



BRIEF MEMOIR

OF THE

REV. ISAAC AMBROSE, B. A.

THE subject of this Memoir, a native of Lancashire, was a descendant of an ancient and respectable family of Ambrose Hall in that County. His father was a clergyman; but of his personal history little is known. His situation in life, however, enabled him to favour his son with a liberal education, every way suited for the ministerial functions which he was trained up to discharge.

Having obtained a competent degree of learning from local seminaries, Isaac was sent to the University of Oxford, and in 1621 was admitted into Brazen Nose College, where he took a degree of Bachelor of Arts.

In Mr. Rees' Cyclopaedia it is asserted, "that in 1641 he left the Established Church, joined the Presbyterian Party, took the covenant, and preached first at Garstang, and afterwards at Preston, in his native county; and that his zeal against the established Clergy, recommended him to the office of assistant to the commissioners, for ejecting such as were called scandalous and ignorant ministers, and schoolmasters."

Of these particulars, which, although they compliment his piety and zeal, indirectly charge him with being influenced by the fanatical spirit of the times, Dr. Calamy, in his account of the Ejected Ministers, takes no notice, with the exception of his preaching at the two places above mentioned; but even of these, the order is inverted. In the Nonconformist Memorial, we are informed, that he was for some time minister of Preston, that from thence he removed to Garstang, where the act of Uniformity found him in 1662.

It appears, that soon after the Restoration of Charles II. when the clouds began to gather round the Church, which led to the tempest, from the awful effects of which she has not yet recovered, a meeting was held at Bolton by about twenty ministers, of which number Mr. Ambrose was one, to consult what course they should take in the present alarming crisis. At this meeting Mr. Ambrose and Mr. Cole of Preston declared, in the presence of their brethren, that they would read the Common

Prayer, and should do it, the state of their respective places requiring it; and that otherwise their services among their congregation would necessarily be at an end. The ministers present, considering the circumstances of their case, approved of this decision. But Mr. Cole, afterwards Dr. Cole, declaring that he could not thus far comply, was turned out from Preston. He, however, found some stronger motive in Essex than operated in Preston, since he finally conformed, and became a lecturer at Dedham in that county.

With respect to Mr. Ambrose, notwithstanding the preceding declaration, it is well known that he lived and died a Nonconformist; but of the particular circumstances which led to the steps in which his character became decided, we have no account. We are, however, in possession of facts that are of much more importance; namely, that he was a man of substantial worth, of eminent piety, and that, for his exemplary life, he was highly respected both as a private Christian, and an approved minister of God. It is to be lamented, that his contemporaries had not collected and preserved a narrative of the various incidents which marked his life, of his unwearied assiduity in composing his various publications, of his manner of living, of his family, and associates, and of the superintending providence of God over him, when for conscience sake he abandoned his prospects of aggrandisement, and even surrendered his livelihood.

In his manner of life, there is one particular circumstance that deserves to be recorded. It was his custom, once in every year, to withdraw from all human society for about a month, which time he spent in a small hut that was erected in a wood not far from his dwelling, giving himself up to meditation, prayer, and divine contemplation. Much of this spirit, which may be supposed to be cherished by a holy man in solitude, appears in his writings; and no doubt, by this means he became better qualified for the discharge of his ministerial duties throughout the rest of the year.

The latter part of his life was spent at Preston, in warning and exhorting those around him, to make preparation for their approaching dissolution, enforcing, by his pious example, the precepts which he taught. As his end drew near, he appears to have had a strong presentiment of the solemn event. Though in perfect health, on paying a visit to his distant friends, he took his leave of them under a serious conviction that he should see them no more; and on his returning to his home, he proceeded to set every thing in order against the termination of his mortal career.

The intelligence of this awful presentiment reaching his absent friends, many, particularly from among his hearers at Garstang, came to visit him. These he received with his usual cheerfulness; and after giving them pious counsel, and conversing

freely on the things of God, he informed them that he was now ready to depart whenever his Lord should think fit to summons him to appear before his face, as he had finished all that he ever intended to write, and on the preceding evening had sent away his Discourse concerning Angels to the press. When his friends were about to take their leave, he accompanied them to the door, and waited until they had mounted their horses; and having taken his leave, he came back, shutting himself in his parlour, the place of his soliloquy, meditation, and prayer. Being thought to tarry longer than usual, the door was opened, and he was found just expiring. The state in which he was discovered rendered all assistance unavailing, his mortal course being brought to an end. This took place in the year 1664, in the 72d year of his age.

His character may be comprised in a few expressions:—He was holy in life, happy in his death, honoured of God, and held in high estimation by all good men.

His works, which are numerous, are still read with much respect and profit, and no doubt they will long continue in request, among the pious of all denominations. Of these works the following are the titles: *Prima, Media, et Ultima*; or Regeneration, Sanctification, and Meditations on Man's Misery and God's Mercy.—Looking unto Jesus.—War with devils.—Ministration of, and communion with, Angels, &c.—These works, though they had previously appeared, were all collected and printed together in folio in the year 1689. Since that time several of them have repeatedly been published in various forms, and in some few instances, from the liberty which has been taken with them, they have been made to speak a language which their author never intended. To this edition, these charges cannot apply.

On the amiable spirit which these writings breathe, the important doctrines which they inculcate, and the practical godliness which they invariably enforce, but one opinion can be entertained. Like the writings of Baxter, they have a vigorous pulse beating in every page; and it will be difficult to select a paragraph in which the author does not appear in earnest for the salvation of his readers. It is this sacred principle, rather than the learning (though even of this they are by no means destitute) which they display, that has brought them downward on the stream of time to the present hour; while many that could boast of more splendid diction and outward decorations, have sunk to rise no more.

In his treatise on Communion with Angels, he has collected together a mass of evidence in favour of his positions, much stronger than might have been expected. His conclusions he has also attempted to fortify by making an appeal to recorded incidents. Many of these, however, being taken from the dark

ages, and others being of doubtful authority, it is very probable, that in the eyes of several judicious readers, he will appear to have injured the cause he intended to promote. This work displays strong powers of mind, an acuteness of investigation, and much learning; but notwithstanding its numerous excellencies, it must be acknowledged, that fancy appears predominant in many parts; and, in its wild exuberances, attributes to supernatural agency, various phenomena which might be traced to natural causes. Many of the incidents which he has recorded are of a very remarkable character, but by no means improbable. But there are others which are of such a nature, as to stagger even credulity itself.

These blemishes are however, of little moment, when compared with the life and power that he has infused into the various subjects of which he treats. These are so strong and so influential, that the most insensible can scarcely read without catching something of his pious spirit, and admiring that devotional feeling which animates every sentence.

Mr. Ambrose was one of those excellent divines, by which the turbulent age in which he lived was distinguished. These, in their combined effulgence, irradiated the gloom of moral darkness which then prevailed, and it is to their indefatigable exertions that we are indebted for many blessings which we now enjoy. He was a star of no common magnitude, in that bright constellation of worthies, who have enriched the world by their writings, and bequeathed their example to posterity.