

## John Valerius,

*Born without Arms.*

**V**ALERIUS was born in the Upper Palatinate of Germany in the year 1667, without arms; and when bereaved of his parents and friends by death, had no other means to depend on for a subsistence than the exhibition of his person. He had practised many arts with his feet and toes, generally performed by the hands and fingers; and necessity had brought them into such use, that he felt but little deficiency in the lack of arms and hands. He travelled into several countries, and among others, visited England, and at London exhibited himself and performed all his wonderful feats from the year 1698 until 1705, as may be seen by the various specimens of his writing, dated in the intermediate periods.

The portrait of this man, and his different postures and performances, was engraved and published by himself in Holland, with Dutch inscriptions, and must have been productive of great advantages to Valerius, from the immense number of impressions taken from the plates, which appear, from some of the copies extant (though in any state rarely to be met with), to have been very much worn.

It was a common custom with the persons who visited Valerius to give him some gratuity for a specimen of his writing; and on the back of a portrait of him which belonged to Sir William Musgrave, were four lines written by Valerius with his toes.

Mr. Bindley, for upwards of forty years a commissioner of the Stamp Office, was one of the greatest collectors of portraits of his time; and, among other rare articles, possessed Valerius's book complete, with lines round the portrait written by himself, in the same manner as that of Sir William Musgrave.

Valerius wrote but very indifferently compared with Mat-



JOHN VALERIUS.  
*Born without Hands & Arms.*



thew Buchinger, whose performances in writing and drawing were truly astonishing.\*

In the place of an arm, where the shoulder usually projects, in the body of Valerius appears the figure of a perfect thumb ; and his chest, unlike most others of his sex and nature, exhibits the appearance of the breast of a female. His face is, likewise, remarkably feminine.

The very rare book of Valerius's postures contains sixteen prints : the first of which is his portrait, dated London, March 20, 1698. The second plate represents Valerius beating a drum, with an inscription in Dutch, implying that whoever sees him perform this feat will be struck with astonishment and wonder.

### PLATE III.

*Playing at Cards and Dice.*

"In the act of managing the cards and dice, he does not yield in dexterity to those who play with their hands."

### PLATE IV.

*Shaving himself.*

"No man who has the use of his hands would ever think of the expedient of doing this office with his toes."

### PLATE V.

*Standing erect on his left leg, holding a rapier between his great and second toe.*

"In the science and art of defence, he manages his weapon with as much skill, adroitness, and strength as his adversary."

### PLATE VI.

*Standing on his left leg, balancing a chair with his right.*

"The ease and power with which he elevates and supports the chair in the position he places it, is beyond what many could do with the use of their arms and hands."

\* *Vide antea* p. 79.

## PLATE VII.

*Balancing himself on a pedestal, and taking up dice with his mouth.*

"By the support of one foot, with the toes of the other, he takes up various dice, and by the assistance of his teeth he builds a little square tower three stories in height."

## PLATE VIII.

*Lying at full length, with his head on the ground, and recovering himself by the support of his left leg.*

"The flexibility of his joints enabled him to place himself in most extraordinary positions, and his strength was sufficient to recover any posture at pleasure."

## PLATE IX.

*Lying on his back, taking up a glass of liquor, and conveying it with his toes to his head.*

"In addition to his powers in balancing his body, it was truly wonderful to witness the ease and dexterity with which he took a glass, filled to the brim with wine, and conducted it with his toes to the top of his head, balancing the same without spilling a drop."

## PLATE X.

*Balancing a glass of liquor on his forehead.*

"This feat he performed in a way similar to the former, with the exception of his lying extended at full length on a table, depending for support by the left leg."

## PLATE XI.

*Standing on a stool, taking a glass of liquor from the ground with his mouth.*

"Elevated near two feet from the floor, on a stool, with the greatest ease he bends his body and catches the glass between his teeth, drinks the liquor, and turns the glass up-side-down."

## PLATE XII.

*Seated on a stool, with both feet he conducts a glass of liquor to the top of his head.*

"The amazing pliability of his joints rendered it a matter of the greatest ease to Valerius to do all the offices of the hands with his feet, and he could move them in every direction with the utmost facility."

