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The Works Of Horatio Walpole, Earl of Orford

In Five Volumes

Walpole, Horace

London, 1798

Life of the Rev. Mr. Thomas Baker of St. John's College, Cambridge

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THE
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OF THE
REVEREND MR. THOMAS BAKER,
OF
ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE IN CAMBRIDGE.

Written in 1778.

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THE deep or extensive learning of a man of letters is but a barren field for biography. His notions are speculation; his adventures, enquiry. If his studies fermented or consolidated into compositions, the history of his life commonly proves but a register of the squabbles occasioned by his works, of the patrons he flattered, of the preferments he obtained or missed. The dates of his publications and their editions form the outlines of his story; and frequently the plans or projects of works he meditated are taken to aid the account; the day of his death is scrupulously ascertained:—and thus, to compose the life of a man who did very little, his biographer acquaints us with what he did not do, and when he ceased to do any thing.

Nor are authors such benefactors to the world, that the trifling incidents of their lives deserve to be recorded. The most shining of the class have not been the most useful members of the community. If Newton unravelled some arcana of nature, and exalted our ideas of the Divinity by the investigation of his works; what benefactions has Homer or Virgil conferred on mankind but a fund of harmonious amusement? Barren literati, who produce nothing, are innocent drones, whom the world has been so kind as to agree to respect for having entertained themselves gravely in the manner most agreeable to their taste. When they have devoured libraries, they are supposed to be prodigies of knowledge, though they are but walking or temporary dictionaries. Yet the republic of letters, confining its own honours to its own corporation, fondly decrees the distinction of biography to most of its active, and to some of its mute members.

Comprehensive as his studies were, his learning or his works were not my incentives to recording memorials of Mr. Thomas Baker. His publications were very few, and his long-protracted life was marked by as few events as

could well be sprinkled through so extended a space, and in a period so memorable for a revolution that left no man an uninterested spectator. Yet, though his abilities rescued his name from oblivion, and though he shone as a confessor for his principles; his singular modesty so little sought the double portion of fame he merited, that, though an accurate and indefatigable recorder of the actions of others, he seems to have humbly declined all care of registering any memoranda of his own story.

That modesty, and that unaffected courage of conscience, with other virtues, particularly one that seldom coalesces with martyrdom for conscience, I mean, impartiality—these were themes that I thought deserved to be transmitted to posterity; not only for the sake of the actor, but for the instruction and imitation of mankind. The example of a virtuous man resigning his fortune rather than violate his oath, preserving charity for his antagonists, and contracting neither virulence nor pride from his sufferings, was an instance too singular not to merit selection. One such action, executed with intrepidity yet without ostentation, could dignify a whole life; and ought to rank the sufferer with his more exalted companions in the same cause. If *they* sacrificed mitres to their integrity, *he* gave his *all*; and on the altar of conscience the firstling of a flock, we know, is as acceptable as a hecatomb of bulls.

Simplicity, the grace that flows from and most becomes good sense, and which naturally ought to accompany the pursuit of wisdom and the command of our passions, has in all ages been forgotten in the ceremonial of philosophers. In fact, their very pretensions exclude so humble an attribute. The Grecian sages announced their own claims: their apes, the moderns, have not relinquished any demands on any part of the succession. Hence the modest Mr. Baker, who was patient, humble, temperate; who sought neither fame nor riches; who was content with the poverty he embraced from duty; who searched after truth, rather than wisdom; never attained the title of *philosopher*: the inference whence is not unfair, that it is a title oftener assumed by the wearers than conferred. Mr. Baker was what his piety enjoined him to be, and what prohibits all assumption of merit—a christian philosopher.

Born with parts and industry, glowing with virtue, and fortified with resolution to adhere to the dictates of his judgment and conscience, the earliest blossom of his talents was dedicated to the same cause which the uniform
tenour

tenour of his life maintained. Smitten with the love of improving his mind, he waded early into science: yet, though he saw its beauties, he discerned its defects, and hastened to disclose the delusions of the syren, while he discovered that he had tasted of her most valuable favours. In the ardour of youth, and enamoured of knowledge, he anticipated experience; and his first production proclaimed what maturity of years alone inculcates into others, that all is vanity but religion. To lower learning and display it, has not been a rare effort of the love of paradox, which is the love of fame. Mr. Baker despised the dexterity of the former, nor aspired to the latter: he gave his book without his name. It was a tribute to his conviction, and a caution to the proud of knowledge. He meant not to check enquiry, but to point out its proper goal.

With the same affection to truth he could turn his mind from the enchanting worlds of investigation to the dry collection of little facts. With shining parts he could condescend to be an antiquary. From a companion of Newton he could stoop to associate with Antony Wood and Thomas Hearne. Gratitude, as well as situation, seems to have given this complexion to his studies. Attached to a society that rejected him from its bosom, and yet harboured him in its arms, he dedicated many days and hours to the history of St. John's college. Though a sincere protestant, the tender effusions of his gratitude made him almost a devotee of a female saint. The pious foundress, Margaret of Richmond, owes more to this Lutheran son than to all that have risen from her alms to episcopal thrones in either church—But I am anticipating his character, which will dart more conspicuously from his conduct. It was a star that seemed to occupy one only little point; but it was a fixed star; and when we examine it through the glass of truth, we find it magnified without exaggeration.

