

THE TRIAL OF JAMES THOMPSON CALLENDER FOR SEDITIOUS LIBEL, RICHMOND, VIRGINIA, 1800.

THE NARRATIVE.

This was the last of the great trials under the Federal Sedition Act,^a and the most celebrated. The libel was directed against the President of the United States, and the tempest which the trial excited, says Dr. Wharton, can now hardly be understood. Virginia had joined Kentucky in declaring the law void within her borders, as a menace to the freedom of the press, and a breach of the liberties guaranteed by the Constitution. There was no popular sympathy for Callender,^b who was a brilliant, drunken, unscrupu-

^a See Trial of Matthew Lyon, 6 Am. St. Tr., 687.

Trial of Anthony Haswell, 6 Am. St. Tr., 695.

Trial of Thomas Cooper, *ante*, p. 774.

^b "JAMES THOMPSON CALLENDER was a Scotchman of whom nothing good is known. He had the pen of a ready writer and the brazen forehead of a knave. In Scotland he wrote a pamphlet which he called 'The Political Progress of Great Britain,' was driven from the country, fled to the United States, where, like Freneau, like Duane, like John Wood, like every man, who, for a few shillings, would laud France and slander the administration, he was taken up and helped by Jefferson. He became, in short, what might be called a Jeffersonian hack. His business was to gather all the political scandal, all the foul abuse, all the libels, all the mean lies that circulated through the press, to distort Congressional speeches, to misinterpret good acts, to attribute false motives, to digest the scurrility of the *Aurora*, of the *Argus*, of the *Independent Chronicle*, and once a year send out the whole mass in the form of a book." McMaster, Vol. 2, p. 468. "Callender belonged to a class of men long common in England, but till he arrived little known in the United States. He was a fine specimen of a Grub-street hack. As destitute of principle as of money, his talents, which were not despicable, were ever up for sale. The question with him was never what he wrote, but what he was to be