

THE
PANOPLIST,
AND
MISSIONARY MAGAZINE UNITED.

No. 5.

OCTOBER, 1808.

VOL. I.

BIOGRAPHY.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE HON. OLIVER ELLSWORTH, I. L. D.

AMONG the rich favors bestowed by Providence on New-England, her CONSTITUTION OF CHRISTIAN PATRIOTS is a prominent blessing. From her earliest periods, men have been raised up, of whom it were poor commendation to say, that they were worthy the best days of Greece or Rome. They were taught in a sublimer school than those ancient patriots knew. They were formed on a far superior model. They were deeply imbued with the pure spirit of that GOSPEL, which came from heaven. Hence, while they contributed to save their country by their exertions, they adorned it by their virtues. Their example was an instructive lesson to the age in which they lived, and an invaluable legacy left to posterity. Among these worthies, a distinguished place is occupied by OLIVER ELLSWORTH; a man whose character cannot be contemplated without admiration, nor admired without profit.

He was born at Windsor, in Connecticut, April 29th, 1745. At the age of 17, he was admitted a student of Yale College; but removed afterwards to Nassau Hall, in New Jersey, where he was graduated in the year 1766. Having passed through a

course of preparatory studies, he commenced the practice of the law; in which he soon attained a great and acknowledged eminence. At a period when the bar in Connecticut was occupied by men of the most brilliant accomplishments, and profound legal science, his talents could not be eclipsed. He sustained an honorable competition with a JOHNSON and an HOSMER. His perceptions were unusually rapid; his reasoning, clear and conclusive; his eloquence powerful, and almost irresistible. His method of managing causes was peculiarly happy. Having ascertained those points on which he could make the most vigorous defence, he seized them with ardor, kept them undeviatingly in view, pursued his object without parade or circumlocution, and triumphantly bore his hearers along with him.

In the year 1777, he was chosen a delegate to the continental Congress. He found himself in a new sphere; but his extraordinary powers did not forsake him. He devoted himself with unwearied assiduity to the great interests of his beloved and threatened country. He met the exigencies of that awful crisis without

the mask of free enquiry, fritter down the gospel to a level with the pages of Seneca and Epic-tetus.

JUVENIS.

ON NOVEL-READING.

The rage for NOVEL READING, so extensively prevalent, cannot fail of being regarded with deep concern by every well informed and reflecting christian philanthropist. It is truly lamentable that so great a proportion of the precious leisure for reading should thus be wasted, and worse than merely wasted; and especially that the early periods of life, in which a foundation should be laid for excellency of character, for usefulness and solid happiness, should be devoted to books, which are calculated not only to afford no real improvement, but even to dissipate, to corrupt, and to destroy. The following remarks upon this subject, extracted from MILLER'S RETROSPECT OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY,* are so just, judicious, and valuable, that they cannot, it is thought, be deemed improper for a place in a periodical work designed for the promotion of the best interests of mankind, and in which the improvement of the rising generation is an object of unceasing solicitude; and they are earnestly recommended to the serious attention of all, and particularly of the young of both sexes, and of parents and guardians, on whom, in relation to those under their care, a most interesting duty devolves. W.

"It has often been made a question, whether romances and novels form an useful kind of reading; or the contrary?

* Vol. ii. p. 172.

This question fifty years ago was of little moment compared with the importance which it has lately assumed. At that period the number of novels was small, and the popular classes of them sustained in general a tolerably pure moral character. Since that time, the case is, unhappily altered; their number has increased, their character is so changed, and the task of discriminating among them has become so delicate and arduous, that the question above stated must now be regarded as one of the most interesting that can be asked, concerning the literary objects of the day, by the wise and affectionate parent, the faithful guardian or the mind of general benevolence.

