

**POETICAL WORKS.
WITH A MEMOIR**

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Poetical Works. With a Memoir by William Collins

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WILLIAM COLLINS

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THE

POETICAL WORKS

OF

WILLIAM COLLINS.

WITH A MEMOIR.



BOSTON:

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MEMOIR OF COLLINS.

"A Bard,
Who touched the tenderest notes of Pity's lyre."
HAYLEY.

No one can have reflected on the history of genius without being impressed with a melancholy feeling at the obscurity in which the lives of the poets of our country are, with few exceptions, involved. That they lived, and wrote, and died, comprises nearly all that is known of many, and, of others, the few facts which are preserved are often records of privations, or sufferings, or errors. The cause of the lamentable deficiency of materials for literary biography may, without difficulty, be explained. The lives of authors are seldom marked by events of an unusual character; and they rarely leave behind them the most interesting work a writer could compose, and which would embrace nearly all the important facts in his career, a "History of his Books," containing

the motives which produced them, the various incidents respecting their progress, and a faithful account of the bitter disappointment, whether the object was fame or profit, or both, which, in most instances, is the result of his labours. Various motives deter men from writing such a volume; for, though quacks and charlatans readily become auto-biographers, and fill their prefaces with their personal concerns, real merit shrinks from such disgusting egotism, and, flying to the opposite extreme, leaves no authentic notice of their struggles, its hopes, or its disappointments. Nor is the history of writers to be expected from their contemporaries; because few will venture to anticipate the judgment of posterity, and mankind are usually so isolated in self, and so jealous of others, that neither time nor inclination admits of their becoming the Boswells of all those whose productions excite admiration.

If these remarks be true, surprise cannot be felt, though there is abundance of cause for regret, that little is known of a poet whose merits were not appreciated until after his decease: whose powers were destroyed by a distressing malady at a period of life when literary exertions begin to be rewarded and stimulated by popular applause.

For the facts contained in the following Memoir of Collins, the author is indebted to the researches of others, as his own, which were

very extensive, were rewarded by trifling discoveries. Dr. Johnson's Life is well known; but the praise of collecting every particular which industry and zeal could glean belongs to the Rev. Alexander Dyce, the result of whose inquiries may be found in his notes to Johnson's Memoir, prefixed to an edition of Collins's works which he lately edited. Those notices are now, for the first time, wove into a Memoir of Collins; and in leaving it to another to erect a fabric out of the materials which he has collected instead of being himself the architect, Mr. Dyce has evinced a degree of modesty which those who know him must greatly lament.

WILLIAM COLLINS was born at Chichester, on the 25th of December, 1721, and was baptized in the parish church of St. Peter the Great, alias Subleanery in that city, on the first of the following January. He was the son of William Collins, who was then the Mayor of Chichester, where he exercised the trade of a hatter, and lived in a respectable manner. His mother was Elizabeth, the sister of a Colonel Martyn, to whose bounty the poet was deeply indebted.

Being destined for the church, young Collins was admitted a scholar of Winchester College on the 19th of January, 1733, where he was educated by Dr. Burton; and in 1740 he stood first on the list of scholars who were to be received at

New College. No vacancy, however, occurred, and the circumstance is said by Johnson to have been the original misfortune of his life. He became a commoner of Queen's,* whence, on the 29th of July, 1741, he was elected a demy of Magdalen College. During his stay at Queen's he was distinguished for genius and indolence, and the few exercises which he could be induced to write bear evident marks of both qualities. He continued at Oxford until he took his bachelor's degree, and then suddenly left the University, his motive, as he alleged, being that he missed a fellowship, for which he offered himself; but it has been assigned to his disgust at the dulness of a college life, and to his being involved in debt.

On arriving in London, which was either in 1743 or 1744, he became, says Johnson, "a literary adventurer, with many projects in his head and very little money in his pocket." Collins was not without some reputation as an author when he proposed to adopt the most uncertain and deplorable of all professions, that of literature, for a subsistence. Whilst at Winchester school he wrote his *Eclogues*, and had appeared before the public in some verses addressed to a lady weeping at her sister's marriage, which were printed in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, Oct. 1739, when Collins was in his eighteenth year. In January, 1742, he published his *Eclogues*, under the title of

* 21st March, 1740.