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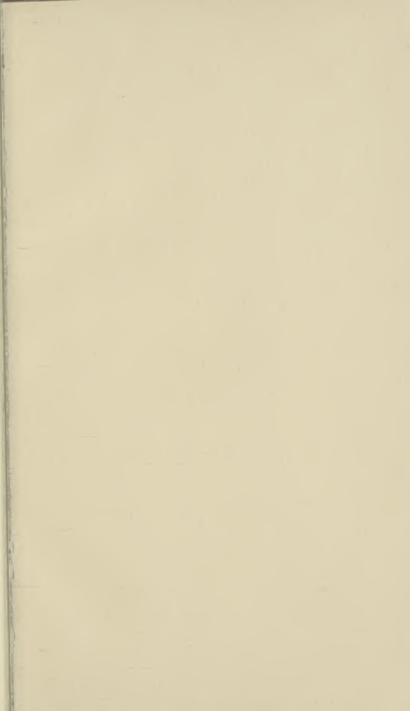
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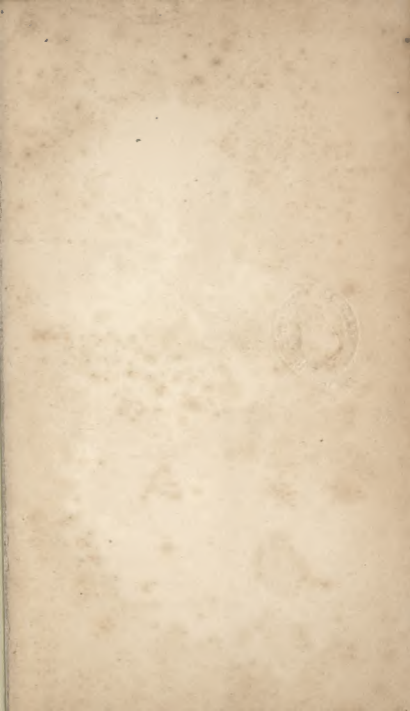
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DAVID HUME.



THE  
L I F E  
OF  
D A V I D H U M E.

4.  
WRITTEN BY HIMSELF.

LONDON:  
WHITTAKER, TREACHER, AND ARNOT,  
AVE MARIA-LANE.

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1888

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## P R E F A C E.

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HOWEVER brief the account which a man of commanding genius or talent may be disposed to give of himself, it can scarcely fail of possessing a portion of the characteristic handling which forms the principal charm of Autobiography. The well-known sketch by the celebrated DAVID HUME, entitled "My own Life," is an instance of this truth; for although it exhibits no pouring out of the mind in the egotistical style of unreserve, which is not without its attraction from men of a fervid and imaginative character, it is singularly indicative of the philosophic bearing and calm temperament of the distinguished author. It also supplies a genuine outline of his literary experience; and nothing can be more interesting than authenticated facts, attendant upon the early efforts of writers of celebrity, or more instructive than a comparison of their expectations and disappointments in the first stages of their progress,

with the settled estimation and judgment of well-informed society, when they have attained the goal. Thus, in the following short narrative, we learn that no author met with more neglect than Hume in the first instance, or in due time attracted more wide and varied attention. We also acquire his only written defence of his greatest work, his "History of England," and what is best of all, his observations upon, and summary of his own character. All this would be attractive from a writer of far inferior pretensions to Mr Hume, but what ought to go farther than all the rest, simple and contracted as this account is, it may be safely asserted that, had it never been written, the world would have been much less informed than it is, in regard to some very distinguishing points in the mental and moral composition of one of the leading philosophers and historians of modern times.

## MY OWN LIFE.

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IT is difficult for a man to speak long of himself without vanity, therefore I shall be short. It may be thought an instance of vanity that I pretend at all to write my life; but this narrative shall contain little more than the history of my writings, as indeed almost all my life has been spent in literary pursuits and occupations. The first success of most of my writings was not such as to be an object of vanity.

