DR. POLIDORI, AUTHOR OF "THE VAMPIRE."

Something has been said in these pages (3rd S. vii. 201, 429) of that singular production The Vampire, which, from having been attributed to Lord Byron, and indeed built upon his groundwork, has excited so much more attention than its very slender literary merits deserved. In like manner, its author, of whose talents and character, notwithstanding his ill-temper and vanity, Byron, whose travelling companion and physician he was, thought and expressed himself favourably, is surely worthy of some further record than the London Catalogue or Lowndes's Manual could give, though even this will be looked for in vain in these works, not to speak of literary histories and biographical dictionaries. All that I have succeeded in learning of him I have gathered from Byron's Works and Letters, Moore's Notices, and his own productions. His father was "a highly respectable Italian gentleman, who, in early life, had been the secretary of Alfieri." He must in later life have come to this country, but whether he is identical with C. Polidori, a teacher of languages in London, who published in 1814 a New Pocket Dictionary of the Italian, French, and English Languages, 3 vols. 12mo, I do not know.

The subject of this notice was, it appears, born in England, which, in a sonnet on his return from Italy in 1817, he apostrophises as his "native land." Here he graduated in medicine, and left with Byron in 1816, taking up his abode with him at Coligny on the Lake of Geneva, on their way to Italy, which, in a sonnet dated Sept. 20, 1816, he addresses as the "Land of my Fathers." Byron soon became disgusted with the petulant temper, the morbid vanity, and the extravagance of his young companion, and a separation ensued while yet at Geneva. On the occasion of one of the quarrels which preceded this, Polidori rushed into his own room, and was actually found by Byron in the act of selecting a convenient poison from his medicine chest for his own immediate consumption; the entrance of his patron with outstretched hands induced a reconciliation, and the perpetuation of the "fatal act" was postponed, but only for a time, as it appears that he actually committed suicide a few years afterwards, though when, where, or under what inducing circumstances, I have not been able to discover. We read of the quodam associates meeting from time to time in Italy; and from a letter of Byron's, Venice, April 11, 1817, it appears that Polidori was there on his way to England with Lord Guilford, and the widow of the preceding Earl. The former died of inflammation of the bowels, and such arrangements were made to convey the body to England, as led Byron to express his astonishment that a "man should go one way, his intestines another, and his immortal soul a third!"

Polidori had previously written to Byron, informing him that he was "about to return to England to go to the Brazils on a medical speculation with the Danish consul." He was at that time one-and-twenty, and Byron, with high commendations of his talents and character, kindly besought the recommendation of Murray with his government friends in his behalf. Byron also spoke of a tragedy which his protegé had composed, in the publication of which he bespeaks the aid of Murray; but instead of asking that gentleman to undertake it himself, furnished him subsequently with what he termed a "civil and delicate declension," beginning —

"Dear Doctor, I have read your play, Which is a good one in its way,— Purges the eyes and moves the bowels, And drenches handkerchiefs like towels," &c. See Works ("Occasional Pieces.")

Returned to England, Polidori soon found a publisher in Longman; and he can have lost no time in producing —


Then appeared, with its differing title-pages —

"The Vampyre; a Tale." London, 8vo, 1819. See "N. & Q." (3rd S. vii. 201, 429.) This was published by Sherwood; while from Longman's press again appeared —


Of this work, we are told in the introduction that it is "the one begun at Coligny, when Frankenstein was planned, and when a noble author, having determined to descend from his lofty range, gave up a few hours to a tale of terror, and wrote the fragment published at the end of Mazeppa." We have, too, a long note asserting the authorship of the Vampyre "to which his lordship's name was wrongly attached."

In the same year was published, also by Longman, his "Dramatic Action," under the title of —

"Ximenes, the Wreath, and other Poems. By J. W. Polidori, M.D. London, 8vo, 1819, pp. 170.

Whether these are the whole of his literary productions I do not know. We read of a tragedy by the young author, which Byron read at Shelley's, and which excited the risible faculty of the noble poet, as on another occasion did Thurlow's line —

"When Rogers o'er this labour bent."

In this piece it appears that there was a passage, beginning with this line —

"'Tis thus the goiter'd idiot of the Alps," which I do not find in Ximenes, and thus there may have been a second tragedy, of which I have not found any record.

The dramatic piece and the accompanying poems

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display considerable merit, in power of language and energy of feeling, especially when we consider the age of the author—three-and-twenty at most. The "Vampyre" image was evidently a favourite one, and one smiles to find it inevitably doing duty when required:

"... the Vampire bat
Flitting around my head, impatient seemed
To wait my sacrifice..."

Ximenes, p. 69.

