

E

3/6



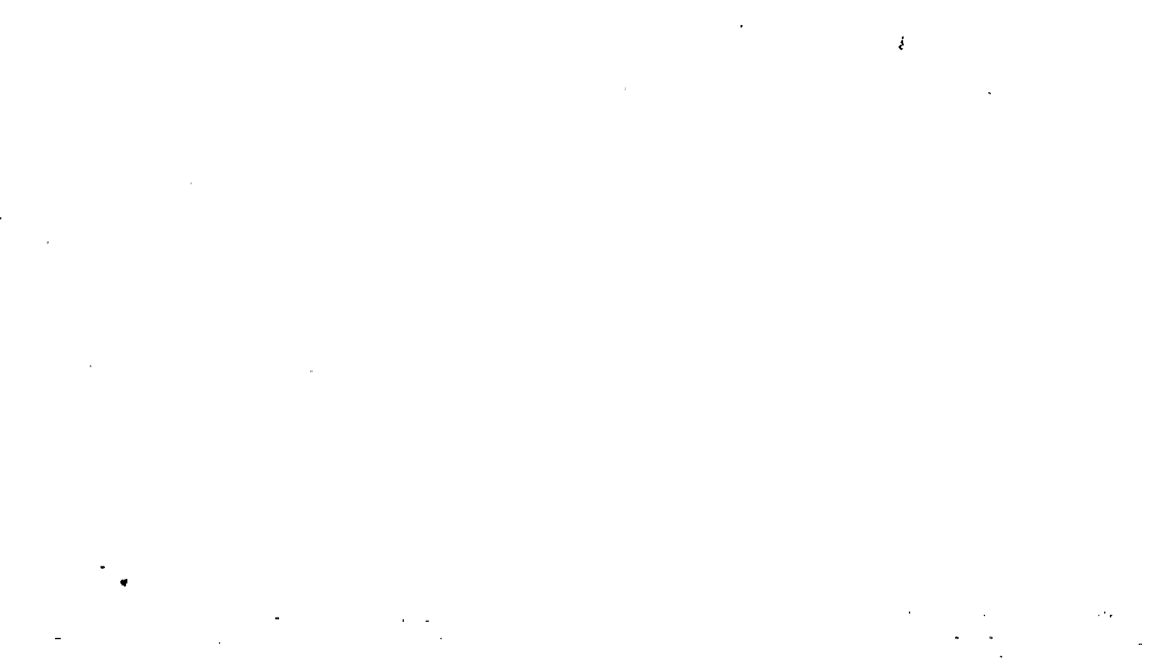
THE LIBRARY
OF
THE UNIVERSITY
OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES

Ex Libris

SIR MICHAEL SADLER

ACQUIRED 1948

WITH THE HELP OF ALUMNI OF THE
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION



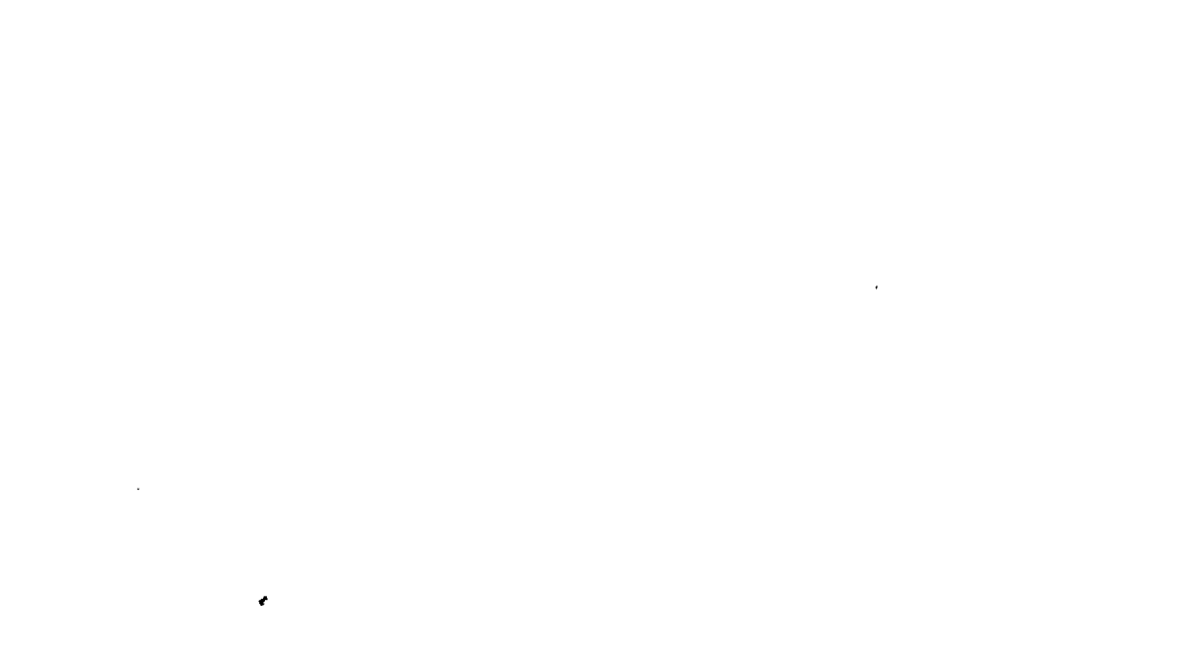
THE

L I F E

OF

MR. THOMAS FIRMIN.

