

**MEMOIRS OF THE LIFE AND WRITINGS
OF THE REV. ARTHUR COLLIER, M. A.
RECTOR OF LANGFORD
MAGNA, IN THE COUNTY OF WILTS,
FROM A. D. 1704 TO A. D. 1732. WITH
SOME ACCOUNT OF HIS FAMILY**

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Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Rev. Arthur Collier, M. A. Rector of Langford Magna, in the County of Wilts, from A. D. 1704 to A. D. 1732. With Some Account of His Family by Robert Benson

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ROBERT BENSON, M.A.

"Quod si quis illud nihilominus meritis teneat, literas nimium absumere temporis,
quod alias rectius impendi possit; sive, neminem adeo distringi negotiis, quin
habet sua otii intervalla, donec agendi vicia atque astus refuant, nisi aut
admodum hebescit in expediendis negotiis, aut parum cum dignitate ambitiosus
in negotiis cujuscumque generis captandis."—*De Augmentis Scientiar.* lib. I.

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56 CHANCERY LANE.

MDCCXXXVII.

TO

SIR RICHARD COLT HOARE,

OF STOURHEAD, IN THE COUNTY OF WILTS, BARONET,

&c. &c. &c.

MY DEAR SIR,

I am much gratified by your permitting me to inscribe this little work to you: indeed, when I consider how many happy hours I have spent at Stourhead in your company, as well as your labours in the illustration of our county history, I am satisfied that, on private as well as on public grounds, my book could to no one be so appropriately dedicated as to yourself. It is the delightful task of the topographer to adorn localities with mental associations; and we all feel how interesting South Wiltshire has been rendered by your reminding us that it was a district familiar to Hooker, Massinger, Clarendon, Addison, Wren, Norris, and others of intellectual celebrity: and if the present publication should be the means of exciting a fresh interest in our county, I shall deem myself amply rewarded for the pains which it has cost me.

Believe me to remain,

My dear Sir,

Your faithful friend and servant,

ROBERT BENSON.

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PREFACE.

I SHOULD feel little anxiety about the present work, if the literary reputation of those who have sought for a memoir of Arthur Collier should be deemed sufficient to justify the following attempt, and I could also persuade myself that the task has been performed in a manner worthy to satisfy their curiosity. As regards my fitness for the undertaking, I can neither disguise from myself, nor will the reader fail to perceive, that few of the objects which engaged Collier's active mind are congenial with my own pursuits—a disadvantage of which a biographer can rarely complain, since it is generally the possession of kindred tastes and sympathies which induces a person to write the life of another. As, however, this has not been my case, I proceed to state the circumstances which have almost insensibly led me to prepare the following Memoirs;

as well as to satisfy the reader of the genuineness of the Collier papers now first submitted to the public.

The history of modern Wiltshire, some years past in progress under the direction of the venerable and munificent Sir Richard Hoare, has occasioned an active search for whatever might illustrate the topography of the county. The lives of Wiltshire authors became, therefore, objects of eager curiosity. When the hundred of Branch and Dole, containing the parish of Langford Magna, issued from the press, my friend Dr. Fowler of Salisbury, a pupil of the late Mr. Dugald Stewart, remarked to me, that Arthur Collier, an eminent metaphysician, was formerly rector of Langford, but that his name did not appear in that character, and that his work, the "Clavis Universalis," was not even mentioned in the recently published account of the parish. This was natural enough; for the "Clavis Universalis" was a book of great rarity, and known only to very few readers. Being enabled to examine it,

by the kindness of Dr. Fowler, I soon felt so deep an interest in its contents, that, by an easy transition from a work to its author, I could not help regretting that no memorials existed of so extraordinary a person. Subsequently, I found that several of the most distinguished of our British writers, partaking of the same feelings, had made frequent although ineffectual attempts to discover some particulars of his life. After being neglected, if not forgotten, for a long series of years, Dr. Reid, I believe, first called the attention of the public to Collier. He was the subject of a correspondence between Sir James Mackintosh, then at Bombay, and the late Dr. Parr. Mr. Dugald Stewart instituted inquiries about him (see Parr's Works, vol. i. 710; vol. vii. 522); and the search was subsequently continued, but all in vain; so that Stewart, in his celebrated Dissertation on the Progress of Metaphysical Philosophy, after noticing the neglect with which posterity had treated Norris, was obliged to add: "Another very acute metaphysician of the same church,

Arthur Collier, has met with still greater injustice. His name is not to be found in any of our biographical dictionaries."—p. 111, n.

To supply this deficiency is the object of the following Memoirs; and as the reader may very fairly ask, how it happens that now, for the first time, there appears any biographical notice of him, and upon what authority it rests,—I proceed to satisfy his curiosity.

Upon Collier's death, in 1732, the rectory of Langford Magna devolved, as will be seen, on Corpus Christi College, Oxford. As he died in embarrassed circumstances, such portions of his effects as his relations deemed it indelicate to sell,* were sent, it is conjectured, to Salisbury, where several of them then resided. One of his sisters married the Rev. Richard Hele, of the Close; and to him, we imagine,

* Amongst such articles I include the drinking-glass mentioned p. 7, and a wood-block of the arms, which face the title. The latter were, doubtless, engraved for the coats of Collier emulating Johnson; but we learn from high authority that they are inaccurate, inasmuch as Collier ought to be sa., a cross patée, fitchée, or; Johnson, ar., five fusils conjoined in fess, between three lions' heads, gules.