

Society, that I should ever refund that sum, and though, since the refunding system has been adopted, it is the custom of the Society, as I am informed, with regard to that system, to make an exception in favor of missionaries, still I am happy to return the above mentioned sum, with the interest, which, by this time nearly equals the principal; and I therefore send you *one hundred* dollars, which I wish you to accept as payment for the fifty dollars, which I received about fourteen years ago. It is not long, since I have had it in my power to remit this sum, which I hope may be the means of aiding some one more worthy than myself."

ISAAC MILNER.

THIS distinguished mathematician, and exemplary divine, was born in the neighborhood of Leeds, England, in the year 1751. His father was a man of strong understanding, who, having felt, in his own case, the want of a good education, formed an early resolution to remedy that defect in his children, as far as in him lay. Accordingly, Isaac, the youngest, was sent, at six years of age, with his brother Joseph, to the grammar school of his native town, where he made a very rapid progress in classical learning. Just as he was entering upon the study of the Greek language, however, in his tenth year, the death of his father, who had been unfortunate in business, and had suffered materially in his circumstances from the incidents of the rebellion of 1745, blighted all his prospects of a literary education; his mother being under the painful necessity of taking him from school, and placing him in a situation in Leeds, in which he would have an opportunity of learning several branches of the woolen manufacture. His father had been a master-weaver, and when he fell into difficulties, his sons, lads as they were, rose up early, and sat up late, to contribute, by the produce of their spinning-wheels, to the support of the family; which was placed in such straitened circumstances, that Joseph, requiring a Greek book, while at school, to enable him to pass into a higher

class, his father sent it home, one Saturday night, instead of a joint of meat, for their Sunday's dinner, not having the means of procuring both. When his death deprived his wife and children of the material advantage of his assistance, Joseph, during the intervals of school, and Isaac, before he went to his work as an apprentice, and after he came home from it, rising in winter, many hours before day-break, and working by candle-light, plied the shuttle incessantly, for the better support of their mother, left in an ill state of health, to get a scanty living by the labor of her hands. Isaac remained with his master for several years, until his brother Joseph, (who from the humble station of chapel clerk of Catharine Hall, Cambridge, in which capacity, supported by several admirers of his extraordinary learning in Leeds, he entered that university, soon after the death of his father, had become head-master of the grammar school, and afterwards lecturer of the principal church in Hull,) from an income of £200 a year, generously resolved to take upon himself the charge of his education for the church. Before, however, he had him removed to Hull, he commissioned a clergyman at Leeds to ascertain what were his attainments. The degree of knowledge, which he had acquired, the accuracy of his ideas, and the astonishing command of language, which he possessed, fully satisfied him of the competency of the lad for the situation in which it was intended to place him. A few days after, at the age of seventeen, he left Leeds and the occupation of a weaver, for his brother's dwelling, and the more congenial pursuits of a literary life. Though still but a boy, he was found to have been so well grounded in the classics by Moore, the usher of the grammar-school at Leeds, as to be able to render material assistance to his brother, in teaching the lower boys of his crowded classes. Whilst not thus engaged, he pursued his own studies, with his wonted diligence, and soon became a complete and

accomplished classic. In mathematics, also, his attainments must also at this time have been considerable, as his brother, whose pre-eminence, as a scholar, lay not in these pursuits, on the occurrence of any algebraical difficulty, was in the habit of sending to him for its solution. Having thus redoubled his diligence, to make up for the time he had lost,—well prepared by a most laborious and successful, if not a long course of study, aided by natural talents of unusual depth and splendor, to make a conspicuous figure at the university—he was entered a sizar, (an indigent student supported by benefactions called exhibitions,) at Queen's college, Cambridge, in the year 1770, where he greatly distinguished himself by his learning and application. He took his bachelor's degree in 1774, when he attained the high honor of being at once the senior wrangler of his year, and the first Smith's prize-man. So strongly, indeed, was his superiority over all his competitors marked, on this occasion, that contrary to the usual practice, it was deemed right, by the examiners, to interpose a blank space between them, and he was honored with the designation of *Incomparabilis*, a distinction which has never been conferred, but in one other instance. Nor was his learning confined to mathematics, for he was not less eminent in other walks of science and literature. In theology, we learn from Bishop Watson, that he was so deeply read, that when he kept his *act*, the divinity school was thronged with auditors; and their curiosity was amply gratified by listening to what the prelate terms a "real academical entertainment." The circumstance of these disputations being held in Latin, proves also that Milner must have made great progress in classical knowledge.