I have warned the reader that it has been with difficulty that any particulars of the life of this good man have been recovered. The highest quality he ever assumed himself was that of *socius ejectus*, which he sometimes subscribed. The industry of a * gentleman, who resembles Mr. Baker in his primitive simplicity and attachment to the university, has retrieved the few notices that I am able to impart—but genealogy and circumstances are but adventitious ornaments to a character that was simple, consistent and heroic. Yet Mr. Baker,

* The Rev. Mr. William Cole, formerly of Clare-hall and King's college, and now rector of Burnham in Buckinghamshire.

though

though he voluntarily descended to poverty, did not spring from necessitous or ignoble parents. It was not returning to his natural condition, when he abandoned the good things of this world. Sordid natures are more capable of reverting to a mean state, than men of gentle birth of embracing the deprivation of comforts. His continuance among those who stripped him of enjoyments was the noblest emanation of a mind incapable of envy or resentment. He quitted what he proved he loved, by remaining on a foil that no longer yielded him any thing but a stone for his pillow.

Thomas Baker, a younger son of sir George Baker of Crooke-hall * Lancaster in the county of Durham, was born September 14, 1656. With his elder brother George he was admitted pensioner of St. John's college in Cambridge June 13, 1674; and Thomas was received as scholar of the same college in November 1676; and as perpetual fellow of the same society in March 1680. In the books of the college is mention of a Thomas Baker as elected librarian in 1699, and Hebrew reader in 1700: but as our Mr. Thomas Baker was then fellow only by connivance, and was actually deprived of his fellowship in 1717; the gentleman who communicated this intelligence reasonably concludes that the society did not heap additional favours on one whom they only tolerated amongst them: and he confirms this conjecture by observing, that, on Mr. Baker's expulsion, he is styled senior Baker for distinction.

At what age Mr. Baker dedicated himself to the church, does not appear. That it was the profession he voluntarily embraced, cannot be doubted from the unvaried colour of his life and studies, and from his having adhered to a monastic life, when divested of the privilege of exercising his ministry. Born under a tempest of contending sects, his reason no sooner began to develop itself than he heard nothing but the conflict of the like warring elements. The jealousy of popery, that had alarmed the staunchest protestants under a devout king, blazed with reason under his profligate son, who was influenced by a brother, whose understanding he despised, in the point that most demands the exercise of one's own judgment. The controversy was managed, at least on the side of the church of England, with the highest abilities; yet when

* By his admission in the College register it appears that his father was then only an esquire, and I do not believe he was afterwards knighted. The name of the place is Lancheester, and it is so spelt in the will.

Mr. Baker consecrated his services to that church, though it was the predominant, it neither enjoyed the partiality of the crown, nor promised a life of ease and tranquillity, at least to one who fathomed every duty, nor dispensed with himself in the performance of the most difficult. This is not mere conjecture, nor drawn from the tenor of his delicate conscience. Mr. Baker early and boldly bore testimony to his religious sentiments. Here are the proofs:

In the library of St. John's college is a collection of the London gazettes. That of July 5, 1688, contains those emanations of loyalty that attend *all* princes in possession (and had not been wanting to Richard Cromwell), and an account of the rejoicings made on the birth of king James's supposed son, in particular of those celebrated at Durham, under the auspices of bishop Crewe, to whom Mr. Baker seems to have been chaplain. On the margin of that gazette Mr. Baker has written these words: "This account was drawn up by the bishop, as his secretary Mr. Peters told me. I was present at the solemnity. If I did not rejoice as I ought, pardon me, O God, that sin!"

What delicacy of conscience! The good man trembled for his religion, yet doubted whether the Omnipotent did not expect that he should exult in whatever good luck befell his vicegerent—But, of what religion were they who invented such principles? If the Ruler of the universe visits a sinful world with pestilence, can he require us to rejoice at the calamity? In other words, can Almighty Wisdom exact our feeling contradictory sensations? Though a pious person says he rejoices, does he rejoice? Such doctors enjoin lip-worship, as if the All-seeing could be imposed on by a formulary of words. This is absurd casuistry, devised by bigots, and recommended by knaves. Nor could Mr. Baker's good sense have swallowed such nonsense, if the tenderness of his piety had not been alarmed by what he had been told was his duty. He thought it safer to trust to his conscience than his judgment. Nor had passive obedience ever a sincerer victim, or did good sense ever lose a worthier son misled by authority. Bishop Crewe proved less sincere, or less firm.

In the same gazette is an account from Whitehall of July 6, of the removal of the Judges, (a clear indication that the king was acting against law) and of the alteration of those appointed to hold the summer assizes on the northern circuit. There too Mr. Baker has attested his own conduct, with the same

dubitation whether he had not transgressed his duty in obeying the dictates of his conscience. It is still more remarkable, that he wept his want of devotion to his worldly master *after* king James was divested of power. There can be no doubt but such contrition would not have been felt, if king James had been successful. Mr. Baker's scruples never led him to sacrifice his religion to his prince, while in possession. Had James triumphed, we may justly conclude that Mr. Baker would have laid down his life for his faith. The relinquishment of fortune is nearer to the stake, than to a time-serving compliance. It was generous to bewail his own want of blind zeal for an unfortunate prince. He would have seen James's folly in its true light, if reduced to the option of emolument or the cross. The death of Charles I. has won him many hearts, that would have abhorred his tyranny if it had been successful.

"At Durham," says Mr. Baker, "I preached before the judges (three of the ecclesiastical commissioners being then present). I could easily observe the sermon gave offence (and indeed justly); and yet it passed without censure. I have since burnt it, as I did the rest."