"That fictitious history, when constructed on proper principles, and executed in a proper manner, may be productive of utility, is a position too plain to be doubted. It is one of the most powerful means of exciting curiosity, of awakening sympathy, and of impressing the understanding and the heart. Such fiction "may do more good to many minds, than the solemnities of professed morality, and convey the knowledge of vice and virtue with more efficacy than axioms and definitions." On this ground it was, no doubt, that the infinitely wise Author of our religion frequently adopted the form of *parable* for communicating the most important truths to his hearers. And, on the same principles, some of the wisest human teachers have used the vehicle of lively and interesting fiction, known to be such at the time, for insinuating into the mind moral and religious lessons, which in a different form, might not so readily

have gained admittance. It is obvious, then, that to this kind of writing, *as such*, there can be no solid objection. Novels may be so written as to promote the cause both of knowledge and virtue. They may be constructed in such a manner as will tend to lead the mind insensibly from what is sordid and mean to more worthy pursuits, and to fill it with pure, elevated and liberal sentiments. Nay, it may be further conceded, that, out of the myriads of novels which have been composed, a few are, in fact, entitled to this character, and have a tendency to produce these effects.

“But it is evident, that a kind of writing which, when wisely and ingeniously executed, may be conducive to the best purposes, may also, in the hands of the unskilful or the wicked, produce the worst effects. If an artfully conducted fiction be so well fitted to interest the curiosity, to awaken sympathy, and to impress the mind, then it follows that if this fiction be enlisted on the side of corrupt principle, or licentious practice, it must do incalculable mischief. The question before us, therefore, must be solved by ascertaining the influence of novels not as they *might* and *ought* to be composed, but as they are found in *fact* to be written. We are not to assume for our standard the utility which *would* be derived from this species of writing, were it confined to the enlightened and virtuous; but the character and tendency of that heterogeneous mass which is daily accumulating from every quarter of the literary world.

“What then is the general character of modern novels? The

most favorable estimate that can be made stands thus:—Were the whole number which the age produced divided into a *thousand* parts, it is probable that *five hundred* of these parts would be found so contemptibly frivolous, as to render the perusal of them a most criminal waste of time. And though entirely destitute of character, yet so far as they are the objects of attention at all, they can do nothing but mischief. To devote the time and attention to works of this kind, has a tendency to dissipate the mind; to beget a dislike to more solid and instructive reading, and especially to real history; and, in general, to excite a greater fondness for the productions of imaginations and fancy, than for the sober reasoning, and the practical investigations of wisdom.

“Of the remaining *five hundred* parts, *four hundred and ninety-nine* may be considered as positively seductive and corrupting in their tendency. They make virtue to appear contemptible, and vice attractive, honorable, and triumphant. Folly and crime have palliative and even commendatory names bestowed upon them; the omnipotence of *love* over all obligations and all duties is continually maintained; and the extravagance of sinful passion represented as the effect of amiable sensibility. Surely these representations can have no other tendency that to mislead, corrupt, and destroy those who habitually peruse them, and especially those who give them a favorable reception.

“But this is not the worst of the evil. A portion of this latter class of novels may be charged

with being seductive and immoral on a more refined plan. They are systematic, and, in some instances, ingenious and plausible apologists for the most atrocious crimes. In many modern productions of this kind the intelligent reader will recognize the following process of representation. Corrupt opinions are put into the mouth of some favorite hero, the splendour of whose character, in other respects, is made to embellish the principles which he holds, and the force of whose eloquence is used to recommend the most unreasonable dogmas. When this hero commits a crime, and when by this crime, according to the fixed law of the Divine government, he is involved in serious difficulty, if not lasting misery, the fashionable novelist endeavors to throw the blame on the religious and moral institutions of the world, as narrow, illiberal, and unjust. When a woman has surrendered her chastity and prostituted herself to a vile seducer, and when she suffers in her reputation and her comfort by such base conduct, all this is ascribed to the "wretched state of civilization," to the "deplorable condition of society!" Every opportunity is taken to attack some principle of morality under the title of a "prejudice;" to ridicule the duties of domestic life, as flowing from "contracted" and "slavish" views; to decry the sober pursuits of upright industry as "dull" and "spiritless;" and, in a word, to frame an apology for suicide, adultery, prostitution, and the indulgence of every propensity for which a corrupt heart can plead an inclination.

"It only remains to speak of the *one thousandth* part not included in the classes already characterized. Of the greater portion of these the most favorable account that can be given is, that they are *innocent* and *amusing* compositions. But even with regard to a considerable number which have been commonly placed among the good and useful novels, a correct judge would scarcely be willing to pronounce them *innocent* without some qualification. After all these deductions how small is the number of those which can be said to merit a perusal, or which can be considered as tending in any tolerable degree to enlighten the mind, or to promote the interests of virtue and happiness! So small indeed, that out of the numerous volumes which a simple catalogue of the novels produced in the eighteenth century would fill, a single page would embrace all that could be with propriety recommended to the attention of the youthful mind.