PRICE TWO SHILLINGS BOUND;



THE
L I F E
O F
MR. THOMAS FIRMIN,
CITIZEN OF LONDON.

B Y
JOSEPH CORNISH,
Pastor to the Church of Protestant Dissenters at
Colyton, in the County of
DEVON.

The memory of the just is blessed. Prov. x. 7.

He was a man, take him for all in all,
We shall not look upon his like again. *Shakespeare.*

L O N D O N :
PRINTED FOR J. JOHNSON, NO. 72. ST. PAUL'S
CHURCH-YARD,
1780.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

F5.3

T O

A GENTLEMAN,

W H O,

FROM EXTREME MODESTY,

WILL NOT PERMIT THE MENTION OF HIS

N A M E;

WITH WHOSE ZEAL FOR THE CAUSE OF LIBERTY,

WITH WHOSE REGARD TO THE INTEREST OF RELIGION,

WITH WHOSE DELIGHT IN DOING GOOD,

THE AUTHOR OF THIS WORK IS WELL ACQUAINTED,

AND OF WHOSE BENEVOLENCE,

AND THAT OF SOME OF HIS NEAREST CONNECTIONS,

THE AUTHOR HATH ALSO HIMSELF LARGELY EXPERIENCED;

THIS ATTEMPT

TO DO SOME SMALL JUSTICE TO THE MEMORY

OF ONE OF THE BEST OF MEN

IS MOST RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED,

a

662733



P R E F A C E.

NOTHING can be more worthy of a rational creature, than to endeavour, by every mean in his power, to promote the knowledge and practice of virtue. This is the professed aim of the moralist and the divine; and unless the philosopher and historian keep this end in view, their speculations and researches, though they may gratify the curiosity natural to the human mind, fail in that which is of much greater consequence;—the impressing upon it a sense of its true dignity, and exciting in the breast a desire of being and of doing good.

The study of history is very pleasing to the generality, and may be made the vehicle of conveying much of that useful knowledge which renders the heart

better. Biography is a species of history which gives a writer some peculiar advantages, who would teach men to be good by examples. The historian must attend principally to great events, which affect mankind only at large. But the biographer may enter into the walks of private life, and exhibit characters interesting to us as individuals. An acquaintance with history may enable a man to shine in conversation; but a knowledge of biography will tend more to improve the heart. Now, to render biography pleasing, there ought to be both variety and dignity in the actions of the person whose life is recorded; without variety the reader cannot be pleased, and unless there be dignity he will be disgusted. My ideas of dignity are not, however, confined to such actions, as obtain the applause of the unthinking part of mankind. In my opinion, that man acts with true dignity, who performs all the kind and beneficent offices for his fellow creatures which he possibly can, and exerts himself to the very utmost in doing good. Many such characters have existed, and, I hope, do still exist; but few, I believe, if any, will be found to equal him
whose

whose life is contained in these sheets, and well deserves to be made known, as exhibiting a pattern fit to be proposed for general imitation.

Accounts of kings and conquerors are not very interesting to the bulk of mankind. Very few are likely to be in situations, which may call for the exercise of the caution to be learned from their errors, or to imitate those actions which rendered them illustrious. From such accounts, however, many useful lessons may be drawn, and that very important one amongst others, the duty of contentment in a lower station. Those who are a little conversant with history, will learn that dignity and power, however justly acquired, are constantly attended with numberless cares; and if injustice and tyranny, or artifice and fraud have been used to obtain them, every friend to virtue abhors or despises the hero and the prince, and learns to be happy in obscurity, and to rest satisfied though confined to the humbler duties of private and domestic life. To read of men who have distinguished themselves by their genius, their learning, and their application is very pleasing; and when these

talents have been employed in the service of mankind, and doing good appears to have been more their desire than the acquisition of fame, the honest and upright of every degree both love and reverence their names and memories. But to that, which, in an historical view, is their chief ornament few can aspire.