In the following year, Mr. Milner was elected a fellow of his college. In 1783 and in 1785, he acted as moderator in the schools; was nominated, in 1782, one of the proctors, and in 1783, a taxor of the university. In the

latter year, also, he was chosen to be the first Jacksonian professor of natural and experimental philosophy and chemistry, in which sciences he had previously given several courses of public lectures in the university, with great acceptance.

Whilst at college, he formed an intimacy with Mr. Wilberforce, whom he is said to have been instrumental in bringing to the decided adoption of those views of religion, which he has since so steadily maintained, and adorned by a consistent life. By his means, Mr. Milner was introduced to the acquaintance of Mr. Pitt; and in the year 1787, these three eminent men set out together on a tour to the continent, in which they had not proceeded far before Mr. Pitt was recalled home in consequence of some change in the ministry, which led to his elevation to the premiership. His companions accompanied him to England, where their friendship continued uninterrupted till the death of Mr. Pitt, and afterwards of Mr. Milner.

In the following year, 1788, Mr. Milner was elected president of the college, to which, as a student, he had been so bright an ornament, and about the same time, took his degree of doctor in divinity.

For some years previously, the college, which had been the asylum of Erasmus, was rapidly declining in its reputation for learning and discipline; but from the moment of his assuming the reins of its government, he labored indefatigably and successfully to restore its ancient character for both. He introduced into its fellowships men, eminent for their talents at other colleges. It specially became celebrated, during his presidency, for the number of pious young men, who studied there for the Christian ministry, and who are now some of the most popular and zealous clergymen of the establishment. Dr. Milner aided the cause of learning, in no slight degree, by giving a strong impulse to the study of mathematics, and the various

branches of experimental philosophy. In 1791, he was raised to the deanery of Carlisle.

In 1798, he was placed in the chair of the Lucasian professor of mathematics, a situation worth about £350 a year, which had been successively filled by Isaac Barrow, Sir Isaac Newton, Whiston, Saunderson, Colson, and Waring, the most eminent mathematicians of their day. He twice served the office of vice chancellor of the university. As an author, he is advantageously known by the life of his brother Joseph; by strictures on some of the publications of Dr. Herbert Marsh,—a most masterly defence of the Bible Society; by a continuation of the Church History begun by his brother; and by papers contributed to the Transactions of the Royal Society, of which he was a fellow.

He died at the house of his friend, Mr. Wilberforce, in London, on the first of April, 1821, in the seventieth year of his age. He left the world in humble hope of eternal life, through the mediation and merits of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"In intellectual endowment," says his biographer, (supposed to be Mr. Wilberforce,) "Isaac Milner was unquestionably one of the first men of his day. He possessed prodigious powers of understanding. As a mathematician, he was one of the first, if not the very first of his age. He had also a great partiality for mechanics; and, spending most of his leisure, during the life-time of his brother, at Hull, his lodgings there were a complete workshop, filled with all kinds of carpenter's and turner's tools. There he was accustomed daily to relax his mind from the fatigues of study by some manual labor; and so much was he interested in these pursuits, that his lathe, and appendages for turning, were not only extremely curious, but very expensive, having cost him no less a sum than one hundred and forty guineas. He had also a very ingenious

machine, partly of his own invention, which formed, and polished at the same time, watch wheels, of every description, with the utmost possible exactness."

