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The Works Of Horatio Walpole, Earl Of Orford

In Five Volumes

Walpole, Horace

London, 1798

Strange Occurrences: being a Continuation of Baker's Chronicle

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STRANGE OCCURRENCES:

BEING

A CONTINUATION OF BAKER'S CHRONICLE.

Dec. 28, 1782.

THERE are few men, who, if they live long, might not contribute something to the history of mankind. I do not mean here collective wisdom, or such remarks as might tend to assist in the improvement of the mind or conduct. On the contrary, I allude to such events as are foreign to the common march of causes and consequences. I mean such accidents as will probably always remain singular, and are rather deviations from, and exceptions to, the ordinary course of things, than the result of design and foresight. They answer in the moral world to the *lufus naturæ* in the natural; and as the latter are deposited in collections as curiosities, so the former are entitled to a place in an historical museum on the same foot.

That solemn recorder of prodigies and of celestial phenomena, which did, or were believed by devout credulity to happen, fir Richard Baker, wound up the conclusion of every reign with a catalogue of the battles that had been fought in the air, and of heavenly meteors, which, though conspicuous to half the globe, had no reference but to what had passed or was passing in England.

The extraordinary events I am going to relate, in imitation of fir Richard, shall have no applicatory comment—not but perhaps they did announce, or register, many of the wonderful revolutions that have happened in my time: but I think it is more generous, by not appropriating them, to leave every sooth-fayer or old gentlewoman to apply them as shall seem good to their religion, prejudices, or politics, the most infallible expounders of judgments.

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Without

Without farther preface, I shall mention some half-dozen or more of those eccentric events that have fallen out within my own memory and observation. They are rather memorabilia than anecdotes, and, when once recorded, will probably sink to their proper place, the list of remarkable occurrences at the end of an almanac.

1st. George the first could speak no English; his prime minister, sir Robert Walpole, neither German nor French; they always conversed in Latin. It implied some parts to govern a prince in a dead language which neither spoke well; and which was little flexible to modern usages, and to a very intricate constitution, of which his majesty could have little idea when he did not even understand its language. It must have increased the minister's difficulties, and kept his abilities on the full stretch, that the duchess of Kendal the mistress, and the Hanoverian ministers, were his constant enemies.

2d. The first duke of Chandos built the superb palace of Canons at such an enormous expence, and inhabited it with such profuse state, that he wasted the prodigious fortune he had raised; and the pile itself, built for ages, was pulled down the moment he died, and the materials and site were bought by Hallet the cabinet-maker, who built a house for himself on the spot.

3d. The descendants of Charles I. and Oliver Cromwell^{*} married in the fourth generation;

Charles II.	Lady Falconberg,
Lady Litchfield	Lady Ruffel,
Earl of Litchfield	Sir Thomas Frankland,
Earl of Litchfield	= Diana Frankland.

4th. The

^{*} Though the extraordinary circumstance I am going to mention did not happen in my time, but three or four years before my birth, it is worthy of entering into this list, and is as little likely to be paralleled in a similar way as any event here recorded.

Richard Cromwell, second protector, it is

well known, was produced as a witness at the age of near ninety, in Westminster-hall, in a civil suit. It is said that the counsel of the opposite party reviled the good old man with his father's crimes, but was reproved by the judge, who ordered a chair to be brought for the venerable ancient; and that queen Anne, to her honour,

4th. The baron de Neuhoff, a German gentleman and adventurer, was elected king of Corfica, was driven out by the Genoese, became a prisoner for debt in England, and recovered his liberty by giving up his effects to his creditors according to the act of insolvency; and all the effects he had to give up were his right to the kingdom of Corfica, which was registered accordingly for the benefit of his creditors.