Mr. Linnæus's excellencies, though of the most exalted kind, were yet such as all may imitate. It was not by the help of extraordinary knowledge in any art or science, that he attracted high esteem from so many of his contemporaries of great note and eminence; he gained honourable fame by a diligent application to business, a prevailing inclination to do good, and a serious attention to the precepts of our holy religion. His soul was cast in a fine mould, and ever influenced by the laws and by the example of Jesus; all the worthy dispositions of his mind rose to the highest degree of improvement, and in him we may see to what dignity and honour a tradesman can attain, without being ever elevated above that rank.

The principal source of my information, with respect to the particulars I have related, has been a former life of
this

this worthy man, intituled *The Life of Mr. Thomas Firmin, late Citizen of London, written by one of his most intimate acquaintance.* The same was published in 1698, which was within a year after Mr. Firmin's death. Intimate acquaintance are oftentimes partial, but there is not the least reason to doubt the truth of the leading actions of Mr. Firmin's life, since they were of public notoriety, are confirmed by contemporary historians, by authentic records, and have been again and again related in various biographical works of the highest repute and authority. The original life has been long out of print and is become scarce, those who have seen it will, unless I am deceived, think with me, that Mr. Firmin's public spirited and beneficent actions may be related in a more regular, perspicuous and striking manner, than is done in the account given of them by his friend. I am at the same time fully convinced, that my attempt falls very short of doing justice to the subject: but until a better history of Mr. Firmin's life be published, I hope that this, however imperfect, will not be entirely useless, as it may be a means of bringing some few at least into an acquaintance with a character

rafter which deserves to be universally known.

If the short histories which are here given of some eminent persons should appear, to any readers, not sufficiently connected with the principal design of this work, yet I hope such will not be severe in their censures. None are mentioned but those with whom Mr. Firmin was particularly connected, and as his forming these connections redounded not a little to his honour, I thought a few particulars concerning them, however well known to the learned, might be agreeable to those whose improvement I had principally in view when compiling this work. My own taste may perhaps have misled my judgment, for nothing is so pleasing to me in works of any kind as anecdotes relating to persons of distinguished merit. I have likewise the authority of Dr. Birch on my side, whose life of Archbishop Tillotson, which hath been very well received by the public, is remarkable for the notice therein taken of the Archbishop's friends. I have been also pretty free in making remarks and observations on the various incidents which I thought worthy to be recorded. Some
choose

choose to throw remarks of this kind into notes, which I believe causes them to be oftentimes overlooked. Others choose to intersperse them with the history itself, which in my judgment is the method most likely to impress, upon the minds of readers, those sentiments which an author should wish to convey. I am most concerned lest they should be thought too numerous, or not sufficiently pertinent. Not that this is my opinion of them, if so, it would have been folly to have published them to the world; but I well know how partial a man is to his own sentiments, and his own method of writing, and therefore I should submit my judgment to that of the Public; and endeavour, as far as my knowledge and ability extended, to consult the general taste, as to the method of conveying my ideas. To please all is indeed impossible; my highest expectations will be answered; if the candid and judicious should regard this attempt as in some degree worthy of their encouragement and recommendation.

Some, perhaps, may imagine that an attachment to Mr. Firm's peculiar religious sentiments, and a desire of promoting

moting a regard to them in others, might be a principal inducement with me to republish his life. Such will be mistaken, for the opinions with respect to our blessed Saviour, which Mr. Firmin espoused and maintained, were different from those which I have adopted and still adhere to. I am, however, very free to acknowledge, that the sincere and ardent love of truth, which appeared to reign in his breast, hath greatly increased my veneration for him, and it would be well if all would seek after truth with that diligence which he did, for whatever might be the result of their inquiries, the principle by which they were actuated would be a noble one.

I could have quoted many more authorities in support of the facts which are related, but I thought it unnecessary, since those produced are quite sufficient to establish the truth of them; and it would be useless to refer to several authors, for the proof of that against which no one will object. Whatever faults there may be in the composition, the reader may be assured that the utmost fidelity has been used in the narration, nor indeed have I been under the least
temp-

temptation to set off the hero of my work with borrowed ornaments. To make Mr. Firmin's character the object of general admiration, it needs only to be placed in its true light. This I have endeavoured to do, and though my attempt may incur censure, yet it will afford me no little consolation, if my private studies are rendered in the smallest degree subservient to the interests of virtue and religion.

I should be guilty of an unpardonable omission, if I did not acknowledge my obligations, to the Rev. Dr. Kippis of London, and the Rev. Mr. Bretland of Exeter, whose very friendly remarks and observations have contributed much towards the improvement of my work. The faults which remain, are not to be imputed to either of these Gentlemen; but had it not been for their advice and assistance, the critical reader would have met with many more. As to the sentiments of whatever kind, which I have advanced, my worthy and honoured friends are by no means to be thought answerable for them: they are both possessed of an amiable candour of mind, which disposes them to serve any one
sincerely

sincerely intent on benefiting the public, whether all his ideas with respect to subjects of debate are consonant to theirs or not. Dr. Kippis, who is excelled by no one in the knowledge of biography, encouraged me much to draw up this Life of Mr. Firmin, by declaring it to be his opinion that such a publication might be very useful; adding, that he thought *Mr. Firmin to have been one of the best men that ever lived.*

C O N T E N T S.

