

SIR J. BERNARD BURKE.

Heraldry and genealogy are too closely allied to the pursuits of mediæval archæology to allow us to pass over in silence the death of Sir Bernard Burke, Ulster King-of-Arms. Though the official representative of Irish genealogical research, his knowledge was by no means confined to that country. Few men were better acquainted with the origin and intermarriages of the gentry of Great Britain, and no man could be more courteous or more liberal in imparting information to those who sought him personally, or by letter, in his favourite tower in the Castle at Dublin. He was also an accomplished Latin scholar, and his verses were such as even such a Lord-Lieutenant as Lord Wellesley himself need not have been unwilling to own.

But he is best known by his numerous books upon subjects within the scope of his profession, and especially by two of them which, in their class, are unequalled. For the ordinary uses of a peerage, Collins was almost as obsolete as Dugdale himself. The ground was held, rather than occupied, by Debrett, but Sir Bernard and his father took a wider view, and produced a volume, the superiority and completeness of which was at once recognised, and though it is the father of several rivals, it has never yet been equalled, still less surpassed.

The other work by which Sir Bernard was mainly known, was, "The Landed Gentry, or Commoners of Great Britain," a work often severely, though we venture to think, unjustly criticised. No doubt many of the pedigrees are deduced from ancestors obviously fabulous. Surnames are given long before surnames were in use, and heroic deeds recorded, and armorial bearings attributed to them evidently fictitious, even supposing armorial bearings at that time to have been in use. But Sir Bernard, though he accepted some responsibility for the later steps of the pedigrees, and sought for and found corrections in them, left the main steps of the pedigrees as they were delivered to him by the representatives of the families. When a pedigree proposes to begin with the Conquest, and still more from a Saxon ancestry, that part of it is generally understood to be vain flourish, if not invented, yet very probably passed without protest by the fathers of British genealogy, and on that account they were admitted into the work. Now and then these traditions contain a germ of truth, which to eliminate would be a work of immense labour, and scarcely necessary in such a volume as that of "The Landed Gentry."

The fact is, that "The Landed Gentry" is one of the most useful of modern genealogical publications. It is essential to know something of

the pretensions of the modern squirarchy, and before Burke there was absolutely no source to which one could apply. Heralds' visitations ceased long since, and but few of the modern land-owners have been long enough in possession to be so recorded. Such of course could find no place in the exclusive and most valuable volume of Shirley, or even in the less exclusive "Stemmata Chichleana;" and in Scotland, Wood's Baronage is imperfect, and but few families are admitted into the first volume of Nesbitt. What was wanted was correct information as to the present family and immediate progenitors, our own contemporaries, to which might be added, if it so pleased them, any genealogical pretensions of a higher order, and this want Sir Bernard entirely and completely fulfilled. If a family was ennobled, the information is given in the "Peerage;" if not, in "The Landed Gentry." Had Sir Bernard left no other works behind him than those two, he would still have been entitled to a good word from every lover of genealogy, and to an honourable place in such volumes as our own.