5th and 6th. Wilkes and the female chevalier D'Eon were phenomena too. Niccolò Rienzi, Maslaniello and others attained greater elevation than the first; but their precipitate catastrophes were the natural consequences of their folly, ignorance and intoxication. That Wilkes, after equal rashness, without the semblance of disguising a most profligate character, and after provoking and insulting the whole Scottish nation, should not only have escaped their various attempts to destroy him, but should, after emerging from a prison, have risen, still without any pretence to gravity and decorum, to all the steps of magistracy like the most sober citizen, and then to the first dignity of the city, and afterwards to its most lucrative employment—such a termination of such an outset baffles all reasoning, and will for ever discriminate Wilkes from other meteors of his class.

D'Eon, by the confusion of sexes, and who is certainly an hermaphrodite of a new kind, as nothing but the gender in her is feminine, is still more remarkable; nor can her history be complete, without taking in another extraordinary character, her master Louis Quinze. While she was insulting, and betraying, and exposing his most confidential ministers, the king kept up a private correspondence with her, and apprised her of all their plots for seizing her, and consequently of recovering the secrets in her power, which were his own secrets; and his fear of her disclosing which, might have been supposed the cause of his management. Shall we say, that he had more pleasure in disappointing his ministers than letting them serve him?

honour, commended the judge for his conduct. From Westminster-hall, Richard had the curiosity to go into the house of lords; and standing at the bar, and it being buzzed that so singular a personage was there, lord Bathurst, then one of the twelve new created peers, went to the bar

and conversed with Mr. Cromwell. Happening to ask how long it was since Mr. Cromwell had been in that house—"Never, my lord," answered Richard, "since I sat in that chair"—pointing to the throne.

The

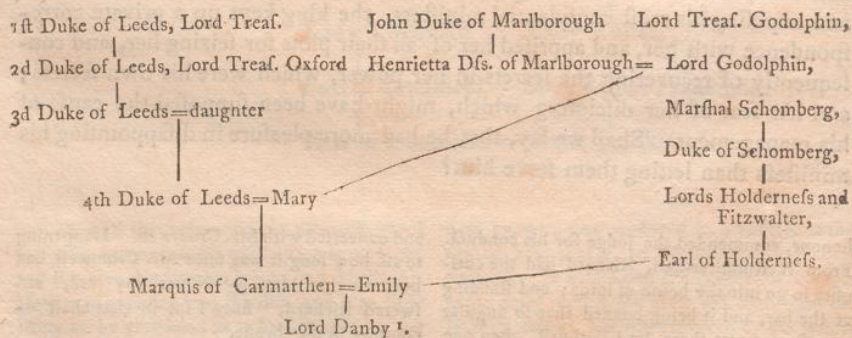
The impunity of Wilkes and D'Eon is a striking contrast to the ages in which poison and assassination revenged the slightest offences, and were called in aid to the furtherance of the most trifling politics.

7th. The duke of Riperda was a Dutchman, became prime minister of Spain, took refuge in England, learnt English in hopes of becoming prime minister here, went to Morocco, turned Mahometan, and died there in high credit.

8th and 9th. William Pitt, lord Chatham, was a second son, and became prime minister of England. His rival and antagonist was Henry Fox lord Holland, a second son likewise. Lord Holland's second son Charles Fox, and lord Chatham's second son William Pitt, are now rivals and antagonists: Fox has as great or greater parts than his father, with much better elocution, and equal power of reasoning. Mr. Pitt has not the dazzling commanding eloquence of his father, but argues much better. Perhaps there is not on record an instance of two statesmen who were rivals, being succeeded in equal rivalry by their sons—certainly not with so many concurrent circumstances.

10th. The two great houses of Campbell and Hamilton were long hostile and rivals for power in Scotland. At last the same woman married the two heads of those families, the dukes of Hamilton and Argyll, and has given an heir to each.

11th. This is the remarkable pedigree of lord Danby, eldest son of the present marquis of Carmarthen, only son of the present duke of Leeds:



¹ Now marquis of Carmarthen.

So that lord Danby will be the representative of lord treasurer Leeds, of lord treasurer Godolphin, of the great duke of Marlborough, of marshal Schomberg, and of the earls of Holderness, and descends from lord treasurer Oxford too:—an extraordinary assemblage of descents from so many great men in a period of fourscore years.

DETACHED