C H A P. I. PAGE

Mr. Firmin's Birth and Parentage.—His behaviour in his Apprenticeship.—He marries, and lives in a very hospitable Manner.—Brief Accounts concerning some of the most noted amongst his Acquaintance. 1

C H A P. II.

Mr. Firmin becomes a Widower, but soon marries again.—His Kindness to his Relations.—His useful Services to the Poor.—Some Account of Mr. Gouge, whose benevolent Scheme was pursued with great Success by Mr. Firmin.—His Humanity to imprisoned Debtors.—His Care and Attention to distressed Families.

C H A P. III.

- Mr. Firmin's Attention to Christ's Church and St. Thomas's Hospitals;—to the Irish and French Refugees;—and to other Public and Private Charities.—Some Account of Bishop Compton.* 59

C H A P. IV.

- Mr. Firmin's undaunted Zeal in the Service of his Country as a Politician and a Patriot.—His Enmity to all kinds of Licentiousness:—his Endeavours to promote Virtue and Piety:—his strong Abhorrence of the Crime of Swearing, and the Method which he used to check this Vice in any of his Acquaintance.* 85

C H A P. V.

- An Account of Mr. Firmin's religious Sentiments, and of his pious Endeavours to promote what appeared to him to be the true Doctrines of the Gospel.—His great Kindness to Mr. Biddle, together with some*
Memoirs

*Memoirs of that extraordinary Man.
—The Friendship of Archbishop
Tillotson and Bishop Fowler for
Mr. Firmin, with some Particulars
concerning these eminent and worthy
Divines.—Other Instances of Mr.
Firmin's Charity to the Sufferers
for Religion.* 101

C H A P. VI.

*Mr. Firmin's Sickness and Death.—
He is attended in his last Illness by
Bishop Fowler, of whom a short
Account is given.—The Respect paid
to Mr. Firmin's Memory by Lady
Clayton.—Reflections on his Charac-
ter, with some Extracts from a
Sermon preached on Occasion of his
Decease.* 145

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Authōr lives at such a distance from London, that he could not undertake to correct the errors of the press, and therefore hopes that the reader will not impute any mistakes of this kind, if any such there be, to negligence or inattention in him.

THE
L I F E

OF

MR. THOMAS FIRMIN.

CHAP. I.

Mr. Firmin's Birth and Parentage. His Behaviour in his Apprenticeship. He marries, and lives in a very hospitable Manner. Brief Accounts concerning some of the most noted amongst his Acquaintance.

MR. THOMAS FIRMIN was born at Ipswich (a very large and populous town in the county of Suffolk), in the month of June, 1632. His parents, Henry and Prudence Firmin, as they did not abound in wealth, so neither were they in strait or mean circumstances*. They were in that middle station, which con-

* Life, page 5, 6.

tains all that is valuable and desireable in wealth, without the temptations and dangers, to which wealth exposes men. This condition of life many persons of wisdom and experience have thought favourable to virtue above any other. The parents of the worthy man, whose life we are now entering upon, proved, at least in one instance, the justice of this remark; for on account of their sobriety, diligence, and good conduct, the effects of their piety, they were held in great esteem and reputation. They were of the number of those then called Puritans, by the loose and ignorant vulgar, who used to deem affected and precise, such as were more conscientious, devout and exemplary than ordinary, even though professed members of the Church of England.

Mr. Firmin, we may naturally suppose, was carefully instructed by his pious parents in all moral and religious duties; but, as nothing remarkable is recorded of him during the years of his childhood, we must pass on to the time, when being of a proper age he was bound apprentice to a tradesman in London *. His beha-

* Life, page 6, 7.

viour in this situation was diligent and obliging, and he was foremarkably nimble in all his motions, and so quick and ready in taking down, opening goods, &c. that many called him "*the Spirit.*"

In making bargains, his words and manner of address were so pleasing and respectful, that after some time the customers chose rather to deal with Thomas, than with the master of the shop; and, when there happened any little dispute about the value of a commodity, he would decide it to the satisfaction of both his master and the customer.

It would be much to the credit and advantage of all apprentices to imitate him in these particulars.

