

**A LITERARY ANTIQUARY. MEMOIR OF
WILLIAM OLDYS, ESQ. TOGETHER
WITH HIS DIARY, CHOICE NOTES
FROM HIS ADVERSARIA, AND AN
ACCOUNT OF THE LONDON LIBRARIES**

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A Literary Antiquary. Memoir of William Oldys, ESQ. Together with His Diary, Choice Notes from His Adversaria, and an Account of the London Libraries by William Oldys

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WILLIAM OLDYS

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A LITERARY ANTIQUARY.

MEMOIR

OF

WILLIAM OLDYS, ESQ.

NORROY KING-AT-ARMS.

Together with

HIS DIARY,

CHOICE NOTES FROM HIS ADVERSARIA,

AND AN

ACCOUNT OF THE LONDON LIBRARIES.

[REPRINTED FROM NOTES AND QUERIES.]



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GENERAL



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Date

MEMOIR OF WILLIAM OLDYS, ESQ.

Barrow King-st-Srms.

THE life of a literary antiquary is seldom sufficiently diversified to afford to a biographer many materials for his pen, so as to give interest and vivacity to the historic page. From the noiseless tenor of his daily pursuits, and the habit he has acquired of holding communion with the past rather than with the present, his existence is, generally speaking, subject to fewer vicissitudes than those which mark the mortal progress of persons belonging to the more active professions : —

“ Allow him but his plaything of a pen,
He ne'er cabals or plots like other men.”

Respecting the parentage of William Oldys there is some obscurity. Mr. John Taylor, the son of Oldys's intimate friend, informs us that “Mr. Oldys was, I understood, the natural son of a gentleman named Harris, who lived in a respectable style in Kensington Square. How he came to adopt the name of Oldys, or where he received his education, I never heard.”* All his biographers, however, speak of him as the natural son of Dr. William Oldys, Chancellor of Lincoln (from 1683 till his death in 1708), Commissary of St. Catharine's, Official of St. Alban's, and Advo-

* *Records of my Life*, i. 26, ed. 1882.

cate of the Admiralty. That even grave civilians will sometimes deviate from moral purity, is deplored by Dr. Coote, who had been informed that Dr. Oldys "maintained a mistress in a very penurious and private manner." *

The civilian died early in the year 1708, and in his will he "devises to his loving cozen Mrs. Ann Oldys his two houses at Kensington, with the residue of his property," and "appoints the said Ann Oldys whole and sole executrix of his Will." It has been conjectured, with some degree of probability, that under the cognomen of cozen is meant the mother of our literary antiquary; more especially as we find from the will of the said Ann Oldys, that after two or three trifling bequests, she "gives all her estate, real and personal, to her loving friend, Benjamin Jackman of the said Kensington, upon trust, for the benefit of her son William Oldys, and she leaves the tuition and guardianship of her son William Oldys, during his minority, to the said Benjamin Jackman." The Will is dated March 21, 1710; and proved by Benjamin Jackman on April 10, 1711, when our antiquary was in the fifteenth year of his age.

At the end of a pedigree of the Oldys family in the handwriting of William Oldys, now in the British Museum (Addit. MS. 4240 †, p. 14), is the following entry: "Dr. William Oldys, Advocate General, born at Addesbury 1636; died at Kensington, 1708; Duxit Theodosia Lovett, Fil. Dom. Jo: Halsey: [Issue] William, nat. July 14, 1696." That the Doctor married Theodosia Lovett there can be no doubt; for not only is it stated by Burke, that "Robert Lovett, of Lis-

* *Lives and Characters of eminent English Civilians*, p. 95, ed. 1804.

† The same volume contains a long account of Dr. William Oldys, and other biographical notices of the family.

combe in Bucks, married Theodosia, daughter of Sir John Halsey, Knt., of Great Gaddesden, Herts; he died *s. p.* in 1683, set. 26," (*Extinct Baronetage*, ed. 1844, p. 325), but in a pedigree in the College of Arms, dated 1700, and subscribed by Dr. Oldys, his marriage with Theodosia Lovett is duly recorded. While as the Doctor there describes himself as "sine prole," and omits all mention of William Oldys in his will, but leaves to Oldys's mother the property which he eventually inherited, there can be little doubt that the baston ought properly to have figured in the arms of the future Norroy. That Oldys always claimed the civilian for his father, appears from the following note in his annotated Langbaine, p. 131: "To search the old papers in one of my large deal boxes for Mr. Dryden's letter of thanks to my father for some communications relating to Plutarch, when they and others were publishing a translation of all Plutarch's *Lives* in 5 vols. 8vo, 1683. It is copied in the yellow book for Dryden's Life, in which there are about 150 transcriptions, in prose and verse, relating to the life, character, and writings of Mr. Dryden." Pompey the Great was the Life translated by Dr. William Oldys.

William Oldys, the son, was born July 14, 1696, and by the death of his parents was left to make his way in life by his own natural abilities. From his *Autobiography* we learn that he was one of the sufferers in the South Sea Bubble, which exploded in 1720, and involved him in a long and expensive lawsuit. From the year 1724 to 1730 he resided in Yorkshire, and spent most of his time at the seat of the first Earl of Malton, with whom he had been intimate in his youth. In 1725, Oldys, being at Leeds soon after the death of Ralph Thoresby, the antiquary, paid a visit to his celebrated Museum.* As he remained in

* *Life of Sir Walter Raleigh*, p. xxxi. ed. 1786.