Here good nature pauses to lament those confessors who resisted king James, and thought it their duty to become victims to their oaths. Indignation takes their part, and condemns oaths that are not mutual, and that are supposed to bind but one side. What foundation can there be for subjects devoting themselves to their prince, if he is bound by no reciprocal ties? If they are his chattels, his herd, his property, oaths are frivolous. He has power to punish them if they revolt, whether they are sworn to him or not. To swear to a king, without reciprocity from him, is subjecting our souls to him as well as our bodies. We are to be damned to all eternity if he makes his tyranny intolerable. Proclaim him God at once. God alone can be trusted with power over our minds: God alone can judge how much we can endure. Shall one of ourselves be emperor of the mind?—No, said Mr. Baker—yet repented that he had said so!—And we must admire the beauty of that integrity, which, instead of recurring to the refinements of casuistry to discover a salvo that would console it, bowed to arguments against itself, and distrusted its own reason more than its scruples.

A contest so nice ought to make us, who stand at a distance, view the combatants with impartiality. Sancroft, who preferred his oath to his mitre, and Tillotson,

Tillotson, who, in accepting it, adhered to the principles that he had avowed when persecution, not emolument, was the probable consequence of his resistance, deserve to be esteemed honest men. James, who had violated his coronation oath, and yet expected that the ministers of religion should prefer their oaths to their religion, was guilty, if either Sancroft or Tillotson was in the wrong. The chief magistrate of any country, who is a rock of offence to the consciences of his subjects, deserves no commiseration. The profusion of advantages that are showered on kings to enforce the authority of magistracy, and to reward them for their superintendency of the whole community, enhances their guilt when they set an example of trampling on the laws which it is both their duty and their interest to preserve inviolate—and none but womanish minds will pity them, when they provoke their subjects to throw off allegiance, and incur the penalty of their crimes. The blindest bigot to the memory of Charles I. or James II. cannot deny, that both were the original aggressors. Had they both acted conformably to the constitution and laws, no man living can think that any part of the nation would have revolted. Did not ship-money and disuse of parliaments precede the rebellion, or were the causes of it? Did not James in the dawn of his reign hoist the banner of popery? Had not Sancroft and the six bishops been imprisoned for withstanding the dispensing power? If Sancroft was a sincere protestant, could he believe that his oath bound him to an idolatrous king, who had perjured himself by promoting idolatry? Might not Tillotson think that the king's perjury absolved his subjects from their oaths? Sancroft, I verily believe, was so weak as to be of the contrary opinion. He was deluded by the conduct of the primitive Christians, who submitted to the higher powers—But how wide was the difference! The pagan emperors of Rome had never sworn to maintain pure christianity—and the early Christians themselves (if not the first, who had no opportunity of resistance) were not very passive, as soon as their numbers enabled them to use temporal weapons for the defence of their religion. Mr. Baker, of a more enlightened understanding than Sancroft's, yet acted the same disinterested part. But what severe reflections does the purity of their conduct call forth on a set of men who in the same cause acted and have acted the counterpart to those confessors!—I mean those Jacobites, who did take the oaths to king William and the succeeding princes down to the present reign, and yet constantly promoted the interests of a family they had so solemnly abjured! Let their conduct be tried by the

standard of their own Sancroft, and let us hear by what casuistry they will be absolved from guilt and contempt!

The three ecclesiastic commissioners alluded to by Mr. Baker in his preceding note, were, probably, Crewe, bishop of Durham, and two of the new judges.

Those commissioners ordered an account to be returned to them of the names of all such of the clergy as refused to read his Majesty's Declaration of April 7, for liberty of conscience.

On the margin of the Gazette for August 23, 1688, Mr. Baker has written this note: "I was ordered by the bishop of Durham [a commissioner] to attend the archdeacon, Dr. Granville, for the execution of this order; which I readily did, knowing it to be enjoined me as a penance for my former disobedience, having refused to read the Declaration in his chapel, and forbid my curate to read it at my living*. The good man's answer was, that he would obey the king and the bishop, and the first man he returned should be the archdeacon, his curates not having read it in his absence; but had he been present, he would have read it himself. Not long after he and I were both of us deprived for disobedience of another kind, and the commanding bishop saved himself by his usual compliance."

Here Mr. Baker's understanding and conscience appear in their full lustre. He saw it was not his duty to obey the king against his religion. He disobeyed. Yet when James had deservedly lost his crown, Mr. Baker sacrificed his fortune rather than take an oath to another. Dr. Denis Granville, dean and archdeacon of Durham, acted the same part, though with less merit, having been ready to humour the king in his injunctions. His bishopric was the religion of bishop Crewe, and he was ready for the toleration of popery or for suppression of it, according to the humour of the king on the throne. But when bishops sit so loose to both religions, one may be very sure they are not sincere in either, but would be Mahometans if the archiepiscopal

* This shows that Mr. Baker lost a living as well as his fellowship; and it appears from his will that it was the parish of Long-Newton the bishopric of Durham.

mitre were turned into a turban. They have not been so pliable towards any reformed church of Christians who do not admit of an opulent clergy. The whole tenour and spirit of the gospel inculcate poverty, charity, and self-denial. It is not so easy to prove from the New Testament that archbishoprics and bishoprics, in the modern sense, are of divine institution. St. Peter and St. Paul would have stared at being saluted by the titles of your grace and your lordship; and on what text are founded deaneries, prebends, chapters, and ecclesiastical courts, those popish excrescencies of a simple religion, we are yet to seek. Translations from one see to another are no doubt authorized by the same chapter of one of the four evangelists, though I know not of which, wherein prelates are enjoined to vote always with the prime minister for the time being; as the Swiss fight for the prince, whatever his religion is, who takes them into his pay.

