

Grotius

THE Life of Grotius has been written by De Burigny: it shows the singular felicity of a man of letters and a statesman; and in what manner a student can pass his hours in the closest imprisonment. The gate of the prison has sometimes been the porch of fame.

Grotius was born with the happiest dispositions: studious from his infancy, he had also received from Nature the faculty of genius; and was so fortunate to find in his father a tutor who had formed his early taste and his moral feelings. The younger Grotius, in imitation of Horace, has celebrated his gratitude in verse.

One of the most interesting circumstances in the life of this great man, which strongly marks his genius and fortitude, is displayed by the manner in which he employed his time during his imprisonment. Other men, condemned to exile and captivity, if they survive, they despair; the man of letters counts those days as the sweetest of his life.

When a prisoner at the Hague, he laboured on a Latin essay on the means of terminating religious disputes, which occasion so many infelicities in the state, in the church, and in families; when he was carried to Louvenstein, he resumed his law studies, which other employments had interrupted. He gave a portion of his time to

moral philosophy, which engaged him to translate the maxims of the ancient poets, collected by Stobæus, and the fragments of Menander and Philemon. Every Sunday was devoted to read the Scriptures, and to write his Commentaries on the New Testament. In the course of the work he fell ill, but as soon as he recovered his health he composed his treatise, in Dutch verse, on the Truth of the Christian Religion. Sacred and profane authors occupied him alternately. His only mode of refreshing his mind was to pass from one work to another. He sent to Vossius his observations on the Tragedies of Seneca. He wrote several other works; particularly a little Catechism, in verse, for his daughter Cornelia; and collected materials to form his Apology. Add to these various labours an extensive correspondence he held with the learned and his friends; and his letters were often so many treatises. There is a printed collection amounting to two thousand. Grotius had notes ready for every classical author of antiquity whenever they prepared a new edition; we must recollect, notwithstanding such uninterrupted literary avocations, his hours were frequently devoted to the public functions of an ambassador. "I only reserve for my studies the time which other ministers give to their pleasures, to conversations often

useless, and visits sometimes unnecessary;” such is the language of this great man! Although he produced thus abundantly, his confinement was not more than two years. We may well exclaim here, that the mind of Grotius had never been imprisoned.

Perhaps the most sincere eulogium, and the most grateful to this illustrious scholar, was that which he received at the hour of his death.

When this great man was travelling, he was suddenly struck by the hand of death, at the village of Rostock. The parish minister, who was called in his last moments, ignorant who the dying man was, began to go over the usual points; but Grotius, who saw there was no time to lose in exhortations, turned to him and told him that he needed them not; and concluded by saying, *Sum Grotius*—I am Grotius. *Tu magnus ille Grotius?* “What! are you the great Grotius?” interrogated the minister. What an eulogium! This anecdote seems, however, apocryphal; for we have a narrative of his death by the clergyman himself. On the death of Grotius, a variety of tales, raised by different parties, were spread concerning his manner of dying.

In the approbation of the *censeur* to print this “Vie de Grotius,” it is observed that while “his history gives

us a clear idea of the extent of the human mind, it will further inform us, that Grotius died without reaping any advantage from his great talents.”