Many novels, which contain no licentious principles or indelicate descriptions, are still defective, in as much as they are not pictures of nature. When this is the case, though they be not chargeable with making a direct attack on the fortress of virtue, yet they are only fitted to mislead. To fill the mind with unreal and delusive pictures of life, is, in the end, to beguile it from sober duty, and to cheat it of substantial enjoyment. Were all the mischief presented to our view, which has been done to thoughtless, unsuspecting minds, by fictitious writings of this character, it would be found to form a mass of crime and

misery too great for the ordinary powers of calculation.

But it is not enough that the fiction be true to nature. It may in no case depart from the probable and natural; every line may be drawn with a strict regard to the original character designed to be represented; the most transient beholder may pronounce the likeness to be perfect; and yet the view may be fitted to corrupt the mind of every one who looks upon it. The truth is, there are many characters which ought never to be drawn in fiction, as there are many which ought never to be contemplated in fact. And he who regards the welfare of a child will be as anxious to withhold from him the view of many natural and lively descriptions of vice, as to keep him from the company of those who are really vicious. "Many writers," says a celebrated critic and moralist,* "for the sake, as they tell us, of following nature, so mingle good and bad qualities in their principal personages, that they are both equally conspicuous; and as we accompany them through their adventures with delight, and are led by degrees to interest ourselves in their favor, we lose the abhorrence of their faults because they do not hinder our pleasure, or perhaps regard them with kindness for being united with so much merit. There have been men, indeed, splendidly wicked, whose endowments threw a brightness on their crimes, and whom scarce any villany made perfectly detestable, because they never could be wholly divested of their

excellencies; but such have been in all ages, the great corruptors of the world; and their resemblance ought no more to be preserved than the art of murdering without pain."†

Estimating novels, then, not as they *might* be made, but as they *are* in fact, it may be asserted, that there is no species of reading which, promiscuously pursued, has a more direct tendency to discourage the acquisition of solid learning, to fill the mind with vain, unnatural, and delusive ideas, and to deprave the moral taste.‡ It would,

† On this principle it is plain that such a character as *Tom Jones* ought never to have been exhibited by a friend to virtue. And though the characters drawn by RICHARDSON are by no means so liable to censure on this ground as several of those by FIELDING, yet it may be doubted whether the *Lovelace* of the former, taken in all its parts, be a character calculated to make a virtuous impression, especially on the youthful mind.

‡ The celebrated Dr. GOLDSMITH, in writing to his brother, respecting the education of a son, expresses himself in the following strong terms, which are the more remarkable as he had himself written a novel:—

"Above all things, never let your son touch a romance or novel; these paint beauty in colors more charming than nature; and describe happiness that man never tastes. How delusive, how destructive are those pictures of consummate bliss! They teach the youthful mind to sigh after beauty and happiness, which never existed; to despise the little good which fortune has mixed in our cup, by expecting more than she ever gave; and, in general, take the word of a man who has seen the world, and has studied human nature more by experience than precept; take my word for it, I say, that such books teach us very little of the world." *Life of GOLDSMITH, prefixed to his miscellaneous works.*

* Dr. Johnson. Rambler, vol. i.

perhaps, be difficult to assign any single cause which has contributed so much to produce that lightness and frivolity which so remarkably characterize the literary taste of the eighteenth century, as the unexampled multiplication, and the astonishing popularity of this class of writings.

“The friend of novels will perhaps agree, that the *promiscuous* perusal of them is dangerous, and will plead for a discreet selection. But who is to make this selection? On whom shall devolve the perplexing task of separating the wheat from the chaff, the food from the poison? If amidst the mighty mass, those which are tolerably pure, and especially those which are calculated to be useful, be only now and then to be found, as a few scattered pearls in the ocean, shall the delicate and arduous task of making the choice be committed to minds “unfurnished with ideas, and therefore easily susceptible of impressions; not fixed by principles, and therefore easily following the current of fancy; not informed by experience, and consequently open to every false suggestion, and partial account?” The imminent danger, and almost certain mischief arising from a choice made by such minds cannot be contemplated by those who feel an interest in human happiness, without deep anxiety and pain. And to expect a wise choice to be made by parents and instructors, is to suppose, what was never the case in any state of society, that they are generally enlightened and virtuous.

