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The library of useless knowledge by Athanasius Gasker

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ATHANASIUS GASKER

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ILLVSTRISSIMÆ
ORNATISSIMÆ AC EXCELLENTISSIMÆ

VICTORIÆ REGINÆ

TUTELE

SPEIQVE BRITANNIÆ

HOC OPVS

D. D.

ATHANASIVS GASKER

AUTO-BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH
OF
THE EDITOR.



HE Commissioners of the Poor Laws will understand me, when I say, that I was Born at Putney, in Surrey. I repeat the name of my birth-place, "PUTNEY," without any angry feeling towards, but in defiance of the *Registration Committee*.

"To write lives," says a favourite author,* proceeding to instance one of those singular productions which appeared at the close of the sixteenth century, "is, to extract, from catalogues of unknown motive, the features which specious idea has imposed upon such a base." I deny this: and I proceed to illustrate, in the sequel, my opinion.

* Mr. Gurton.

With regard to any seeming irregularity of expression, which failing memory may allow to insinuate itself into the texture of this brief sketch, I shall take no notice of any criticisms on this head. Impudence will ever exist in large communities of men; and I hold it to be a prostitution of attention to make further remark upon the subject. Therefore, without announcement, without preface of any kind, to this part of my undertakings—

“ Nor drum, nor trumpet piloting approach,
Nor gilded herald:—quiet as the morn
Which leaves a peaceful bed for worlds of strife,
I come—nor would I, for Golconda’s sand,
No, nor for jewell’d Araby, my birth-right pawn
For surfeits of ambition’s eminence.”

My Father was a poor, but a respected man—my Mother shared his sorrows and his dignity. I left my Father’s roof at an early age, in search of great truths in other lands. I did not find them; and I returned to my paternal dwelling. My Father—he was dead:—my Mother—so was she:—and I went abroad again.

In thirty years of wandering: in visiting all the principal libraries of the world: residing in forty different monasteries in different countries: being member of most of the literary and philosophical societies of the world,—all those of Europe: communicating with all the eminent men of my time, by letter and by conversation:—with a mind ardent in proportion with the object of my re-

search—it may be conceived I became possessed of *knowledge*.

I am, now, a lonely, world-abandoned man: and I am thankful for that peaceful lot; and from my quiet home, furnished with books and bread, I look back, in imagination, towards my lost heritage, as the mausoleum where worth and greatness, side by side, lie in spangled shrouds;—where the moral blood of human kind is frozen:—and where hope is dead!

But to return—I have said, that I became possessed of knowledge. I did so, and when I consider the persecution which I have ever experienced, in the attempt at the communication of portions of the results of that knowledge to a benighted multitude, I marvel rather at the still youthful flow of anxious feeling, actuating me to suffer further persecution, in the publication of truth.

At Potsdam, as early as the year 1797, I was placed in a barrel of brown sugar, before the Royal Family of Prussia, that I might be rendered ridiculous, as being the author of my first principal literary production, "*On the Nature of Sounds*." My whispering apparatus, which I had caused to be erected, at great personal expense and trouble, in the drawingroom of the royal residence, (and by which the queen was enabled to communicate with any individual of her domestics, without another person in the room being aware of the circumstance,) was destroyed, without my receiving back even

the metal of which the separate conductors were composed, because the queen had been discovered, in a freak of temper at being differed with by his majesty, to have suddenly counter-ordered some smoked goose, in preparation for his majesty's supper.

The only objection advanced by the court against my two folio volumes on sounds, was, an absurd suspicion of the king's, that, in my chapter on "simple relations," I alluded purposely to a stupid nephew of his, who rendered himself obnoxious to the head gardener of Sans Souci, by eating a bag of rare crocus bulbs, which he had left to dry on his trowsers, in the sun.

Being still under a species of arrest, even after the disgraceful insult which had been inflicted upon me at Potsdam, it was with considerable difficulty and inconvenience that I escaped from the clutches of my persecutors: owing my liberty to the kindness of my landlady, and being exposed to two hours of the night breeze of a northern climate, while I sat, with nothing to protect me but my shirt, across the roof of my lodging-house, to escape the scrutiny of the police.

Arriving, however, at Rostock, I embarked for London; and, in a few days, ascended the Thames, with a favourable wind.

It would be vain to attempt to describe the anxiety which I constantly felt, to circumvent a fatality which seems indigenous to English literature, namely, the necessity of the antecedent notoriety of an author, and of