I was born the twenty-sixth of April, 1711, old style, at Edinburgh. I was of a good family, both by father and mother. My father's family is a branch of the earl of Home's or Hume's; and my ancestors had been proprietors of the estate which my brother possesses for several generations. My mother was daughter of sir David Falconer, president of the college of justice: the title of lord Halkerton came by succession to her brother.

My family, however, was not rich; and, being myself a younger brother, my patrimony, according to the mode of my country, was of course very slender. My father, who passed for a man of parts, died when I was an infant, leaving me with an elder brother and sister, under the care of our mother, a woman of singular merit: who, though young and handsome, devoted herself entirely to the rearing and educating of her children. I passed through the ordinary course of education with success, and was seized very early with a passion for literature, which had been the ruling passion of my life, and the great source of my enjoyments. My studious disposition, my sobriety, and

my industry, gave my family a notion that the law was a proper profession for me; but I found an insurmountable aversion to every thing but the pursuits of philosophy and general learning; and, while they fancied I was poring over Voet and Vinnius, Cicero and Virgil were the authors which I was secretly devouring.

My very slender fortune, however, being unsuitable to this plan of life, and my health being a little broken by my ardent application, I was tempted, or rather forced, to make a very feeble trial for entering into a more active scene of life. In 1734, I went to Bristol, with recommendations to eminent merchants; but in a few months found that scene totally unsuitable to me. I went over to France with a view of prosecuting my studies in a country retreat; and there I laid that plan of life which I have steadily and successfully pursued. I resolved to make a very rigid frugality supply my deficiency of fortune, to maintain unimpaired my independency, and to regard every object as contemptible, except the improvement of my talents in literature.

During my retreat in France, first at Rheims, but chiefly at La Fleche, in Anjou, I composed my "Treatise of Human Nature." After passing three years very agreeably in that country, I came over to London, in 1737. In the end of 1738, I published my treatise, and immediately went down to my mother and my brother, who lived at his country-house, and was employing himself very judiciously and successfully in the improvement of his fortune.

Never literary attempt was more unfortunate than my "Treatise of Human Nature." It fell dead-born from the press, without reaching such distinction as even to excite a murmur among the zealots. But being naturally of a cheerful and sanguine temper, I very soon recovered the blow, and prosecuted with great ardour my studies in the country. In 1742, I printed at Edinburgh the first part of my "Essays," the work was favourably received, and soon made me entirely forget my former disappointment. I continued with

my mother and brother in the country, and in that time recovered the knowledge of the Greek language, which I had too much neglected in my early youth.

In 1745, I received a letter from the marquis of Annandale, inviting me to come and live with him in England; I found also that the friends and family of that young nobleman were desirous of putting him under my care and direction, for the state of his mind and health required it. I lived with him a twelve-month. My appointments during that time made a considerable accession to my small fortune. I then received an invitation from general St Clair, to attend him as secretary to his expedition, which was at first meant against Canada, but ended in an incursion on the coast of France. Next year, to wit 1747, I received an invitation from the general, to attend him in the same station in his military embassy to the courts of Vienna and Turin. I then wore the uniform of an officer, and was introduced at these courts as aid-de-camp to the general, along with sir Harry Erskine, and captain Grant, now general Grant. These two years were almost the only interruptions which my studies have received during the course of my life: I passed them agreeably, and in good company; and my appointments, with my frugality, had made me reach a fortune which I called independent, though most of my friends were inclined to smile when I said so: in short, I was now master of near a thousand pounds.

I had always entertained a notion that my want of success in publishing the "Treatise of Human Nature," had proceeded more from the manner than the matter, and that I had been guilty of a very usual indiscretion, in going to the press too early. I therefore cast the first part of that work anew in the "Enquiry concerning Human Understanding," which was published while I was at Turin. But this piece was at first little more successful than the "Treatise of Human Nature." On my return from Italy, I had the mortification to find all England in a ferment, on account of Dr Mid

dleton's "Free Enquiry," while my performance was entirely overlooked and neglected. A new edition which had been published at London of my "Essays," moral and political, met not with a much better reception.