These notes on the gazette that I have cited, and the firmness of his subsequent conduct, prove that Mr. Baker was prepared to meet every storm that could fall on him in the cause of his religion. It was the stamp of a mind still more disinterested, that he was not equally ready to triumph with his religion, when it was victorious. He had not foreseen the fall of the tyrant, nor had considered royalty on the great scale of the interests of the public, and as an office only held by the possessor for the benefit of the people. The sufferings of Charles I. whose crimes were not of the magnitude of his son's, had raised a spirit of enthusiasm in his partisans, and conjured up in their minds a profane idolatry of kings, that was inconsistent both with true religion and common sense; and had been extended even to genealogic succession—as if being born of a certain race could entitle any family to a right of violating with impunity all laws, both divine and human. Mr. Baker had unhappily imbibed those prejudices; but, as his virtue corrected the errors of his understanding, himself was the only person whom he attempted to sacrifice to his mistaken loyalty. He was never suspected of caballing against the new established government; and, while his own order and both universities, Oxford in particular, swarmed with factious priests, and engendered some whose zeal dipped them even in plots of assassination against the deliverer of the protestant religion, the meek Mr. Baker was content with the cross he had embraced, and never profaned his piety by rebellious intrigues. He even lived in charity, in communion, in friendship with churchmen of the most opposite principles. He assisted the studies and publications of archbishop Wake and bishop Kennet :
and

and while turbulent incendiaries and Jacobite priests, who had taken the oaths to king William, poured deluges of filth and malevolence on the head of bishop Burnet, for having, like an honest man, ventured his life in the cause of his religion, and for having (his greatest crime) recorded the crimes of the Stuarts and their ministers and creatures, Mr. Baker did justice to the character of the man, and contributed to his History of the reformation of that church to which they both adhered, and which other protestant divines have endeavoured to subject again to a Roman catholic sovereign. Mr. Baker's conduct is the most severe answer to all such libellers and renegades.

That prejudice and obstinacy were not the sole arbiters of this good man's conscience, appeared from his being disposed to take the oaths to the new government, as soon as his old master king James was no more; whose tampering, in concert with that other royal saint, Louis XIV. in the assassination-plot, and from which their memories will never be washed *, had shaken the allegiance of many of his warmest devotees. But the imposition of an oath of abjuration dispelled all thoughts in Mr. Baker of conformity: perhaps not from mere tenderness. He was too conscientious to take an oath to king William with any intention of transgressing it, like so many others, on a good

* The marshal duke of Berwick, son of king James, in his own Memoirs written by himself, has these words: "Pendant mon séjour à Londres, ayant été informé qu'il s'y tramait une conspiration contre la personne du prince d'Orange, je crus que, ma principale mission étant finie, je ne devois pas perdre le tems à regagner la France pour ne point me trouver confondu avec les conjurés, dont le dessein me paroissoit difficile à exécuter." Vol. i. p. 145. Not a word of abhorrence of so atrocious a design; it was the difficulty of the execution that staggered the good duke, and made him consult his safety. In the next page he is still more explicit; he owns that, Louis and James being apprised of the conspiracy, James waited on the sea-coast for the event of the plot. It is true, the duke pretends that the conspirators aimed only at seizing king William: but the words *quelque événement* imply that any event of the conspiracy would not be unwelcome. It was proved that the

conspirators actually intended to shoot the king; and lord Portland remonstrated to Louis himself at Versailles against the appearance of the duke of Berwick there, as privy to the plot of assassination. Lord Portland tells king William so in his letters:—and who can doubt it, when he himself acknowledges so much? Had the conspirators been able to seize the person of William, would they have hesitated at murder if he or his guards had resisted? William had James in his power, and facilitated his escape from Rochester. A man who had the meanness to *see*, and triumph over, the duke of Monmouth, and then put him to death, would, no doubt, have been tender of William's life, if the conspirators had had so little zeal, after succeeding in carrying off the king, as not to have saved James the trouble of signing the warrant for his death! After owning the plot, it is folly to endeavour to palliate it, and as great folly to believe the palliation!

opportunity;

opportunity; but having fallen into such difficulties by his religious observance of the oath he had taken, he was probably averse to entangling himself in more snares. And since the experience of several reigns has demonstrated how little binding oaths are but to the most virtuous of mankind, it were to be wished that they were administered with great circumspection. The perjuries at the Custom-house, and in the case of elections, call for the abrogation of a sacrament that has lost all sanctity.