Nothing recommends a youth so much as diligence in his master's business, accompanied with an obliging deportment towards all those who have any dealings with him. Seasons and occasions may also happen, when a young man may find it of the utmost service to have gained the favourable opinion of those with whom he is connected. Mr. Firmin met with one very disagreeable event in the course of his servitude: the elder apprentice took five pounds of his master's

money, and laid it to young Firmin's charge. Whether the imputation was believed or not the friend who wrote his life was uncertain. "Probably* (says he) it was not." The reasons of this probability are very evident. If a young man be idle, sullen, and neglectful of his master's interest, any ill thing is easily believed concerning him. On the contrary, where there is any room to hope, all are ready to favour one, who recommends himself by those qualities which are proper for his station. However of Mr. Firmin's innocence in this affair no doubt remains.

The elder apprentice was shortly after this transaction seized with a mortal sickness, and before he died made confession, that it was he himself who had taken and spent the money, Mr. Firmin not having been in the least degree privy to it. Thus was his innocence made apparent to all, the consciousness of which, as may be easily supposed, was a most noble support to his own mind, whilst he lay under the charge.

Mr. Firmin, as soon as the term of his apprenticeship expired, began to trade

* Life, page 8.

for himself, setting out with the very small stock of one hundred pounds *. But he was possessed of those qualities, which are generally found to be more serviceable to a man than a large capital. Those qualities were fidelity, industry, and amiable manners, which had recommended him to the love and esteem of all those who dealt with his master, or lived in the neighbourhood. He also stood high in the opinion of the merchants; and, having made a large acquaintance who were attached to his interest, purely on account of his merit, he speedily overcame the difficulties, which usually attend those who enter upon business with very little money of their own. Parents and friends often make themselves very uneasy from an apprehension, that the trifling sums, with which those for whom they are concerned set out in life, will be entirely inadequate to their wants, and prevent them from ever rising much above straits and difficulties. But it frequently happens that this seeming disadvantage, by leading a man to observe the necessity of being diligent, attentive, and obliging,

* Life, page 9.

proves the very means of advancing him; whilst those, who, depending on their own fortunes, neglect the surer methods of thriving, and disappoint the hopes which their relations had been led to form. No stock, how great soever, can render a man successful in trade, without the concurrence of those qualities, which beget confidence and respect. If a youth be of an amiable disposition, and have a turn for business, there is but little cause for anxiety as to his future welfare.

In the year 1660. Mr. Firmin married a citizen's daughter with five hundred pounds as a portion, which though not a large sum, was to him who knew so well how to improve it, a valuable acquisition.

The great expense of supporting a family in this age of dissipation and luxury renders many young traders, and indeed persons of all professions, very averse from matrimony. But it is to be hoped, that, notwithstanding the prevailing love of pleasure, there are still many amongst our fair countrywomen, who are fond of domestic life, and of all those duties which may render it comfortable and agreeable. Such a one, even
without

without a fortune, is a treasure in herself, and will be more likely, upon the whole, to save expenses than to increase them. Young men of warm passions are exposed to temptations, which small degrees of virtue and resolution are not able to withstand; and, putting religion out of the question, none but the unthinking and superficial would recommend the too common method of satisfying the sensual desires. How much the health is endangered thereby all are sensible, and the expenses attending such a course have ruined thousands. Besides, occasional converse with the abandoned part of the female sex, very frequently begets an ill opinion of every woman; so that those who have been used to the company of prostitutes, lose all relish for the delicate pleasures of virtuous love; and, if they find it convenient to marry, have seldom that respect and esteem for a wife, which is necessary to render the nuptial state a happy one.

In general, those, who inveigh most warmly against the vanity, inconstancy and frailty of the female sex, have conversed pretty freely with the worst part of them. There are but few cases and

circumstances, in which it will not be the most prudent and economical way of proceeding to marry early in life; but should any thing particular render this inexpedient, the wisest course will be, to win the affections of some chaste and virtuous female, to be attached solely to her as a lover, and, as soon as affairs will permit, to become her husband. Thus will the purity of the mind and the health of the body be preserved, the expenses attending irregular courses be avoided, and a fair prospect of happiness be ever in view as an excitement to application and diligence.

Mr. Firmin, when he became a house-keeper, was discreet and prudent, yet he practised in an eminent degree that good old English virtue hospitality. From his first entrance on business he sought all opportunities of becoming acquainted with persons of learning and worth, whether foreigners or his own countrymen, and more especially with ministers *. He was seldom without some of the last sort at his table, which, though attended with expense, answered, as he thought,

* Life, page 9.

very valuable ends. Their conversation helped to inform and enlarge his mind, and their friendship was of great use to him afterwards, in serving and assisting the poor, which was the delight and pleasure of his life. For having a large acquaintance, he was enabled to procure the powerful interest of some, and the liberal contributions of others, towards forwarding his important and charitable designs.

