

A CARICATURE OF SIR JOHN LESLIE

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DEMONSTRATION
OR
CAUSE & EFFECT.

SIR JOHN LESLIE (1766-1832), Professor of Natural Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh, is remembered nowadays primarily for his invention and application of the differential thermometer and his discoveries in the field of heat radiation. Physics teachers should think of him, however, whenever they repeat the experiment of freezing water with a vacuum pump using sulfuric acid to remove the water vapor—for it is to him that this well-known experiment is due.

The amusing caricature of Leslie above was sketched by John Kay (1742-1826), the self-taught Scottish etcher, who from 1785 until his death produced nearly 900 plates of the oddities and celebrities of Edinburgh. Almost every notable Scotsman of the period, with the exception of Burns, was represented, and the etchings, while not entitled to high rank as works of art, possess a certain quaint originality as well as considerable fidelity as likenesses.

Kay's work was collected and published in two volumes after his death. The curious biographical notes that accompany the etchings were started by Kay, but were completed after his death by James Paterson, author of *The History of the County of Ayr*, aided by David Laing, Alexander Smellie, and other antiquarians.

"The character of Sir John," according to the biographical notes on Leslie, "has been subject to some little stricture. All have admired the inventive fertility of his genius—his extensive knowledge and vigorous mind. As a writer, however, his style has been criticised; and he has been accused as somewhat illiberal in his estimate of kindred merit, while he is represented to have been credulous in matters of common life, and sceptical in science. 'His faults,' says his biographer, 'were far more than compensated by his many good qualities—by his constant equanimity, his cheerfulness,

his simplicity of character, almost infantine, his straight-forwardness, his perfect freedom from affectation and, above all, his unconquerable good nature. He was, indeed, one of the most placable of human beings; and if, as has been thought, he generally had a steady eye, in his worldly course, to his own interest, it cannot be denied that he was, notwithstanding, a warm and good friend, and a relation on whose affectionate assistance a firm reliance could ever be placed.' In this character we are disposed to concur. One slight blemish, however, has been overlooked—personal vanity; for, strange to say, although in the eyes of others the worthy knight was very far from an Adonis, yet in his own estimation he was a perfect model of male beauty.

"The general appearance of Sir John is well represented in the print which precedes this notice. He was short and corpulent—of a florid complexion—and his front teeth projected considerably. What the natural color of his hair may have been we cannot say; but in consequence of the use of some tincture—Tyrian dye it is said—it generally appeared somewhat of a purple hue. In later life, his corpulence increased;* he walked with difficulty; and he became rather slovenly in his mode of dress—a circumstance the more surprising, as his anxiety to be thought young and engaging continued undiminished."

* "When unbending his mind from severer labours, the knight resorted to Apicius; and to his success in reducing to practice the gastronomical propositions of that interesting writer has been ascribed his somewhat remarkable exuberance of abdomen. A legal friend, now, alas! no more, once witnessed an amicable contest between Sir John and an eminent individual, celebrated for his taste in *re culinaria*. The latter was invincible in the turtle soup and cold punch, but the former carried all before him when the 'sweets' were placed on the table. To show how easily the victory was won, besides other fruits produced with dessert, the knight, without any effort, devoured nearly a couple of pounds of almonds and raisins."