Mr. Baker retained his fellowship to the death of queen Anne, by the connivance of Dr. Jenkin the master, who at first had been himself a non-juror, but on taking the oaths had been elected head of the college. The accession of a new family of foreigners, who were not lineal heirs, and whose relation to the crown was too remote not to offend the prejudices of the vulgar, incited the vigilance of government to be strict in imposing the oath of fidelity. It was tendered to and refused by Mr. Baker. In his life in the *Biographia Britannica*, it is asserted, that he had hoped to continue to be screened by the master, and was offended at that indulgence being withdrawn; but the proof of that assertion is very inadequate to the inference. He wrote himself in the blank leaves of all the books he afterwards gave to the college *socius ejectus*. If, when a conscientious man sacrifices his fortune to his integrity, it is demanded that he should have no sense of the sacrifice; the demand would not only be absurd, but would destroy half the beauty of the action. What merit is there in conquering passions to which we are insensible? Is it not rather a contradiction in terms? How remote too is indignation and a lively sense of our loss, from patience? Or can any words convey less resentment than *socius ejectus*? No, I own, they strike as humble and resigned; and were I to search for an invidious interpretation, the utmost I could discover in the words *socius ejectus* would be a testimonial borne by the victim to his own virtuous deed. If, after all, Mr. Baker retained a lively sense of his deprivation, the long remainder of his days was a constant triumph over his anger; for he remained in the college, under the jurisdiction of the master who had expelled him, in charity with his late colleagues, and dedicated many of his hours to the illustration of the history of his college. His meek, modest, inoffensive behaviour never varied. Avarice, the preposterous passion that often increases with our decay, never stained Mr. Baker's simplicity. He had little, but thought it enough; and had the greatness of mind to decline offers of what would have been wealth in his circumstances.

It is indeed asserted in the new edition of the Biographia Britannica, that Mr. Prior ceded to Mr. Baker the profits of his fellowship after his expulsion. If he did, the generous act was worthy of so honest and amiable a man as Mr. Prior; and it is not to detract from the generosity of one whose soul glowed with friendship and good-nature, and whose poetry owed not one of its graceful and genteel beauties to asperity, that I am obliged, on the remarks of the gentleman to whom this tract is chiefly indebted, to doubt of the reality of the gift. Though Mr. Baker could have enjoyed the benefit of the cession but very few years, he being ejected in 1717, and Mr. Prior dying in 1721; the generosity was complete, Mr. Prior not being able to cede his fellowship but while he enjoyed it. But on the authority above mentioned, I must question the fact; not from the want of humanity in Mr. Prior, but from his own circumstances, which could ill allow him to be so munificent. Mr. Prior bequeathed books to the value of 200*l.* (together with the portraits of himself and the earl of Jersey) to St. John's college, in acknowledgment for having held the fellowship during his life. It is no proof, though perhaps a presumption, that he would not have been so sensible of the obligation, if he had ceded it to another; but in fact Mr. Prior's own fortune was so far from splendid, that he was little enabled to be a patron. He had had the intrinsic merit of having raised himself by his abilities from obscurity to shining eminence both in poetry and in the state—and yet there is no trace of his having been greedy of wealth. He left a very inconsiderable fortune, and at the very moment of Mr. Baker's sacrifice Mr. Prior's own friends were fallen into sudden disgrace, one of his patrons* was in the Tower, and the other in exile, and he himself under prosecution by parliament. It appears from his friend Dr. Swift, that Mr. Prior had prepared no pecuniary shelter against the storm. "Our friend Prior," says he, "not having had the vicissitude of human things before his eyes, is likely to end his days in as forlorn a state as any other poet has done before him, if his friends do not take more care of him than he did of himself." Swift's Letters from 1703 to 1740, published by Dr. Hawksworth in 1766, in 3 vols. octavo, p. 50. Accordingly the Dean, with Mr. Pope, Dr. Arbuthnot, and Mr. Gay, with a zeal that will for ever illustrate that friendly society of men of the first genius, who never suffered either jealousy or even party to interfere with their esteem for congenial merit, set on foot, promoted, and carried into execution a subscription for the publi-

* Robert Harley earl of Oxford.

cation of Mr. Prior's works.—Mr. Prior, with his other virtues, was a man of no ostentation; would he have accepted a subscription for himself, while sending an independent, though small, income to another? Yet the assertion is positive. It is not decent to contradict a gentleman of unimpeached character on what he affirms; yet it may be presumed, that, being a matter of tradition, at the distance of near sixty years the original reporter may have been mistaken.

There is still less foundation for believing what is asserted in a marginal note in the first edition of the *Biographia Britannica*, p. 3726, that bishop Burnet allowed Mr. Baker an annuity. That they had literary connections is well known, probably commenced by Mr. Baker's sending the prelate many corrections of his *History of the Reformation*, which his lordship mentions with great gratitude and esteem, in the introduction to his third volume, where he has also printed Mr. Baker's observations. But the terms employed by the bishop are far from implying either familiarity or patronage; and as that was his last publication, being dedicated to George I. and as Burnet died in March 1715, near two years before Mr. Baker lost his fellowship, it is not probable that the bishop would have selected a nonjuror for the object of his bounty, and less probable that Mr. Baker would have accepted it; he, who, when reduced to much narrower circumstances, would not stoop to accept emoluments from the head of the triumphant church. Having assisted archbishop Wake in his work on the state of the church, his grace offered to Mr. Baker the nomination of any friend he would recommend to a living of 200*l.* a year, since he could not accept it himself. This generous gratitude Mr. Baker declined, and desired that his grace's favour might be confined to a present of the book in question. Nor can it easily be believed, that a man who never boasted of the distinctions he received, would have been silent on obligations. Mr. Baker certainly did receive pecuniary presents from Edward Harley the second earl of Oxford, and it is said they were an annuity of 60*l.* a year. Mr. Baker ever gratefully acknowledged the patronage of the noble Mæcenas, to whose house at Wimpey he was always a welcome guest. More of their connection will appear, when we come to speak of the disposition of Mr. Baker's works.