Mr. Firmin was settled in Lombard Street, in the parish of St. Mary Woolnoth, the ministers of which parish were first Mr. Samuel Jacomb and then Dr. Outram. With these two excellent preachers and learned men, he maintained a close correspondence. Mr. Jacomb was a divine of a free temper and genius, not confining himself to the ancient systems, but inclined to more liberal notions *. He died in the thirtieth year of his age; so that the world had not long the benefit of his labours. Now also it was that Mr. Firmin became intimate with those very celebrated divines Whichcote, Worthington, Wilkins, and Tillotson.

*- See Birch's Life of Tillotson, page 399.

Dr. Benjamin Whichcote was descended from an ancient and reputable family in the county of Salop; he was born in March, 1609, and in 1626 was admitted a student of Emanuel College Cambridge, of which he was elected fellow in 1633, and became a most excellent tutor. Dr. Samuel Collins, Provost of King's College in that University, being ejected by the parliament visitors, Dr. Whichcote was admitted to it in March, 1644. Dr. Collins was pleased to see a man of such learning and virtue succeed him; and Dr. Whichcote, who rather scrupled at first to accept this place, was at length prevailed upon to do it, and made it appear that his view was more to usefulness than wordly profit; for he punctually paid his predecessor half the income *. He preached a lecture for twenty years at Trinity church in Cambridge, using his utmost endeavours to promote a spirit of sober piety, and rational religion †. The happy effects of his pains appeared in the fine talents and excellent performances of so many eminent preachers after the Restoration, most of whom, and

* Biographical Dictionary.

† Tillotson's Sermon on his death.

Tillotson amongst the rest, had received their education at Cambridge, and been formed at least, if not actually brought up, by him. Others have since copied from, and in some respects improved upon these excellent models; so that Dr. Whichcote had the honour of leading the way to that solid, useful, profitable way of preaching, which is now admired by the learned of all parties. In the year 1662, he was chosen minister of St. Andrew Black-Friars, in London, where he continued till the great fire in 1666, when his church was burnt down; but soon after he was presented by the Crown to the vicarage of St. Lawrence Jewry, where he continued in high reputation till his death, which happened in May, 1683, in the 73d year of his age.

Bishop Burnet, amongst other things greatly to his honour, says of him; "That he set young students on considering the Christian Religion, as a doctrine sent from God, both to elevate and sweeten human nature, in which he was a great example as well as a wise and kind instructor. *"

Select sermons

* History of his own times, vol. I. p. 186. fol.

of Dr. Whichcote's were published in the year 1698, by the famous Earl of Shaftesbury author of the Characteristics. The Earl wrote an extraordinary preface to them, in which he not only speaks in the highest terms of the Doctor, but appears in the light of a warm friend to genuine Christianity, of the excellent nature and tendency of which he had formed a very high opinion *. It is to be lamented that his Lordship having such sentiments of the Gospel, as he there expresses, should have dropped any thing in his writings to depreciate the New Testament. But when a desire of obtaining literary fame is the ruling passion, writers are strongly inclined to advance what is new, even in opposition to what is useful. To this desire may be ascribed many of those free things, which ingenious men have advanced, and the enemies of religion and virtue have been glad to lay hold of. Those who are possessed of great talents, ought to be much on their guard, when writing on subjects of importance; for even a witticism may injure a good

* The preface is very curious and the whole is inserted in the Biographical Dictionary under the article Whichcote.

cause, and a jest weighs more with most men than solid and learned arguments. Three other volumes of Dr. Whichcote's sermons have been published, and also a collection of religious and moral aphorisms. They do not abound in the ornaments of style; what chiefly recommends them is the excellence of their matter.

Dr. John Worthington, master of Jesus College in Cambridge, and preacher at St. Bennet Fink in London, died in the year 1671 at Hackney, where he had been chosen lecturer the year before. " He
 " was ever regarded in a most amiable
 " light, as a perfect example of unwearied
 " diligence and activity in his profession,
 " and for the general service of mankind,
 " being furnished with a great stock of all
 " excellent learning proper for a divine;
 " pious and grave, without moroseness or
 " affectation, as remarkable for his humi-
 " lity as his knowledge; zealous in his
 " friendships; charitable beyond the pro-
 " portion of his estate; universally inof-
 " fensive, kind and obliging, even to those
 " who differed from him; not passionate
 " or contentious in debates or contro-
 " versies of religion; of eminent zeal for
 " the promotion of learning and piety, and
 " indefatigable

“ indefatigable in collecting, reviewing,
 “ and publishing, the works of Mr. Joseph
 “ Mede, which he did with so much
 “ care, that it would be hard to instance
 “ either in our own nation, or perhaps
 “ any where else, in so vast a work, that
 “ was ever published with more ex-
 “ actness; by which he raised up to him-
 “ self a monument likely to last as long
 “ as learning and religion shall continue
 “ in the world *.”