“On the whole, the answer of a

wise preceptor to the main question respecting the utility of novels, would probably be something like this:—That, wholly to condemn them, and rigidly to forbid the perusal of *any*, in the present state of the literary world, would be an indiscreet and dangerous extreme; that reading a *very few*, therefore of the *best* is not unadvisable;* that in selecting these, however, great vigilance and caution should be exercised by those to whom the delicate and difficult task is committed; that the perusal of a *large number*, even of the *better* sort, has a tendency too much to engross the mind, to fill it with artificial views, and to diminish the taste for more solid reading; but that a young per-

* The author has no hesitation in saying, that, if it were *possible*, he would *wholly* prohibit the reading of novels. Not because there are none worthy of being perused; but because the hope that, out of the polluted and mischievous mass continually presented to the youthful mind, a tolerably wise choice will, in many instances, be made, can scarcely be thought a reasonable hope. As however, those fictitious productions are strewed around us in such profusion, and will more or less excite the curiosity of youth, the plan of *total exclusion* is seldom practicable. In this case it is, perhaps, the wisest course, to endeavor to regulate the curiosity which cannot be prevented, and to exercise the utmost vigilance in making a proper choice for its gratification, and in restraining this gratification within *small bounds*. For it may, with confidence, be pronounced, that NO ONE WAS EVER AN EXTENSIVE AND ESPECIALLY AN HABITUAL READER OF NOVELS, EVEN SUPPOSING THEM ALL TO BE WELL SELECTED, WITHOUT SUFFERING BOTH INTELLECTUAL AND MORAL INJURY, AND OF COURSE INCURRING A DIMINUTION OF HAPPINESS.

son habitually and indiscriminately devoted to novels, is in a fair way to dissipate his mind, to degrade his taste, and to bring on himself intellectual and moral ruin."

ON THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST.

[We are favoured with a Dissertation of considerable length and much merit, on the seasonable and interesting subject of the DIVINITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. It is from the pen of a venerable "Christian of the ancient school," whose name, did not his great modesty forbid our bringing it before the public, would add weight to his arguments, and ensure for him an attentive and candid perusal of those, who deny this cardinal doctrine of the holy Scriptures. It shall be published, in suitable portions, in the future numbers of the Panoplist.

EDITORS.]

NO. I.

ALL professed christians acknowledge, that Christ is the Son of God, and the Saviour of men. But there has been a great and wonderful difference in their apprehensions respecting his person and character. I shall not attempt to reckon up all the different opinions, which have been advanced on this point, many of which are deservedly buried in oblivion; but shall only mention such, as have been revived and favoured by some among us.

The ancient *Ebionites*, it is said, held that Christ was the son of Joseph and Mary by ordinary generation, and that there was nothing preternatural in his conception and birth.

But this agrees not with the account which the Evangelists have given of the birth of Christ. Matthew says, before Joseph and Mary came together, she was

found to be with child of the Holy Ghost; that this was notified to him by an angel, when he thought to put her away; and that he knew her not till the child was born. Though Jesus was supposed to be the son of Joseph, by those who were ignorant of these circumstances, and though his mother, who could not be ignorant, called Joseph his father, this is no evidence that Joseph was his natural father—every one knows that a step-father commonly is so styled. It seems also that Jesus was adopted by Joseph. Many who acknowledge the miraculous conception of Christ hold, that he was a mere man, and that he had no existence before he was conceived and born. This it is said, was the opinion of the ancient *Nazarenes*, and *Photinians*; which has been revived by *Soci-nus*, and is a prevailing notion among those who, at the present day, call themselves *Unitarians*.*

All agree that Christ is a proper man. The Apostles say that he is a man approved of God; that God will judge the world by the man whom he hath ordained; that there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; that he was in all things made like unto his brethren, yet without sin.

Now a proper man has every essential part of a man. He must

* This name has been assumed by that class of christians who deny the proper deity of Jesus Christ. If by it they would designate those, who believe in the one only living and true God, in distinction from those who acknowledge a plurality of Gods, it is not a correct or appropriate term; because those, who hold the doctrine of a trinity of persons in the godhead are in this sense *Unitarians*.

EDITORS.