Such is the force of natural temper, that these disappointments made little or no impression on me. I went down in 1749, and lived two years with my brother, at his country-house, for my mother was now dead. I there composed the second part of my essay, which I called "Political Discourses," and also my "Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals," which is another part of my treatise that I cast anew. Meanwhile my bookseller, A. Millar, informed me that my former publications (all but the unfortunate treatise) were beginning to be the subject of conversation; that the sale of them was gradually increasing, and that new editions were demanded. Answers by reverends and right reverends came out two or three in a year; and I found, by Dr Warburton's railing, that the books were beginning to be esteemed in good company. However, I had a fixed resolution, which I inflexibly maintained, never to reply to any body; and not being very irascible in my temper, I have kept myself clear of all literary squabbles. These symptoms of a rising reputation gave me encouragement, as I was ever more disposed to see the favourable than the unfavourable side of things; a turn of mind which it is more happy to possess, than to be born to an estate of ten thousand a year.

In 1751, I removed from the country to the town, the true scene for a man of letters. In 1752, were published at Edinburgh, where I then lived, my "Political Discourses," the only work of mine that was successful on the first publication. It was well received abroad and at home. In the same year was published at London, my "Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals;" which, in my opinion, (who ought not to judge on that subject,) is of all my writings, historical, philosophical, or literary, incomparably the best. It came unnoticed and unobserved into the world.



In 1752, the Faculty of Advocates chose me for their librarian; an office from which I received little or no emolument, but which gave me the command of a large library. I then formed the plan of writing the "History of England," but being frightened with the notion of continuing a narrative through a period of seventeen hundred years, I commenced with the accession of the house of Stuart, an epoch when I thought the misrepresentations began chiefly to take place. I was, I own, sanguine in my expectations of the success of this work. I thought that I was the only historian that had at once neglected present power, interest, and authority, and the cry of popular prejudices; and, as the subject was suited to every capacity, I expected proportional applause. But miserable was my disappointment: I was assailed by one cry of reproach, disapprobation, and even detestation: English, Scotch, and Irish, Whig and Tory, churchman and sectary, freethinker and religionist, patriot and courtier, united in their rage against the man who had presumed to shed a generous tear for the fate of Charles I and the earl of Strafford; and after the first ebullitions of their fury were over, what was still more mortifying, the book seemed to sink into oblivion. Mr Millar told me, that in a twelvemonth he sold only forty-five copies of it. I scarcely, indeed, heard of one man in the three kingdoms, considerable for rank or letters, that could endure the book. I must only except the primate of England, Dr Herring, and the primate of Ireland, Dr Stone, which seem two odd exceptions. These dignified prelates separately sent me messages not to be discouraged.

I was, however, I confess, discouraged; and, had not the war at that time been breaking out between France and England, I had certainly retired to some provincial town of the former kingdom, have changed my name, and never more have returned to my native country; but as this scheme was not now practicable, and the subsequent volume was considerably advanced, I resolved to pick up courage and to persevere.

In this interval, I published at London, my "Natural History of Religion," along with some other small pieces: its public entry was rather obscure, except only that Dr Hurd wrote a pamphlet against it, with all the illiberal petulance, arrogance, and scurrility, which distinguish the Warburtonian school. This pamphlet gave me some consolation for the otherwise indifferent reception of my performance.

In 1756, two years after the fall of the first volume, was published the second volume of my "History, containing the period from the death of Charles I till the Revolution." This performance happened to give less displeasure to the Whigs, and was better received. It not only rose itself, but helped to buoy up its unfortunate brother.

