Copy of
Judge Breckenridges Memoir

The pulpit eloquence of doctor Nisbet had an excellence which is not common in this country, which was the being enriched with quotations from the scripture, evangelical expressions, and moral observations, in the precise words of the translation, which has become, if I may so express it, classical and will not bear a variation. Indeed the pith and weight of the diction are injured and the figure sometimes lost by the least alteration. His eloquence proceeded with a sedate and steady march, with great gravity and dignity of manner, and chastened and correct elocution, no affectation of pathos, but moving by the energy and justness of thought, and the importance of the subject; no vain reasoning of the sophist, or the scholman, but the deep reflection of the divine and the philosopher.

The information of doctor Nisbet was far surpassing that of any other man in this country, equal I would conceive, and

and perhaps superior to that of any other man in any country, and I might add of any age. For having had the best opportunities from the earliest age, and without break or interruption having pursued his studies, and thus at all times with unremitting assiduity, having at the same time the greatest quickness of perception, and a felicity of memory, it was not in the nature of man to go beyond the acquisition of his years.

His conversation was in like manner enriched with quotations from what are called the classicks, the Latin and the Greek: both which languages were perfectly familiar; so that I have heard him say that in turning to the Greek authors he had not had occasion to look into a lexicon for many years. His allusions to the writings of the ancients, or quotations from them were not scholastic pedantry, but seasonably introduced with those who understood and had taste to relish them, but he had at

all

all times a great command of their fine ideas in the very words used. Nor with less facility of recollection did his reading supply him with sentences from the modern writers in verse or prose, so that but mention a line of any of the poets, and he could continue the author almost interminably; such was the felicity of his memory and the frequent perusal that he appeared to be able to recite the whole.

His taste which every learned man does not possess, any more than common sense in common life evinced itself not only in reading the best books, but in his judgement of them But his own ideas which were correct and natural, and expressed with selection, and at the same time simplicity of language, were the best evidence.

As a philologist he derived great advantage from his knowledge of the German language which is the mother of the English; his reading of the German authors, and his correspondence with

with the German literate who constantly forwarded to him every new publication of merit, rendered his knowledge of the German extensive, and preserved it familiar. Of the French language he was master, and spoke and wrote it with facility; of the Italian language he had a knowledge sufficient to relish the composition of the modern poets, and to be familiar with them in the original, besides a passing acquaintance with several others of the modern tongues; the Spanish and Portuguese: for if I mistake not, he read Don Quixote and Camoens?) in the original. But with his attainments in this particular I am not so well informed, or know of any own knowledge, not setting much store by it, as a knowledge of languages though a desirable acquisition, yet is the result of application and of memory, more than of the superior faculties of judgement and of invention

The wit of doctor Nisbet

was

was of the most genuine quality. It showed itself chiefly in anecdote and moral observation. His anecdote of men and things was inexhaustible. The talents of relating facts briefly that illustrate a principle of human nature - or the character of an individual, or the history of a transactione, is a rare and most pleasing talent. Not less that of repeating what has been said or written. It is not one in many thousands, even of the literate, that has the judgement to use the proper words, to use no more than sufficient, and to present the fact and thought simply to the mind.
It is a talent, that is a great deal the gift of nature though it may be improved by art. But illiterate persons in common life are observed to possess it, in a degree whereto the most improved of the academics are without it. An anecdote or a saying may be ruined by the omission or addition of a single word, and the most delicate taste from nature or from art, or both, is necessary to that tenseness

in

in which the excellence consists.
"Brevity is the soul of wit"
It is for this reason that a man of wit
seldom hears a bon mot which he is
said to have used, attempted to be re-
peated, but with disrelish, because it
has lost its salt by the change of ex-
pression.

His reading all books in almost ~~most~~
all languages, his conversation with
men, and never failing memory, gave
him an immense fund of entertaining
and instructive pleasantry drawn from
what had been done and said in
ancient and modern times; in the
introducing which appositely, he shewed
vivacity of mind and ready judgement.

His own combinations of ideas were
also quick and surprizing, to illustrate
a truth or answer an argument;
and expressed with perhaps a smile,
but the laugh left to others. The
pleasure could not best be shared by
those at whose expense it was felt.
— cerebrum præcordia ludit.

This continuation of Judge Brackenridge's Memoir is copied from a paper in the possession of the Historical Society

Jan. 22, 1883.

I have never heard of his giving offence to any one by his wit or hurting the tenderest mind. For it was evident there was no vanity at bottom, or ill-nature, but humanity, with a disposition to divert or interest.

"In smoothest oil the sharpest edge is set."

It was not a sparkling fire, but a playing light, and brilliancy repressed, rather than encouraged. I do not know that he thought he had wit, or ever meant to use it. But his own mind, presenting the inconsistencies of things, he gave way to an expression of the assemblages which were upon his fancy unconscious of the view in which he placed the errors which gave rise to them.

It was a wit employed to inculcate just ideas, and correct false sentiments, more impressive than a grave or didactic observation, more acceptable and therefore producing a happier effect. It might be called a felicity, in him, as useful as it was rare. To make the talent of wit a particular in the great man might seem incongruous, were we not to understand the wit of a sage, and such as might become the banquet of Plato, or the conversations of Socrates. In that point of view, it detracts not from dignity, but adds to it.

"The feast of reason and the flow of soul."

His clearness and perspicuity in communicat-

ing his ideas, in speaking or writing was a result of a perfect understanding of the subjects agreeably to Fielding, or, as the Doctor used himself to say it, "I incline to be of the opinion that a man will write the better on a subject for understanding it." This was expressing with humour what the poet has given written it;

"Recte scribendi sapere principium est et fons."

Good temper was particularly a characteristic of the doctor, not the offspring of apathy, but a good deal owing to an abstraction of mind upon literary subjects, so that it was not ruffled by the disappointments of ambition, or of gain, he pursuing with a calm placidity the delights of science.

"In wit a sage, simplicity a child."

Hence, though not with all the absence of Joseph Andrews, or of Goldsmith, he had a portion of their inattention to affairs around him. His is perhaps the case in a greater or less degree with all minds abstracted in intellectual pursuits.

Sincerity and truth are inseparable from such a character; benevolence and humanity. But sensibility is usually a concomitant, and is sometimes a misfortune, affecting the tender nerve, and injuring the system. The doctor fell a victim to the sensibilities of the heart, of which the deprivation of the society of his

literary friends, and absence from his native country was the beginning. Other causes followed which no foresight could anticipate, and no prudence prevent.

written by Prof J. A. Lippincott,