Excluded from the church, in whose service he had intended to exert his activity and pious labours, he was reduced to the exercise of his private

virtues, and at liberty, if ever man was, to indulge his passion for study. It was the occupation of the rest of his life; and from the era of his deprivation there is no trace of events in his long course but such as were literary. I shall therefore confine what I have farther to say of Mr. Baker to the chapter of his writings; and even check the pleasure I have in doing justice to his virtues, unless where they break out indirectly from circumstances that attended his own compositions, or the communications with which he assisted other authors.

Mr. Baker's first publication was his *Reflections on Learning*, published in octavo, 1699, without his name. It is a work full of learning, wit, and ingenuity, and deservedly raised the author's reputation; yet as much as I admire it, it would be the partiality of a biographer to his hero, not to allow that it has considerable defects. The editors of the new *Biographia* have justly reprehended Mr. Baker's style, which is far from possessing modern elegance, and from being formed by a good ear. It is not so universally replete with coarse and vulgar language, as the styles of Dr. Echard, Dr. Bentley, and Dr. Wootton; men whom however I rather mention with Mr. Baker as luminaries of science and wit, than to censure the harshness and want of purity in their diction. But Mr. Baker's book had a more considerable fault than the defect of elegance. It wanted a logical conclusion. The title of his work explains his scope. "Reflections upon Learning; wherein is shewn the insufficiency thereof in its several particulars, in order to evince the usefulness and necessity of Revelation."

The fathers who decried human learning in order to enforce the one thing necessary, religion, argued consequentially, supposing God implanted a propensity to arts and sciences in the heart of man, and yet did not intend that he should make any use of the powers bestowed. The fathers too, who held that absurd doctrine, had at least the excuse of apprehending that the end of the world was at hand. But seventeen hundred years have pretty well exploded that vision; and therefore we must be the more surpris'd to hear an ingenious man argue like enthusiasts of the second or third century.

That human industry has not perfected, probably cannot perfect, every science, is a self-evident truth, but perhaps not a melancholy one. The investigation is delightful; and so exquisite is the goodness of the creator, that he

he has taught us to strike out numerous enjoyments even from imperfect knowledge. Where he has not given us specifics, he has bestowed succedaneums. If the pyramids were raised by slender skill in mechanics, though by great labour, they might be erected in less time now, yet would not last longer. The natives of Otaheite could carve without iron. A Grecian or Roman could execute works in cameo or intaglia without microscopic glasses, which we cannot imitate with superior advantages. But how does revelation supply the defects of knowledge, except in what it was given to reveal? I will mention a few of Mr. Baker's topics, to which revelation seems a very inadequate supplement. In fact, except morality, I see not what revelation was intended to improve, has improved, or could improve. If it even has not improved morality, it is not the fault of revelation, but of those to whom it has been dispensed.

But, says Mr. Baker, language, grammar, history, chronology, geography, civil law, canon law, physick, oriental and scholastic learning, are still imperfect.

In his preface he declares he does not mean wholly to discredit the use of human learning; yet as in one place he apprehends that the thirst of learning will substitute natural to revealed religion, we might infer that he fears knowledge is no great friend to revelation—but at least the whole scope of his book and the avowed declaration of the conclusion is, that no complete satisfaction is to be had but from revelation. If he meant, that no complete happiness can flow but from religion, it is an undeniable truth, and the defects of knowledge are by no means the greatest evils against which we need that consolatory cordial. But when he runs through the defects of history, physick, and canon law, &c. and sends us to revelation, one should suppose that in revelation were to be found the discoveries not yet made in any of those sciences. Otherwise his dissertation is a nugatory declamation, and a vain parade of his own examination of so many branches of knowledge. I should trifle if I replied, that I cannot see how revelation can improve physick, or supply its place, since the power of curing diseases has not been transmitted from the apostles to their successors. Or if I applied revelation to the canon law, which is, or is pretended to be, drawn from the gospel. Or if, instead of believing that revelation could amend scholastic learning, I should assert that

nothing can improve nonsense and absurdity; and that the learning of the schools was so far from being learning, that it barred all knowledge, and that the world never recovered its senses till it exploded the schools.

But reasonable piety will never confound things that have no coherence. The gospel was intended to correct our passions, and preach purer morality than had been discovered by the force of human reason. Ten thousand inventions, systems, and doctrines have been built upon it, to which it gave no foundation. The precepts of Christ were plain and simple. He enjoined, he forbid, nothing but what he expressed. He came not to instruct us in chronology, nor to teach us to write history. His own disciples indeed did not always understand him, or conjectured more from his words than they implied. The more their successors have fancied themselves illuminated, the farther they have wandered in the dark; and good Mr. Baker has not been the most free from error, if he really thought, as his argument leads us to suppose, that the gospel could supply any other consolation to the imperfection of science, than resignation to the divine will. All human knowledge, except morality, might have made all the progress it has made, had revelation never been dispensed: and it would puzzle Mr. Baker himself to show, that any other science has been improved by lights drawn from the gospel: and if in near two thousand years it has contributed nothing to science, it probably never will. Mr. Baker was cautiously in the right not to refer us to the older testament for improving the sciences, as it was remarkably unfortunate in some, particularly in history, geography, and astronomy—defects solved by the supposition that God conformed himself to the ideas of men—a very irreligious solution: but the old law being abrogated by the new, we have no business to uphold the former; nor could we without falling into contradictions; the spirit of Jewish invasions and massacre, and their want of charity for their neighbours, being totally abhorrent from the spirit of the meek Jesus.