Humility was a very striking feature in his character. Never, at any period of his life, was he ashamed of his former lowly station; and after he had become the head of a college, a dignified member of the clerical order, and had proved himself one of the first scholars in the country, whenever he passed through Leeds, as he generally did on his journeys to the North, he never failed to visit the obscure friends of his boyish days, and by his well-timed acts of generosity towards them, often did he "deliver the poor and fatherless, and cause the widow's heart to sing for joy." Isaac Milner, the poor fatherless weaver, and the very reverend Isaac Milner, president of Queen's college, Lucasian professor of mathematics, and dean of Carlisle, rich in this world's goods,* as well as in literary fame, never wore even the semblance of two different men. Through life, he manifested in his deportment, the unaffected simplicity of manners, and affability of disposition, appropriate to his early station in society, but not less adorning the high sphere, in which, by the providence of God, he afterwards was called to move.

* Notwithstanding his great liberality, he accumulated from the savings of his preferments a fortune of from fifty to sixty thousand pounds.

WILLIAM CANTON.

"The ease, which we now find in providing and dispersing, what number of copies of books we please, by means of the press," says Dr. Middleton, in his *Free Inquiry*, "makes us apt to imagine, without considering the matter, that the publication of books was the same easy affair in all former times as in the present. But the case was quite different. For, when there were no books in the world, but what were written out by hand with great labor and expense, the method of publishing them was necessarily very slow, and the price very dear; so that the rich only and curious would be disposed or able to purchase them; and to such also, it was often difficult to procure them, or to know even where they were to be bought."

Of the truth of these remarks of Dr. Middleton, a great variety of facts might be brought forward in proof. In 1209, the bishop of Winchester borrowed a Bible in two volumes folio, from a convent in that city, giving a bond, drawn up in the most formal and solemn manner, for its due return. This Bible had been given to the convent by a former bishop, and in consideration of this gift, and one hundred marks, the monks founded a daily mass for the soul of the donor. In the same century, several Latin Bibles were given to the university of Oxford, on condition that the students, who read them, should deposit a

BIOGRAPHY
OF
SELF TAUGHT MEN.

WITH AN
INTRODUCTORY ESSAY.

BY B. B. EDWARDS.

Per angusta ad angusta.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE materials of this volume were derived from a great variety of sources. The writer is indebted for some facts to correspondence. In other cases, he has obtained information by personal inquiry. He acknowledges himself to be under particular obligation to the publications of the British Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge. Some of the series of their publications have not been republished in this country. In many cases he has altered and abridged the memoirs of different individuals to suit his purpose. In general, where any important sentiment is given in the words of the author, the usual marks of quotation are inserted. In the mere narration of facts, this was not thought to be necessary, except in instances of auto-biography. Whatever phraseology was found to be objectionable on the score of morality, or of good taste, has been carefully expunged. Every article, written or abridged, has been given to the printer in manuscript.

The great object of the writer has been to furnish encouragement to a very large and a very deserving class of young men in this country, who are endeavoring to rise to respectability and usefulness, by their own efforts and resources. At the same time, he trusts he has said nothing in disparagement of our public institutions, and of a regular course of education.

Should this volume be favorably received, it will be succeeded by another on a similar plan.

Boston, February, 1832.

INTRODUCTORY ESSAY.

THE future history of the United States is a subject of deep interest. We are come to a very important period in our course. The strength of our political system is beginning to be tried. The tendencies of our institutions are becoming apparent. The elements, which form a general national character, are combining and coalescing. It is emphatically a day of trial. Every thing is subjected to a rigid scrutiny. Merely prescriptive rights are abandoned. Reliance upon authority is given up. Such being the condition of the country, it is not an inappropriate question, What is to be done? There are local divisions, civil strifes, rival religious denominations, great questions pending in political economy, interesting relations with other portions of the world, and boundless resources for good or evil. What then are the duties which devolve on the American citizen?

It is very obvious, in the first place, that in the passion for novelty and change, we are to see that we do not give up anything which is truly valuable. We