

GEORGE SWINNOCK, M.A.

A VERY brief space will suffice to give the reader all the information that we have been able to procure respecting the life of the author of these works.

George Swinnock was born at Maidstone in the year 1627. We learn some particulars respecting his family from the dedication of one of his works. The treatise called "The Fading of the Flesh" was originally a funeral sermon preached on occasion of the death of Mr Caleb Swinnock. To it is prefixed a twofold dedication; one to the widow of Caleb Swinnock, the other to the Mayor, &c., of Maidstone. Mrs Caleb Swinnock he addresses as his "Honoured Cousin." Now, of course, we know that this term was used with great latitude, but we think it probable that Caleb was his cousin-german. In the dedication to the Mayor and corporation of Maidstone, he says,—“The occasion of it, as is well known to you, was the death of your neighbour, and my dear relation, Master Caleb Swinnock, who was interred May 21, 1662, whose father and grandfather had three or four times enjoyed the highest honour, and exercised the highest office, in your corporation.” Now if, as we suppose, Caleb was the full cousin of George, Caleb's father must have been George's uncle, and Caleb's grandfather must have been George's grandfather. If then his grandfather and his uncle were three or four times chosen to the Mayoralty of Maidstone, the family must have been one of good standing in the place.

From one of these dedications we learn further, that George was brought up for some time in the house of Robert, the father of Caleb; and from this it is perhaps admissible to conjecture that he lost his own father at an early age, and was adopted by his

uncle Robert. The passage containing the information from which we draw this inference gives us an interesting view of the arrangements of a Puritan household, and of the early training which our author received. It is as follows:—

“I had the happiness some time to be brought up with him in his father’s, Mr Robert Swinnock’s family; whose house—I cannot but speak it to the glory of God—had holiness to the Lord written upon it. His manner was to pray twice a day by himself, once or twice a day with his wife, and twice a day with his family, besides singing psalms, reading and expounding scriptures, which morning and evening were minded. The Sabbath he dedicated wholly to God’s service, and did not only himself, but took care that all within his gate should spend the day in secret and private duties, and in attendance on public ordinances. Of their proficiency by the last, he would take an account upon their return from the assembly. His house indeed was, as Tremellius saith of Cranmer’s, *Palæstra pietatis*, a school of religion.”

It is evidently from this passage that Wood derived his information respecting the early years of Swinnock. The prominent particulars of his after-life are sufficiently stated in Wood’s account, the greater part of which we transfer to our pages.

“George Swinnock was born in the ancient borough of Maidstone, in Kent, anno 1627; brought up religiously, when a child, in the family of Robert Swinnock, a most zealous Puritan of that town; educated in Cambridge, till he was Bachelor of Arts; went to Oxon to get preferment, in the latter end of 1647, at which time he entered himself a Commoner of Magdalen Hall. Soon after he became one of the Chaplains of New College, and, on the 6th day of October following, (1648,) he was made Fellow of Bal. College, by the authority of the visitors appointed by Parliament. In 1650 he became vicar of Rickmansworth, in Hertfordshire, and thereupon resigning his Fellowship, on the 24th of November the same year, took the degree of Master of Arts six days after. In 1660, or thereabouts, he was made vicar of Great Kemble, in Bucks, and in August 1662, being ejected for Nonconformity, he was received into the family of Richard Hampden, of Great Hampden, in the said county of Bucks, Esq., and continued with him for some time in the quality of a chaplain. At length, upon the issuing out of His Majesty’s declaration for liberty of conscience, in the latter end of

the year 1671, he retired to his native place, where he continued in preaching and praying among the godly till the time of his death. His works are these,

“What other things this Mr Swinnock (who was accounted an eminent preacher among those of his persuasion) hath written I know not, nor anything else of him, only that he died on the 10th day of November 1673, and was buried in the church of Maidstone before-mentioned. In that most virulent and diabolical pamphlet called *Mirabilis Annus Secundus*, is a story of one Mr Swinnock, a minister in St Martin’s Lane, near Canon Street, in London, sometime chaplain to one of the Sheriffs of that city, who, for his conformity to the Church of England, and for wearing a surplice, which he began to do on the 21st of September 1662, (after he had often said among the brethren he would rather burn than conform, &c., as the author of the said *Mirabilis Annus Secundus* saith), it pleased the Lord (as he further adds) to strike him with sickness, which proved a violent burning fever, whereof, within a few days after, before another Lord’s day came about, he died, &c. Who this Mr Swinnock was I cannot tell; neither doth the author set down his Christian name, otherwise we might have said something more of him—something to the disproof of that most vile author.”

This account of our Swinnock is less tainted with bitterness than are most of Antony’s notices of distinguished Puritans; but his characteristic *animus* is displayed in the gratuitous introduction of the other Swinnock, with whom he had nothing whatever to do, inasmuch as he had no ground for supposing that he was an Oxonian, or rather, he had the certainty that he was not an Oxonian. It is very much as if he had said: Well, I have nothing very particular to say against George Swinnock; but there is another Swinnock about whom a certain story is told. It will be noticed he had no suspicion that that Swinnock was the man of whom he was writing, for he knew quite well that he was never a minister in London. It would be rather hard if any particular member of the family, say, of the *Smiths*, were to be held guilty of all the misdeeds ever committed by all who have borne that not unfrequent name! It is amusing also to notice the logic of his assumption. If he only knew something of the matter, he would certainly be able to “disprove that most vile author.”