Mr. Baker's Reflections on learning drew him into a controversy with Le Clerc, a dispute detailed in the Biographia, and which therefore I shall not repeat. It seems to have been the only moment of his life in which he did not preserve his temperate politeness, but exchanged it, yet only to a moderate degree, for that boisterous indelicacy of the literati of the preceding age, the Scaligers, Scioppiuses, and Salmasiuses, who hurled Latin ordures at the
heads

heads of their foes, and were proud of being able to be as scurrilous as the cobblers* of old Rome and in the same terms.

May I be allowed to think that a fault which a man commits but once in a long life, is a beauty in his character; at least a foil, that heightens the rest of his virtues, and implies a greater amendment? In Mr. Baker it was redeemed by communications even to men of the most opposite principles. He knew to distinguish between the members of the republic of letters, and the adherents to a party in the state from which he differed.

His next, and sole other, publication was a new edition of bishop Eisher's funeral sermon on Margaret countess of Richmond and Derby; to which he added an account of her charities, foundations, &c.

The rest of his life was passed in the study of antiquity and in laborious collections of antique papers, great numbers of which he transcribed with his own hand, relating to our transactions both in the church and the state. From these stores, and his own indefatigable reading, he assisted many men of congenial studies in their several publications; and he was supposed to have been engaged for many years in compiling for his own university a work similar to Wood's *Athenæ Oxonienses*: but there is no sufficient warrant for believing that he ever meditated such a digestion; and he certainly left nothing beyond materials for it.

Of his own college he actually undertook and executed a very valuable history; valuable still less for its accuracy and fidelity, than for its author's singular impartiality. It is the *chef-d'œuvre* of temper in a martyr. It is brightened too with rays of judgment and good sense that shine unexpectedly from such brute matter; and though too dry to charm without the walls of its own college, it is so honourable both to the society and the author, that it is rather surprising a few copies at least have not been preserved by the press: at least it would be a model to writers of that class, if the scribblers of antiquities could be taught to have taste, and to abandon bigotry and prejudice, and useless trifles, which have no value but that of existence.

The authors and editors his cotemporaries, whose studies were congenial

* Dr. Bentley said of Joshua Barnes, that he knew as much Greek as a Grecian cobbler.

with

with Mr. Baker's, were gratefully fond of acknowledging their obligations to him, and of bearing testimony to his exemplary virtues. Mr. Brown Willis, Dr. Knight in his Life of Erasius, Dr. Richardson in his edition of Godwin *De præfulibus Angliæ*, Professor Ward in his History of Gresham College, Dr. Fiddes in his Life of Wolfey, and Hearne in several of his publications, all hold the same language on the communicative humanity and other excellencies of this primitive confessor.

More might be said on this head; but where genuine virtues shine so conspicuously by their own light, they want no adventitious rays. The preceding age had leaned so heavily on those collateral crutches, compliments from cotemporaries, that panegyrics of that kind sunk into total disuse. Mr. Pope's juvenile works were I think the last so gilded, and his own effulgence made all those lesser stars

Hide their diminish'd heads.

In those indefatigable researches, in collections, in benevolent and friendly communications, and in the exercise of every duty and of every charity within the limits of his contracted fortune, Mr. Baker reached the eighty-fourth year of his age, when his life terminated as mildly, though suddenly, as it had been passed. On Saturday the 28th of June, 1740, in the afternoon, he was found lying upon the floor of his chamber; his face so much convulsed that his speech was almost inarticulate; a stupor hung on his senses, and one side was dead. At times he seemed to disregard what was passing around him; at others he knew those present, and recommended himself to their prayers for an easy death; expressing perfect resignation, as he perceived, he said, that his time was come, and thanking his friends for their kind offices. In this easy state of transition he lasted till the following Wednesday; and being almost incapable of swallowing, he took little nourishment and less of medicine, accepting with uneasiness any assistance, but to change his linen, as he deemed all remedy impossible and but a delay of his departure; so that his friends forbore to disturb him more than was requisite to mark that there was no neglect.

This was the end he had often wished, preceded by a short illness, and accompanied by little or no pain. He was interred in the anti-chapel of St.

John's

John's college with every sincere mark of respect and ceremony from the society, and an oration in his praise was pronounced over his grave by one of the fellows.

The last act of his life, his will, was consonant to the series of his actions, and breathes the same devotion, humility, charity, friendship, and candour, that had adorned each period. It shall be printed here, as it indicates the disposition of his MSS. the contents of which are specified in the new edition of the Biographia Britannica, and which show how useful a virtuous man may be even when cut off from society: but one particularity of his last testament is too memorable not to be singled from the rest of his legacies. One of them is to Dr. Conyers Middleton, whose principles in church and state were not only very different from those of Mr. Baker, but the doctor himself had lost the friendship of their common patron, the earl of Oxford, by being converted from the narrow and bigoted creed of those who adhered to the monkish notions of royal and ecclesiastical despotism, and who did not, like Mr. Baker, allow any toleration, nor forgive Middleton for seeing with his own eyes. Mr. Baker certainly intended no reproach to a sect, which he never quitted; but the candour of his conduct is the severest censure on every party that is intolerant. They alone who abhor toleration deserve little. They are enemies to the freedom of religion, over which God alone can have any right of empire. Mr. Baker lived and died in charity with all mankind, and was perhaps the sole instance of a man who bequeathed his worldly goods to a society that had ejected him, and to the ministers of a church in which he had lost preferment. The following copy of his will attests these merits, and shall close what I have to say of so uncommon and amiable a character.

