A Pickle for the Knowing Ones

Timothy Dexter

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A PICKLE FOR THE KNOWING ONES,

BY LORD TIMOTHY DEXTER,

WITH AN

Introductory Preface,

BY A DISTINGUISHED CITIZEN OF "OULD NEWBERRY."

FOURTH EDITION.

NEWBURYPORT:
BLANCHARD & SARGENT.
1848.

PREFACE.

Timothy Dexter, the author of the following curious and unique production, entitled "_A Pickle for the Knowing Ones_," which is here re-printed verbatim et spellatim from the original edition, was born in Malden, January 22, 1747. Having served an apprenticeship with a leather dresser, he commenced business in Newburyport shortly after he was one and twenty, and being industrious and economical, he soon found himself in good circumstances. In the year

1770 he married, and receiving a considerable amount of money with his wife, he was thus put in possession of a moderate fortune. In 1776 he had for one of his apprentices the no less eccentric, and afterwards the no less noted Jonathan Plumer, jun., "travelling preacher, physician and poet," as he was accustomed to style himself, and of whom we shall hereafter speak. In addition to his regular business of selling leather breeches, gloves "soutabel for wimen's ware," &c. he engaged in commercial speculations, and in various kinds of business, and was unusually successful. He traded with merchants and speculators in the then Province of Maine, was engaged to some extent in the West India trade. He also purchased a large amount of what were called State securities, which were eventually redeemed at prices far exceeding their original cost. Some of his speculations in whalebone and warming pans are mentioned by himself on page 23 of this work. Thus in various ways he added to his property, and in a few years he became a wealthy man. With wealth came the desire of distinction, and as his vanity was inordinate he spared no expence in obtaining the notoriety he sought. In the first place he purchased an elegant house in High Street, Newburyport, and embellished it in his peculiar way. Minarets surmounted with golden balls were placed on the roof, a large gilt eagle was placed on the top, and a great variety of other ornaments. In front of his house and land he caused to be erected between forty and fifty wooden statues, full length and larger than life. The principal arch stood directly in front of his door, and on this stood the figures of Washington, Adams and Jefferson. There were also the statues of William Pitt, Franklin, Bonaparte, George IV, Lord Nelson, Gen. Morgan, Cornplanter, an Indian Chief, Jack Tar, Traveling Preacher, Maternal Affection, Two Grenadiers, Four Lions

and one Lamb, and conspicuous among them were two images of Dexter himself, one of which held a label with the inscription "_I am the first in the East, the first in the West, and the greatest philosopher in the Western world_." In order that the interior of his house should correspond with the exterior, the most costly furniture was imported from France, and the walls hung with paintings, brought from Holland and other parts of Europe. A library was also provided, but how large or valuable we are not able to say. An elegant coach with a span of beautiful cream colored horses was procured, on which was painted his coat of arms, with the baronial supporters, after the manner of the English nobility. With this equipage he took the title of Lord Dexter, because, as he said, it was "the voice of the people at Large." He was sometimes called the Marquis of Newburyport. Having completed the embelishments of his house and gardens, Lord Dexter busied himself in receiving the visits of the crowds, who were drawn by curiosity to his house. His gardens were thrown open to their inspection, and he was liberal to all. The fame of his hospitality attracted as many visitors as the fame of his images. To gratify his vanity he selected in imitation of European princes, a poet laureate. This was no other than his former apprentice, Jonathan Plumer, jun., a native of Newbury. They had once been associated as master and apprentice, but now stood in the relation of patron and poet. From the auto-biography of Plumer a very curious and scarce production of 244 pages, the following extract is taken, which may serve to give some idea of the versatility of his genius.--"I had," says he, "some practice as a physician, and earned something with my pen, but for several years was obliged chiefly to follow various kinds of business accounted less honorable, viz: Farming, repeating select passages

from authors, selling halibut, sawing wood, selling books and ballads in the streets, serving as post boy, filling beds with straw and wheeling them to the owners thereof, collecting rags, &c." He had previously served one or two campaigns as a soldier, and on his return from the wars he taught school for some time in New Hampshire. The ballads, which he hawked about, were generally his own composition. Every horrid accident, bloody murder, a shipwreck, or any other dreadful catastrophe, was sure to be followed by a statement of the facts, a sermon and a poem. In the capacity of ballad maker and monger he attracted the notice of Dexter, in whose service he entered for a small salary as poet laureate. He wore a livery, consisting of a black frock coat, adorned with stars and fringes, a cocked hat and black breeches. He was crowned in the garden of his patron with a wreath of parsley, instead of laurel, but the ceremony was interrupted before its completion by a mob of boys, and both patron and poet put to flight. One specimen of his laudatory verses may be seen on page 29 of this work, which will give the reader some idea of his qualifications for the office to which he was elected. How well he was satisfied with the praises of the poet we are not informed, but feeling probably that no person but himself could do justice to the ideas, which he wished to present to the public, he commenced writing for the press. Several of these effusions were printed in the newspapers.--The larger part of them written at different times are embodied in the present work, a large edition of which was published by himself and given away. In this edition not a stop or a mark was used in any line of his writings, but in the second edition one entire page was filled with stops and marks, with a recommendation from the author to his readers, to use them where they were wanted in the