His attention to that valuable publica-
 tion, and to the duties of his profession,
 besides the correspondence, which he car-
 ried on with the learned, took up so much
 time, as to prevent him from obliging
 the world with much of his own; besides
 a volume of miscellanies published in oc-
 tavo after his death, an excellent cate-
 chism is commonly ascribed to him. This
 was drawn up wholly in the words of
 Scripture, and not in the phrases peculiar
 to any party of Christians; for he was
 (to use Bp. Fowler's expression) “ a great
 “ enemy to man-made divinity.” And
 surely the doctrines and duties of the
 Gospel, cannot be better expressed than in

* Birch's life of Tillotson, page 377.

the words of the inspired writers. The more these are adhered to, the more will peace and holiness prevail. Those have ever been in all ages of the church the most amiable and useful men, who have endeavoured in every thing to conform, as nearly as possible, to the great standard of truth.

Dr. John Wilkins, another of Mr. Firmin's learned friends, was born in 1614, near Daventry in Northamptonshire. His grandfather by the mother's side, was the good Mr. Dod, well known for his sayings, and distinguished likewise by the sufferings * which he patiently endured, for refusing a compliance with the many ceremonies, which Archbishop Laud and others endeavoured, with a popish zeal, to introduce into the Church of England. Dr. Wilkins was such a proficient in classical learning, that, at the age of 13 †, he was entered a student at New College in Oxford. In 1656, he married the sister of Oliver Cromwell, and was preferred to the mastership of Trinity College

* Neal's History of the Puritans.

† Life of Bishop Wilkin's, prefixed to some of his Works, published in Oct. 1708.

in Cambridge by Richard Cromwell in the year 1659, which office he held but for a short time, being ejected upon the Restoration. He was not favourably thought of at the court of Charles II. on account of his connection with the Protector's family; and being also very enlarged as to his religious sentiments, and desirous of uniting all parties together by mutual concessions, his preferment in the church was opposed by Archbishop Sheldon, whose influence was great*. The Duke of Buckingham however so effectually recommended him to the king, that he was advanced to the see of Chester in 1668, which high dignity he enjoyed but a short time, dying of the stone in 1672.

Bishop Wilkins was not only a great divine, but also a very eminent philosopher. He was one of the first members of the Royal Society, and indefatigable in promoting every kind of useful knowledge. All his writings were ingenious and learned, and many of them very curious and entertaining; and he stands amongst the foremost of those, from

* Burnet's History of his Own Times, vol. I. p. 253.
whose

whose studies the world has received immense benefit. The learned of all professions loved him; and, what is more, the greatest and best qualities are ascribed to him, by so many eminent and good men, that he will be one of the illustrious few, whom the most distant times and ages will revere*.

Dr. Tillotson, that great and amiable divine, at the time of Mr. Firmin's first acquaintance with him, preached the Tuesday lecture at St. Lawrence Jewry, then so much frequented by all the divines of the town, and by a great many persons of quality and distinction. When obliged to be out of London, as he frequently was, either on business or for relaxation or health, he generally left it to Mr. Firmin to provide preachers for his lecture †; and he fulfilled this trust so well that there was never any complaint on account of Dr. Tillotson's absence, some eminent divine always appearing in his room. Mr. Firmin was very fit to undertake this service, for now there was hardly a clergyman of

* For testimonials in proof of his uncommon worth, see his article in the Biographical Dictionary.

† Mr. Firmin's Life, p. 14.

note, that lived in or frequented London, with whom he was not become acquainted. This circumstance enabled him to render material service to many hopeful young preachers and scholars, the candidates for schools, lectures, curacies, or rectories, for whom he would solicit with as much affection and diligence as other persons are wont to do for relations and children.

See here a tradesman, who understood neither Latin nor Greek, logic or philosophy, honoured with the intimacy and friendship of the most learned and eminent persons of the age, and who notwithstanding differed widely from him in opinion as to religious matters, and were continually attacking his supposed errors of doctrine. But as the clearness of his natural understanding, joined to an uncommon solidity of judgment, enabled him to refute their arguments, at least to his own satisfaction; so his steadiness in maintaining what he believed to be the truth did not lessen their regard for him. This is one proof amongst many others, that the widest differences in religious sentiments will never set good men at variance, if their natural tempers be

be amiable, and they be disposed to allow one another the same liberty of thinking and judging, which each claims for himself. What Mr. Firmin's religious sentiments were, or rather what were his endeavours to propagate them from a conviction of their truth and importance, is a matter worth knowing. But his great and extensive charities claim our first attention, and will create a warm love for him in the breast of very benevolent reader. Such a one no doubt, if a stranger to his character before, now begins to reverence it; for if a man may be known by the company he keeps, Mr. Firmin must certainly have been a most excellent person.