The account of Swinnock contained in the "Nonconformist's Memorial" is very brief. It is as follows:—

"Great Kymble, [V.] £23. George Swinnock, M.A., born at Maidstone in Kent. He was first at Cambridge, and removed to Oxford, where he was chosen Fellow of Baliol Col. After his ordination he was vicar of Rickmansworth, Herts; and then of Great Kymble, where he was ejected for Nonconformity in 1662; upon which he became chaplain to R. Hampden, Esq. of Great Hampden. Upon the Indulgence in 1672, he removed to Maidstone, where he became pastor of a considerable congregation. He died Nov. 10, 1673. He was a man of good abilities, and a serious, warm, and practical useful preacher.

"WORKS.—The Door of Salvation opened by the Key of Regeneration. The Christian Man's Calling. Heaven and Hell Epitomized. The Beauty of Magistrates. Treatise on the Incomparableness of God in His Being, Attributes, &c. The Sinner's last Sentence. The Life of Mr J. Wilson. Several occasional Sermons."

It will be noticed that we have not inserted the life of Mr Wilson amongst Swinnock's works. It would have been scarcely in keeping with the character of this series to have included a merely biographical work.

As to the merits of Swinnock as an author, we beg to subjoin the estimate of the late Dr James Hamilton of London, with which we substantially agree:—

"George Swinnock was a native of Maidstone in Kent, and for some time was a fellow of Baliol College, Oxford. His first charge was Rickmansworth in Hertfordshire, but at the time of his ejection from the Church of England, he had been translated to Great Kymble, in Bucks. For nine years thereafter, he was chaplain to the great protector of Nonconformity in Buckinghamshire, Richard Hampden; but availing himself of the indulgence in 1671, he removed to his native town, Maidstone, and became pastor of a considerable congregation there, and died Nov. 10, 1673.

"Except to a few collectors, the writings of Swinnock are almost unknown; but we confess that we have rejoiced in them as those that find great spoil. So pithy and pungent, and so practical, few books are more fitted to keep the attention awake, and few so richly reward it. No doubt there are a good many far-fetched similes,

and not a little apocryphal science; but these are what we look for in that period of our literature, and they are abundantly over-balanced by a rare amount of sanctified wit and wisdom.

“For instance, to show that ‘the lack of fervency is the loss of many prayers,’ he subjoins—‘The lazy petition is eaten up by wandering thoughts, like cold honey by wasps and flies; whilst fervent prayers, like honey boiling over the fire, are free from such ill guests.’ Again, to illustrate the same idea, ‘There is no getting to the Indian Mines by the cold northern seas; though, because it is a shorter cut, some have attempted that way, and lost their labour.’ Amongst many other curiosities of natural history, he tells us—on the authority of Pliny, however—that ‘when one bee is sick, the rest in the hive are all sad;’ and he mentions that horse-hairs, by lying nine days under water, turn to snakes. In our own boyhood we remember a species of gordius, common in still water, which the country people believed to be an animated horse-hair. But some of his inferences are so ingenious, that we must not quarrel with the fact on which they are founded. Thus: ‘There is a story of a bastard eagle, which hath one foot close like a goose, with which she swims in the waters, and dives for fish; and another foot open, and armed with talons, with which she soareth in the air, and seizeth her prey; but she, participating of both natures, is weak in either, and at last becomes a prey to every ordinary vulture. The *ambidexter* in religion, who is both for the flesh and the spirit, for riches and righteousness, is all his time a servant of sin, and will at last become a prey to Satan.’ Again: ‘As the carbuncle, a beast among the blackamoors, which is seen only by night, having a stone in his forehead, which shineth incredibly and giveth him light whereby to feed, but when he heareth the least noise, he presently lets fall over it a skin which he hath as a natural covering, lest its splendour should betray him; so the half-Christian shines with the light of holiness by fits and starts—every fright makes him hold in and hide it.’”

With reference to his erroneous views on some points in natural history, we would notice that he does not generally seem to us to believe them himself, but to use them simply as illustrations, as many writers among ourselves would have to scruple in deriving an illustration from the fable of the phœnix.

To our thinking, the greatest defect in his works is a certain want of concentration. There are many chapters in some of his

treatises which are very admirable in themselves, but which do not seem to have any special right to the places which they occupy. They look somewhat as if he had had them by him, and thought them too good to be lost. In this we quite agree, but would rather have had them as separate treatises or fragments.

But despite slight blemishes, the writings of Swinnock are of a very high order. His principal work, "The Christian Man's Calling," is one of the fullest, and, we venture to think, one of the best exhibitions of the gospel in its application to the ordinary affairs of life. There are few better works of practical religion in our language. We commend the whole works to the prayerful and frequent perusal of Christian readers, and them to the grace and blessing of our God.

THOMAS HALL, B.D.

As about a third part of vol. iv. is by Mr Hall, we subjoin the account of him given in the "Nonconformist's Memorial":—

"Norton, Kings [C. or D.] Thomas Hall, B.D. Of Oxford, under Dr Lushington. Born at Worcester. He here succeeded his brother Mr John Hall, when he removed to Bromsgrove, and applied himself in earnest to do good to souls. His salary being small, he kept the free-school, and continued single. As God owned his labours in the place, he would not be persuaded to leave it, though solicited with a promise of far greater preferment. During the civil war he was often accused, cursed, threatened with death, plundered, and five times imprisoned. He constantly preached twice on the Lord's-day, and held lectures abroad, besides his exposition, catechising, private admonition, &c. He was a very hard student, and considerable scholar, a well-furnished divine, a man of a public spirit, and intent upon spreading knowledge. He gave many valuable books to the library at Birmingham, and persuaded his brethren to do the same. He prevailed with the parish to build a public library, and gave to it the books in his own study in his life-time. He was of a free and liberal heart; and when his property was gone, he lived by faith. In his last illness his stock was reduced to sixpence; but he was easy, and said it was enough: and so it proved, with providential additions; for before it was