MR. BAKER'S

MR. BAKER'S WILL.

IN the name of God, Amen. I Thomas Baker, ejected fellow of St. John's college in Cambridge, do make my last will and testament as follows:

First, I commend my soul into the hands of Almighty God (my gracious and good God) my faithful creator, and merciful redeemer, and in all my dangers and difficulties a most constant protector. Blessed for ever be his holy name!

As to the temporal goods it hath pleased the same good God to bestow on me (such as all men might be content with, and are, I bless God, neither poverty nor riches), I dispose of them in the following manner:

Whereas I have made a deed of gift (or sale for one guinea) of twenty-one volumes in folio of my own hand writing, to the right honourable Edward earl of Oxford, I confirm and ratify that gift by this my last will, and I beg his lordship's acceptance of them, being sensible they are of little use or value; with two other volumes in folio, markt vol. 19, 20. since conveyed to him in like manner.

To my dear cousin George Baker, esq. of Crook, I leave The Life of Cardinal Wolfey, noted with my own hand, lord Clarendon's History with cuts and prints, and Winwood's Memorials in three volumes, in folio, with a five-pound jacobus piece of gold, as a mark of respect and affection, since he does not want it.

To my cousin Ferd. Baker, my silver salver, as promised.

To my worthy kinsman and friend, Mr. George Smith, I leave Godwin De præfulibus Angliæ, Waræus De præfulibus Hybernæ, both noted with my own hand.

To the reverend and learned Dr. Newcombe, master of St. John's college, I leave a ring of a guinea, with two tables of the masters of St. John's college,

in frames, with my founder's picture (Dr. Hugh Ashton) for himself or college: and to his excellent lady a ring of one guinea.

To my worthy friend Dr. Dickens, regius professor of law, I leave the first edition of Linwood's Provincial, in a large folio and black letter, with a ring of a guinea, and Dr. Corbet's picture, for himself, or the college.

To the worthy Mr. Burrough, fellow of Caius college, I leave bishop Cosin's picture for the college; and my worthy friend Dr. Knight, archbishop Parker's picture, together with another picture (near my bed) of Dr. Humphry Tyndal, dean of Ely (as supposed, and the date and year agree exactly).

All my other pictures and prints undisposed of, I leave to my worthy friend Dr. Grey*, LL. D. for the ornament of his house, with a ring of a guinea to him, Dr. Middleton, Dr. Williams, Mrs. Burton of Ellamore, and my dear niece and god-daughter Mrs. Margaret Shepperfon, and the rev. Mr. John Boswell, vicar of Taunton and prebendary of Wells.

To St. John's college library I leave all such books, printed or MSS. as I have, and are wanting there; excepting those I leave in trust to my worthy friend Dr. Middleton, for the University library: viz. archbishop Wake's State of the Church, noted and improved under his own hand; bishop Burnet's History of the Reformation, in three volumes, noted in my hand; and bishop Kennet's Register and Chronicle (for the memory of which three great prelates, my honoured friends, I must always have a due regard). To these I add Mr. Anstis's History of the Garter, in 2 vols. folio; Wood's Athenæ Oxonienses, and (Maunsel's Catalogue) both noted in my own hand, and Gunton's and Patrick's History of the Church of Peterborough, noted for bishop Kennet in my own hand; with 15 volumes more or less, in folio, in manuscript, all in my own hand; and 3 volumes in quarto, part in my own hand.

To the poor of the parish of Lanchester, where (at Crook) I was born; and to the poor of the parish of Longnewton, where I was ejected; to each parish I leave ten pounds, and to the college servants of St. John the Evan-

* Dr. Zacary Grey, either editor or author of Remarks upon Neale's History of the Puritans, and the last edition of Hudibras.

gelist ten pounds (among such as shall be willing to accept a share), and out of that I leave five pounds to my bedmaker.

And whereas I have an hundred pounds in the Bank of England, under the name of my worthy friend and kinsman Dr. William Bedford, M. D. I leave him the profits of one year, and one year's dividend next after my decease.

As to my funeral, I am not so solicitous: I desire nothing more than christian burial. Christ be merciful to me a sinner!

Lastly, I constitute and appoint my dear nephew, Richard Burton, esquire, my sole executor; to whom I leave every thing undisposed of, which I hope will be enough, to defray his trouble. May God Almighty bless him, and give him all the engaging qualities of his father, all the virtues of his mother, and none of the sins or failings of his uncle; which (God knows) are great and many, and humbly (O my God) I call for mercy.

In testimony of this my will, I have hereunto set my hand and seal this 15th day of October, 1739.

THOMAS BAKER.

Signed, sealed, delivered and declared by the aforesaid Thomas Baker, the testator, as for his last will and testament, in the presence of us,

WILLIAM CLAPHAM,
CHARLES RICHARDS.

And now, O my God, into thy hands I contentedly resign myself: whether it be to life or death, thy will be done. Long life I have not desired, and yet thou hast given it me. Give me, if it be thy good pleasure, an easy and an happy death: or, if it shall please thee to visit me severely, as my sins have deserved, give me patience to bear thy correction, and let me always say, even with my dying breath, Thy will be done. Amen, Amen.

ACCOUNT