But though I had been taught by experience that the Whig party were in possession of bestowing all places, both in the state and in literature, I was so little inclined to yield to their senseless clamour, that in above a hundred alterations, which further study, reading, or recollection, engaged me to make in the reigns of the two first Stuarts, I have made all of them invariably to the Tory side. It is ridiculous to consider the English constitution before that period as a regular plan of liberty.

In 1759, I published my "History of the House of Tudor." The clamour against this performance was almost equal to that against the history of the two first Stuarts. The reign of Elizabeth was particularly obnoxious. But I was now callous against the impressions of public folly, and continued very peaceably and contentedly in my retreat at Edinburgh, to finish, in two volumes, the more early part of "The English History," which I gave to the public in 1761, with tolerable, and but tolerable, success.

But, notwithstanding this variety of winds and seasons to which my writings had been exposed, they had still been making such advances, that the copy-money given me by the booksellers much exceeded any thing formerly known in England. I was become not only independent, but opulent, I retired to my native coun-

try of Scotland, determined never more to set my foot out of it; and retaining the satisfaction of never having preferred a request to one great man, or even making advances of friendship to any of them. As I was now turned of fifty, I thought of passing all the rest of my life in this philosophical manner, when I received, in 1763, an invitation from the earl of Hertford, with whom I was not in the least acquainted, to attend him on his embassy to Paris, with a near prospect of being appointed secretary to the embassy; and, in the mean while, of performing the functions of that office. This offer, however inviting, I at first declined, both because I was reluctant to begin connections with the great, and because I was afraid that the civilities and gay company of Paris would prove disagreeable to a person of my age and humour; but on his lordship's repeating the invitation, I accepted of it. I have every reason, both of pleasure and interest, to think myself happy in my connections with that nobleman, as well as afterwards with his brother, general Conway.

Those who have not seen the strange effects of modes will never imagine the strange reception I met with at Paris, from men and women of all ranks and stations. The more I resiled from their excessive civilities, the more I was loaded with them. There is, however, a real satisfaction in living at Paris, from the great number of sensible, knowing, and polite company with which the city abounds above all places in the universe. I thought once of settling there for life.

I was appointed secretary to the embassy; and in summer 1765, lord Hertford left me, being appointed lord lieutenant of Ireland. I was *chargé d'affaires* till the arrival of the duke of Richmond, towards the end of the year. In the beginning of 1776 I left Paris, and next summer went to Edinburgh, with the same view as formerly, of burying myself in a philosophical retreat. I returned to that place not richer, but with much more money, and a much larger income, by

means of lord Hertford's friendship, than I left it; and I was desirous of trying what superfluity could produce, as I had formerly made an experiment of a competency. But in 1767 I received from Mr Conway an invitation to be under-secretary; and this invitation both the character of the person, and my connections with lord Hertford, prevented me from declining. I returned to Edinburgh in 1769 very opulent, (for I possessed a revenue of one thousand pounds a year,) healthy, and though somewhat stricken in years, with the prospect of enjoying long my ease, and of seeing the increase of my reputation.

In spring, 1775, I was struck with a disorder in my bowels, which at first gave me no alarm, but has since, as I apprehend it, become mortal and incurable. I now reckon upon a speedy dissolution. I have suffered very little pain from my disorder; and, what is more strange, have, notwithstanding the great decline of my person, never suffered a moment's abatement of my spirits; insomuch that were I to name a period of my life which I should most choose to pass over again, I might be tempted to point to this later period. I possess the same ardour as ever in study, and the same gaiety in company. I consider, besides, that a man at sixty-five, by dying, cuts off only a few years of infirmities; and though I see many symptoms of my literary reputation's breaking out at last with additional lustre, I know that I could have but very few years to enjoy it. It is difficult to be more detached from life than I am at present.

