awful occasion, as one of the most striking imaginable. Mrs. Piozzi had lain for some time silent, and as if exhausted, but suddenly sat up, and with a piercing aspect, and slow distinct utterance, said, "I die in the trust, and the fear of God!" Such words from such a person are