

**MEMOIRS OF JOHN BANNISTER GIBSON,
LATE CHIEF JUSTICE OF PENNSYLVANIA.
WITH HON. JEREMIAH S.
BLACK'S EULOGY, NOTES FROM HON.
WILLIAM A. PORTER'S ESSAY UPON HIS
LIFE AND CHARACTER, ETC., ETC.**

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Memoirs of John Bannister Gibson, Late Chief Justice of Pennsylvania. With Hon. Jeremiah S. Black's Eulogy, Notes from Hon. William A. Porter's Essay upon His Life and Character, Etc., Etc. by Thomas P. Roberts

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THOMAS P. ROBERTS

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John Gibson

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INTRODUCTION.

The opinion of those acquainted with Judge Gibson's writings, so far as I can learn, is, that his genius was *sui generis*, and that he came to exercise it at the formative period, the period which witnessed the firm establishment of republican government in America, upon which the war of 1812 set its seal, and in the quarter of the century that witnessed the inception of canals and railroads which hastened wonderfully the settlement and civilization of the continent.

In the determination of the new and perplexing problems governing these new species of corporations, which arose during the period in question, the courts of no State took a more conspicuous part than those of Pennsylvania; and from 1816 to 1853, a period of thirty-seven years, Judge Gibson sat on the Bench of her Supreme Court.

But whatever his merits, I do not feel qualified, being only a layman, to speak of him as a jurist, and have, therefore, attempted only the humble task of gathering together the incidents of his private life and the history of his ancestors. I felt impelled to this duty by reason of the fact that but little is known by the public concerning his personal history; for, as was aptly said in a public address, "In our 'American Encyclopædia,' which purports to give in its sixteen big

volumes, biographical sketches of all eminent Americans, there is no mention whatever of John Bannister Gibson."*

The Hon. Wm. A. Porter published in 1855, two years after Judge Gibson's death, an essay on his life, character and writings; aside from this, and Judge Black's beautiful eulogy, nothing has been written which merits even the title of a review of his life as a judge, while no one has heretofore attempted to sketch his personal history beyond the extent of a few paragraphs.

Regarding the private history of a man about whom his own friends know so little, the task, after a period of a third of a century has elapsed since his death, of producing a connected and entertaining sketch is a difficult one. I will feel satisfied, under the circumstances, if this effort will lessen the labors of the historian in the future who is destined to appear, as Judge Porter says, to write the history of the judiciary of Pennsylvania. My aim has been to make this not only a personal sketch, but a compilation of the published matter concerning the part taken in that history by Judge Gibson. Judge Porter's essay has long been out of print, and readers will doubtless be pleased to see reproduced a very large portion of that writer's selections from Judge Gibson's opinions, with his own interesting and able comments thereon. This feature, at least, will be recognized as not the work of a novice or a layman.

To the family and relatives of Judge Gibson I am indebted for much useful material; also to ex-Chief Justice Agnew; Hon. James T. Mitchell and Hon. Henry W. Williams, of the Supreme Court; Hon. William G. Hawkins, of Pittsburgh; Thomas J. Keenan, Esq., and William

* Hon. Thos. J. Keenan, at the Pittsburgh Bar meeting in memory of the late Hon. Jeremiah S. Black.

INTRODUCTION.

v

B. Rodgers, Esq., of the Pittsburgh bar; Hon. Charles H. Smiley, of Perry county; Boyd Crumrine, Esq., Reporter of the Supreme Court; Hon. John Stewart, of Chambersburg, and the Rev. J. A. Murray, of Carlisle, from whom many valued suggestions and contributions were received.

T. P. R.

PITTSBURGH, PA., July, 1890.