To conclude historically with my own character. I am, or rather was (for that is the style I must now use in speaking of myself, which emboldens me the more to speak my sentiments) I was, I say, a man of mild disposition, of command of temper, of an open, social, and cheerful humour, capable of attachment, but little susceptible of enmity, and of great moderation in all my passions. Even my love of literary fame, my ruling passion, never soured my temper, notwithstanding my frequent disappointments.

My company was not acceptable to the young and careless, as well as to the studious and literary; and as I took a particular pleasure in the company of modest women, I had not reason to be displeas'd with the reception I met with from them. In a word, though most men, anywise eminent, have found reason to complain of calumny, I never was touch'd, or even attack'd, by her baleful tooth; and though I wantonly expos'd myself to the rage of both civil and religious factions, they seem'd to be disarm'd in my behalf of their wonted fury. My friends never had occasion to vindicate any one circumstance of my character and conduct: not but that the zealots, we may well suppose, would have been glad to invent and propagate any story to my disadvantage, but they could never find any which they thought would wear the face of probability. I cannot say there is no vanity in making this funeral oration of myself; but I hope it is not a misplaced one; and this is a matter of fact which is easily clear'd and ascertain'd.

*April 18, 1776.*

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### S E Q U E L.

Mr Hume died on the 26th of August, 1776, about four months after concluding the foregoing brief account of his life and literary labours. Looking to the tenour of the conclusion, there is reason to believe that it was drawn up with a view of anticipating or preventing erroneous statements, to which, owing to the latitude of his religious opinions he was aware that he would be peculiarly liable. At the same time it is by no means improbable that the minute and interesting account of his deportment a few days before he died, convey'd in the following letter from Dr Adam Smith to their common friend, Mr Strahan, either directly or indirectly originated in some expressed anxiety on the part of Mr Hume, that his dying sentiments might be recorded:—

LETTER FROM ADAM SMITH, LL. D. to WILLIAM STRAHAN, Esq.

*Kircaldy, Fifeshire,*  
Nov. 9, 1776.

Dear Sir,

It is with a real, though a very melancholy pleasure, that I sit down to give you some account of the behaviour of our late excellent friend, Mr Hume, during his last illness.

Though in his own judgment his disease was mortal and incurable, yet he allowed himself to be prevailed upon, by the entreaty of his friends, to try what might be the effects of a long journey. A few days before he set out he wrote that account of his own life, which, together with his other papers, he has left to your care. My account, therefore, shall begin where his ends.

He set out for London towards the end of April, and at Morpeth met with Mr John Home and myself, who had both come down from London on purpose to see him, expecting to have found him at Edinburgh. Mr Home returned with him, and attended him, during the whole of his stay in England, with that care and attention which might be expected from a temper so perfectly friendly and affectionate. As I had written to my mother that she might expect me in Scotland, I was under the necessity of continuing my journey. His disease seemed to yield to exercise and change of air; and, when he arrived in London, he was apparently in much better health than when he left Edinburgh. He was advised to go to Bath to drink the waters, which appeared for some time to have so good an effect upon him, that even he himself began to entertain, what he was not apt to do, a better opinion of his own health. His symptoms however soon returned with their usual violence, and from that moment he gave up all thoughts of recovery, but submitted with the utmost cheerfulness and the most