"When most the men shall flatter, fear—
When most the men shall softly smile,
They fondly hope they may beguile—
And hope to hurt when most they please.
As Vampire bat excites a breeze,
Soft, cool, and lulling to repose
The child whose life-blood quickly flows."

Poems, p. 138.

I hope that these scanty records of a forgotten poet may educe some further particulars of his short and ill-fated career. As illustrative of his character, I cannot do better than transcribe, in conclusion, a passage from Moore's Life of Byron:

"A dialogue which Lord Byron himself used to mention as having taken place between them, during their journey on the Rhine, is amusingly characteristic of both the persons concerned. 'After all,' said the Physician, 'what is there you can do that I cannot?' 'Why, since you force me to say,' answered the other, 'I think there are three things which I can do which you cannot.' Polidori defied him to name them. 'I can,' said Lord Byron, 'swim across that river—I can snuff out that candle with a pistol-shot at the distance of twenty paces—and I have written a poem (The Corsair) of which 14,000 copies were sold in one day.'"—P. 319.

With his inordinate vanity, with the overweening ambition, and the passionate temper of such a man, it cannot be matter of surprise that, at the failure of his literary aspirations and professional prospects—with probably other causes—his morbidly sensitive mind gave way. The young physician was evidently possessed of considerable talents, warm feelings, and honourable principles, but was wanting in ballast, in modesty, discretion, tact, and above all in that—

"Prudent, cautious, self-control,"

which Burns has told us—

"Is Wisdom's root."

William Bates.

Birmingham.

"GILDAS, HIS PROPHESIE."

The following is taken from a MS. in the Library of the Faculty of Advocates. It seems to have been attributed to "Dr. Anderson," perhaps the Scottish physician: the inventor of the Gra'm Angelica, and author of the exceedingly rare tract on the Caudal Spring of Kinghorn:

"Ye Brittaines giv eare, that wines in the sea,
To Gildas the great prophet of Britannie;
For in his worke who list for to see,
Of Great Brittanis great miserie:

How Gildas revealed by a visione,
Of a change that should be in religione;
That Edinburgh towne should first mak a change,
Her wallis should be raised without revenge;
A parliament house shall be throwne downe,
Wher a kirk shall be founded in the middest of the towne;
And ther shall a dolorous service be sung,
By a companie of dumbe dogges wanting the tounge.
A year after that, a great battell shall be
Betwix ane maden castell and ane absassie:
The waipen shall be ther with the speir nor shield,
Bot a battell of coddling or a stonie field;
And as ther shall fall within Edinburgh towne,
Great mervells shall be seine in Albion:
For quhen the towne and suburbs shall joyne both in on,
Leith shall have one prouest, and Edinburgh non.
The wonder of wonders ther shall be sein,
Quhen bot ane towne all the world shall containe;
Nobilitie and the pears within Brugh or land,
For libertie of holy Kirk shall mak a sure band.
Quhen Gold comes to Leth, to be sold as a trade,
Then Britannie shall be ruled by a dangerous lad;
His counsel shall cheris much strive and debet,
Ane mother of seditione, and overthrow of stait:
Humillation, devotion, much praying and fasting,
All then shall be turned in boisting and posting;
Honestie, conscience, justice and reassone,
By fals brethren shall all be called treassone:
For covetousnes, dignities, pryd, and ambitione,
Shall be all march'd off, under clock of religione:
As hypocrasie, heresie, schisme and divisione,
The onlie ground of all the confusion.
All vyece and mischiefe shall reigne in the dayes,
For breach of a covenant ther after saysie,

"DOCTOR ANDERSON."
J. M.

SHAKESPEARE. — It may interest some of your readers, especially those whose taste is Shake-sperian, to know that, in the advertising columns of a recent number of the Nanaimo Gazette (Vancouver's Island), a Mr. Shakespear "keeps always on hand dry goods, boots and shoes, and small groceries." Another gentleman of the same name advertises his "Photographic Gallery." If the sun pictures of Mr. Shakespear No. 2 are nearly as good as the ideal ones of that celebrated literary limner, Mr. William Shakespear, sometime of Stratford-upon-Avon, whose "one touch of nature" has made the whole world kin, we may congratulate the inhabitants of Nanaimo, and conscientiously advise them to get "taken in this style" by his namesake.

James Pitt.
Easton Road, Bristol.

THIRTEEN. — By those who speak the Aderbijem dialect of Turkish, according to Mirza Hassem Bey, the Turkish for thirteen is considered unlucky, and they use the word ziyadeh instead.

EIGHTY. — In the same dialect seksan, eighty, is avoided, and the Persian substituted; but the reason is, that seksan can be made to signify "Thou dog!"