## PLATE XIII.

*Seated on a stool and writing with his toes.*

"However niggardly nature had been in bounty to Valerius, she made an ample compensation in endowing him with most extraordinary powers and command with his feet, which he could, with the greatest agility, turn to all the purposes of the hands."

## PLATE XIV.

*Seated on a stool, he takes a pistol and discharges it with his right toes.*

"Long habit had brought the soles of this man's feet into the same use as the palm of the hand; he could expand or contract them at pleasure; and, if he could not handle, he could foot a pistol with anyone."

## PLATE XV.

*Seated on a low stool, he takes up a musket, and assisted by both feet discharges it.*

"The weight and length of a musket must have made this one of Valerius's most difficult performances: yet, from the apparent ease with which he managed it, it seemed to the spectators to be equally of the same familiar use with the rest."

## PLATE XVI.

*Standing on the left leg, taking up his hat from the ground with his right foot.*

"It was Valerius's general mode when his visitors took leave

of him, to take up his hat ; which, after placing on his head, he took off in a most graceful manner, and bowed thanks for the honour their visit conferred on him."

IN the early years of the present century a MISS BIFFIN, who laboured under the same misfortune as Valerius, was to be seen annually at Bartholomew and other fairs around the metropolis. She worked with her toes neatly at her needle, and was very ingenious in designing and cutting out patterns in paper.

Miss Biffin was a person really capable of showing talent as a miniature painter, without hands or arms. She was found in Bartholomew Fair and assisted by the Earl of Morton, who sat for his likeness to her, always taking the unfinished picture away with him when he left, that he might prove it to be all the work of her own shoulder. When it was done he laid it before George III., in the year 1808 ; obtained the king's favour for Miss Biffin, and caused her to receive, at his own expense, further instruction in her art from Mr. Craig. For the last twenty years of his life he maintained a correspondence with her, and after having enjoyed favour from two of the Georges, she received from William IV. a small pension, with which, at the Earl's request, she retired from a life among caravans. But fourteen years later, having been married in the interval, she found it necessary to resume, as *Mrs. Wright*, her business as a skilful miniature painter in one or two of our chief provincial towns.

There was also a Biffin of the nursery—a certain MASTER VINE, whose peculiar merit it was to draw landscapes in pencil with the shrunken misformed stump that represented hand and arm.

A still more extraordinary person than either Valerius or Miss Biffin, was WILLIAM KINGSTON, who was born without arms or hands, and resided at Ditcheat, near Bristol, an account of whom is extracted from a letter sent to John Wesley, by a person named Walton, dated Bristol, October 14, 1788.

"I went with a friend to visit this man, who highly entertained us at breakfast, by putting his half-naked foot upon the

table as he sat, and carrying his tea and toast between his great and second toe to his mouth, with as much facility as if his foot had been a hand and his toe fingers. I put half a sheet of paper upon the floor, with a pen and ink-horn: he threw off his shoes as he sat, took the ink-horn in the toes of his left foot, and held the pen in those of his right. He then wrote three lines, as well as most ordinary writers, and as swiftly.

“He writes out all his own bills and other accounts. He then shewed how he shaves himself with a razor in his toes, and how he combs his own hair. He can dress and undress himself, except buttoning his clothes. He feeds himself, and can bring both his meat and his broth to his mouth by holding the fork or spoon in his toes. He cleans his own shoes; can clean the knives, light the fire, and do almost every other domestic business as well as any other man. He can make his hen-coops. He is a farmer by occupation; he can milk his own cows with his toes, and cut his own hay, bind it up in bundles, and carry it about the field for his cattle. Last winter he had eight heifers constantly to fodder. The last summer he made all his own hay ricks. He can do all the business of the hay-field (except mowing), as fast and as well, with only his feet, as others can with rakes and forks. He goes to the field and catches his horse; he saddles and bridles him with his feet and toes. If he has a sheep among his flock that ails, he can separate it from the rest, drive it into a corner, and catch it when nobody else can. He then examines it, and applies a remedy to it. He is so strong in his teeth that he can lift ten pecks of beans with them. He can throw a great sledge-hammer as far with his feet as other men can with their hands. In a word, he can nearly do as much without, as others can with their arms.”