perfect complacency and resignation. Upon his return to Edinburgh, though he found himself much weaker, yet his cheerfulness never abated, and he continued to divert himself, as usual, with correcting his own works for a new edition, with reading books of amusement, with the conversation of his friends; and sometimes in the evening with a party at his favourite game of whist. His cheerfulness was so great, and his conversation and amusements ran so much in their usual strain, that notwithstanding all bad symptoms, many people could not believe he was dying. "I shall tell your friend colonel Edmondstone," said doctor Dundas to him one day, "that I left you much better, and in a fair way of recovery." "Doctor," said he, "as I believe you would not choose to tell any thing but the truth, you had better tell him I am dying as fast as my enemies, if I have any, could wish, and as easily and cheerfully as my best of friends could desire." Colonel Edmondstone soon afterwards came to see him, and take leave of him; and on his way home he could not forbear writing him a letter, bidding him once more an eternal adieu, and applying to him, as to a dying man, the beautiful French verses in which the abbé Chaulieu, in expectation of his own death, laments his approaching separation from his friend the marquis de la Fare. Mr Hume's magnanimity and firmness were such, that his most affectionate friends knew that they hazarded nothing in talking and writing to him as to a dying man; and that so far from being hurt by this frankness, he was rather pleased and flattered by it. I happened to come into his room while he was reading this letter, which he had just received, and which he immediately showed me. I told him, that though I was sensible how very much he was weakened, and that appearances were in many respects very bad, yet his cheerfulness was still so great, the spirit of life seemed still to be so very strong in him, that I could not help entertaining some faint hopes. He answered, "Your hopes are groundless. An habitual diarrhœa of more than

a year's standing would be a very bad disease at any age; at my age it is a mortal one. When I lie down in the evening I feel myself weaker than when I rose in the morning; and when I rise in the morning weaker than when I lay down in the evening. I am sensible, besides, that some of my vital parts are affected, so that I must soon die." "Well," said I, "if it must be so, you have at least the satisfaction of leaving all your friends, your brother's family in particular, in great prosperity." He said that he felt that satisfaction so sensibly, that when he was reading, a few days before, Lucian's "Dialogues of the Dead," among all the excuses which are alleged to Charon for not entering readily into his boat, he could not find one that fitted him: he had no house to finish, he had no daughter to provide for, he had no enemies upon whom he wished to revenge himself. "I could not well imagine," said he, "what excuse I could make to Charon, in order to obtain a little delay. I have done every thing of consequence which I ever meant to do, and I could at no time expect to leave my relations and friends in a better situation than that in which I am now likely to leave them: I therefore have all reason to die contented." He then diverted himself with inventing several jocular excuses, which he supposed he might make to Charon, and with imagining the very surly answers which it might suit the character of Charon to return to them. "Upon further consideration," said he, "I thought I might say to him, 'Good Charon, I have been correcting my works for a new edition. Allow me a little time that I may see how the public receives the alterations.' But Charon would answer, 'When you have seen the effect of these, you will be for making other alterations. There will be no end of such excuses; so, honest friend, please step into the boat.' But I might still urge, 'Have a little patience, good Charon, I have been endeavouring to open the eyes of the public. If I live a few years longer, I may have the satisfaction of seeing the downfall of the prevailing



systems of superstition.' But Charon would then lose all temper and decency. 'You loitering rogue, that will not happen these many hundred years. Do you fancy I will grant you a lease for so long a term? Get into the boat this instant, you lazy loitering rogue.' "

But though Mr Hume always talked of his approaching dissolution with great cheerfulness, he never affected to make any parade of his great magnanimity. He never mentioned the subject but when the conversation naturally led to it, and never dwelt longer upon it than the course of conversation happened to require; it was a subject indeed which occurred pretty frequently, in consequence of the inquiries his friends, who came to see him, naturally made concerning the state of his health. The conversation which I mentioned above, and which passed on Thursday the 8th of August, was the last, except one, that I ever had with him. He had now become so very weak that the company of his most intimate friends fatigued him; for his cheerfulness was still so great, his complaisance and social disposition were still so entire, that when any friend was with him he could not help talking more, and with greater exertion, than suited the weakness of his body. At his own desire, therefore, I agreed to leave Edinburgh, where I was staying partly upon his account, and returned to my mother's house here at Kirkaldy, upon condition that he would send for me whenever he wished to see me; the physician who saw him most frequently, doctor Black, undertaking, in the mean time, to write me occasionally an account of the state of his health.