work, or in his own language, "to peper and soolt it as they pleased." Dexter had two children, Samuel and Nancy, neither of whom was distinguished for strength of intellect. The son was a dissipated prodigal and died young. The daughter, of whom mention is made by the father in the following pages, was married to Abraham Bishop of New Haven, who we are informed treated her with neglect and cruelty. A divorce followed and she became intemperate, lost what little reason she had, and is still living, a wretched object. Lord Dexter himself, if we may judge from his own writings and from what we have heard, was not happy in his domestic relations. He complains much of his wife, whom he calls the "gost," and charges the cause of his separation from her for thirteen years to his son Bishop. His own temper was irascible, and several stories are told of the excesses, into which it would sometimes lead him. He ordered his painter, Mr. Babson, to place the word "Constitution" on the scroll in the hand of the figure of Jefferson, which the latter, knowing the artist designed it to represent the Declaration of Independence, refused to do. Dexter was so incensed by this refusal, that he went into the house, and brought out a pistol, which he deliberately fired at the painter; but he was a poor shot, and the ball missing its object, entered the side of the house. At another time, seeing a countryman, as he thought, rather impudently viewing his premises, he ordered his son to fire at the stranger. He refused to do so, when the father threatened to shoot him unless he complied. His son then obeyed. The stranger escaped unhurt, but entered a complaint, and Lord Timothy was, in consequence, sentenced to the house of correction for several months. He went thither in his own coach, priding himself on being the first man who had been to the county house in his own carriage,

drawn by two splendid horses. He soon grew tired, however, of his confinement, and procured a release, which it was said, cost him a thousand dollars. The individual, who exercised most influence over Dexter was a negro woman, named Lucy Lancaster, or as she was commonly called "Black Luce," a woman of uncommon strength of mind, great shrewdness and remarkable for her powers of memory and knowledge of human nature, but as wicked as she was sagacious. She thought him an honest man, and not so deficient in intellect as many people supposed, and attributed his eccentricities to an excess of animal spirits.--This was probably to some extent true, though it is certain that other spirits contributed in no small degree to the excesses of his temper and the peculiarities of his taste. He was addicted to drunkenness, and with his son and other companions, kept up his revels in the best apartments of his house, by which in a very short time, all his costly furniture was ruined, or very much injured.

"Not insensible that he must share the common lot, Dexter, many years before his death, prepared himself a tomb. It was the basement story of his summer-house, magnificently fitted, and open to the light of day. His coffin, made of the best mahogany which he could find, superbly lined, and adorned with silver handles, he kept in a room of the house, and took great pleasure in exhibiting it to visitors--at other times it was locked up. Soon after his death apparatus was prepared, Dexter got up a mock funeral, which with all but his family and a few associates was to pass as real. Various people in the town were invited by card, who came and found the family clad in mourning, and preparations for the funeral going forward. The burial service was read by a wag, who then pronounced a bombastic eulogy upon the deceased. The mourners moved in procession to the tomb in the

garden, the coffin was deposited, and they returned to the large hall, where a sumptuous entertainment was provided. While the feast was going on, a loud noise attracted the guests to the kitchen, where they beheld the arisen Lord caning his wife for not having shed a tear during the ceremony! He entered the hall with the astonished mourners, in high spirits, joined in the rout, threw money from the window to the crowd of boys, and expressed his satisfaction with every thing except the indifference of his wife, and the silence of the bells."

Lord Dexter died at his house, on the 26th of October, 1806, in his 60th year, and by direction of the Board of Health, his remains were interred in the common burying place. His grave is marked by a simple stone.

The Dexter mansion, is yet standing, and is a very fine tenement, but retains few traces of the whims of its late proprietor. Of the images, upwards of forty in number, only the three Presidents now remain, the others having been cast down by the resistless hand of time. Some of them were blown down in the great gale of September, 1815, and were sold at auction.

The cut fronting the Biography gives a very excellent and faithful representation of Lord Dexter in his walking habits, and the likeness of the dog is equally perfect. The dog was perfectly black and the skin as entirely free from hair as that of an elephant. He differed as much from other dogs as did his master and his friend, the poet, differ from other people. The likenesses of all three were drawn with great accuracy by James Aiken, Esq. now a resident of Philadelphia, and could the patron and the poet be seen in proper person, dressed in the

costume of that day, they would be objects of great curiosity. But they are gone, and of each it may be truly said,

We ne'er shall look upon his like again.

A PICKLE

FOR THE KNOWING ONES.

To mankind at Large the time is Com at Last the grat day of Regoising what is that why I will tell you thous three kings is Rased Rased you meane should know Rased on the first Royal Arch in the world olmost Not quite but very hiw up upon so thay are good mark to be scene so the womans Lik to see the frount and all people Loves to see them as the quakers will Com and peape slyly and feele glad and say houe the doue frind father Jorge washeton is in the senter king Addoms is at the Rite hand the present king at the Left hand father gorge with his hat on the other hats of the middel king with his sword king Addoms with his Cane in a grand poster Adtetoude turning his fass towards the first king as if they was on sum politicks king our present king he is stands hearing being younger and very deafe in short being one grat felosfer Looks well East & west and North & south deafe & very deafe the god of Natur has dun very much for our present king and all our former ones they are all good I want them to Live for Ever and I beleave thay will it is hard work to be A king--I say it is hardar than tilling the ground I know it is for I find it is hard work to be A Lord I dont desier the sound but to pleas the peopel at Large Let it gou to brak the way it dus for Asort ment to help a good Lafe to Cour the sick spleney goutey dul frames Lik my

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