On the twenty-second of August, the doctor wrote me the following letter:

"Since my last Mr Hume has passed his time pretty easily, but is much weaker. He sits up, goes down stairs once a day, and amuses himself with reading, but seldom sees any body. He finds that even the conversation of his most intimate friends fatigues and

oppresses him, and it is happy that he does not need it; for he is quite free from anxiety, impatience, or low spirits, and passes his time very well with the assistance of amusing books."

I received, the day after, a letter from Mr Hume himself, of which the following is an extract :

*" Edinburgh, August 23, 1776.*

" My dearest friend,

" I am obliged to make use of my nephew's hand in writing to you, as I do not rise to-day. \* \*

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\* \* \* \* \*

I go very fast to decline, and last night had a small fever, which I hoped might put a quicker period to this tedious illness; but unluckily, it has in a great measure gone off. I cannot submit to your coming over here on my account, as it is possible for me to see you so small a part of the day; but Dr Black can better inform you concerning the degree of strength which may from time to time remain with me. Adieu," &c.

Three days after I received the following letter from Dr Black.

*" Edinburgh, August 26, 1776.*

" Dear Sir;

" Yesterday, about four o'clock, afternoon, Mr Hume expired. The near approach of his death became evident in the night between Thursday and Friday, when his disease became excessive, and soon weakened him so much, that he could no longer rise out of his bed. He continued to the last perfectly sensible, and free from much pain or feelings of distress. He never dropt the smallest expression of impatience; but when he had occasion to speak to the people about him, always did it with affection and tenderness. I thought it improper to write to bring you over, especially as I had heard that he had dictated a letter to you, desiring you not to come. When he be-

came very weak it cost him an effort to speak, and he died in such a happy composure of mind that nothing could exceed it."

Thus died our most excellent, and never-to-be-forgotten friend; concerning whose philosophical opinions men will no doubt judge variously, every one approving or condemning them according as they happen to coincide, or disagree with his own; but concerning whose character and conduct there can scarce be a difference of opinion. His temper, indeed, seemed to be more happily balanced, if I may be allowed such an expression, than that perhaps of any other man I have ever known. Even in the lowest state of his fortune, his great and necessary frugality never hindered him from exercising, upon proper occasions, acts both of charity and generosity. It was a frugality founded not upon avarice, but upon the love of independency. The extreme gentleness of his nature never weakened either the firmness of his mind, or the steadiness of his resolutions. His constant pleasantry was the genuine effusion of good-nature and good-humour, tempered with delicacy and modesty, and without even the slightest tincture of malignity, so frequently the disagreeable source of what is called wit in other men. It never was the meaning of his raillery to mortify; and therefore, far from offending, it seldom failed to please and delight even those who were the objects of it. To his friends, who were frequently the objects of it, there was not perhaps any one of all his great and amiable qualities which contributed more to endear his conversation. And that gaiety of temper, so agreeable in society, but which is so often accompanied with frivolous and superficial qualities, was in him certainly attended with the most severe application, the most extensive learning, the greatest depth of thought, and a capacity in every respect the most comprehensive. Upon the whole, I have always considered him, both in his lifetime, and since his death, as approaching as nearly

to the idea of a perfectly wise and virtuous man, as perhaps the nature of human frailty will admit.

I am ever, dear Sir,

Most affectionately yours,

ADAM SMITH.

A document so explicit as the above calls for little in the way of additional remark. Of a nature to preclude all imagination or invention in regard to the death-bed opinions of possibly the most acute of modern sceptics, it has by no means prevented a variety of strictures upon their tendency, and in condemnation of the ease, and even gaiety, with which under such peculiar circumstances they were implied. With these it is not in the spirit of the brief sequels rendered convenient by the nature of the present republications to interfere; and such being the fact, it may be sufficient, in the way of conclusion, to observe—that whether emulative of the philosophic or of any other character, it is the lot of few mortals, in their march across what the poet Cowley calls the isthmus that divides the “two eternities,” to evince the calm propriety and graceful consistency which these brief documents record as distinctive of the life and death of DAVID HUME.

THE END.