CHAP.

C H A P. II.

Mr. Firmin becomes a Widower, but soon marries again. His Kindness to his Relations. His useful Services to the Poor. Some Account of Mr. Gouge, whose benevolent Scheme was pursued with great Success by Mr. Firmin. His Humanity to imprisoned Debtors. His Care and Attention to distressed Families.

MR. FIRMIN had been married but a short time, when death deprived him of his wife. She had brought him two children, a son and a daughter, the former of whom lived to man's estate, but died a bachelor about seven years before his father. Biographers have taken notice of what they call a very remarkable circumstance with regard to Mrs. Firmin's death, in which many will think, and perhaps very justly, that there was nothing at all extraordinary. " Mr. " Firmin, it seems, being at Cambridge, " dreamed that he saw his wife breath- " ing her last: whereupon he took horse " early

“ early in the morning for London, and
 “ on the way thither, he met the messenger who was sent to give him notice
 “ of her decease *.” God may, without doubt, in the course of his wise providence, see fit, in dreams and visions of the night, or when men are engaged in their common business, to suggest such thoughts to their minds, as may be a means of doing them real service. But as it does not appear that any wise or good end could be answered by this dream, as his wife was dead before he could possibly come to her assistance, ought it not to be ascribed to those fancies of the brain of which no rational account has been yet given. The laying any stress upon dreams, unless evidently calculated to answer some valuable purpose, only serves to prop up the old rotten cause of superstition, every degree of which may prove a source of uneasiness to some honest and good minds.

Mr. Firmin, having experienced the comforts of the married state, did not remain very long without another partner,

* Life, p. 11. All those who have written Mr. Firmin's life in Dictionaries, &c. have thought fit to retain this trifling anecdote.

but

but as soon as it was decent, paid his addresses to the daughter of a justice of the peace in the county of Essex *. He had with this lady, who possessed all the qualifications of a good wife, a very considerable portion. God was pleased to lend them several children. It may properly be said *lend*, for but one of them lived to man's estate, who was named Giles. His father gave him the whole portion which his mother had brought, and he was likely to become a respectable merchant, but he died; when just about to embark for Portugal, where his business called for his presence.

Mr. Firmin's first matrimonial connection was dissolved in less than four years: as to the continuance of the second, which commenced in 1664, no particular mention is made in any of the accounts relating to him, and authors have also been silent as to his character in the domestic relations of a father and a husband. That he filled up these important relations in a becoming manner we have sufficient reason to believe from the whole tenor of his conduct, which

* Life, page 26.

was such as to leave no room for the suspicion of negligence in any of the duties incumbent on him. It is more especially very worthy of being observed, that, when he was possessed of but a moderate capital, and his manner of living was attended with considerable expense, neither of these circumstances, nor that of his having an increasing family prevented him from being a most kind brother, uncle and kinsman *.

There are too many of those, whom the world styles good sort of people, whose cares center entirely in themselves, and their very nearest connections; but true generosity enlarges the heart. What St. Paul says to Timothy (as it is well rendered in the margin of our Bibles;) "He that provides not for his own kindred is worse than an infidel †." was religiously attended to by Mr. Firmin. His losses by some of his relations, for whom he had advanced money, and his disbursements for others amounted to very considerable sums, and most of those losses happened to him just after his entering upon business. But he was disposed to

* Life, p. 12. † 1 Tim. v. 8.

improve the present hour, and not to defer all his acts of kindness and liberality till he had an abundance. He always kept his heart open, and never appears to have formed a design of amassing any particular sum, the aiming at which has been a means of contracting and hardening the hearts of numbers. All should accustom themselves, according to their ability, to do liberal and kind things frequently, and then in all probability their benevolent dispositions will increase with their riches. This was Mr. Firmin's method, and though his knowledge of and diligence in business, would soon have acquired him a very large fortune, yet, when he arrived to the 44th year of his age*, he was worth only about nine thousand pounds, which was more by half than he left behind him at his decease †, though he might have increased his wealth daily. But so far was avarice from growing upon him with years, that he became more and more indifferent to the world the longer he lived in it; though he had always that commendable degree of prudence, which

* Life, p. 28. † Life, p. 38.

rendered him so far attentive to his own interest, as not only to keep himself out of all difficulties, but to be enabled also to be doing good to the very last.

The year 1665 is remarkable in the English annals for a great plague, of which there died in London only, though perhaps not more than half so populous as at present, one hundred thousand persons *. Most of the wealthy citizens removed themselves and their families into the country, and so did Mr. Firmin, but he left a kinsman in his house (since it was necessary that some one should be there) with orders to relieve certain of the poor weekly, and to give them out stuff to employ them in making their usual commodities. He foresaw that he should be hard put to it to dispose of the large quantities, which those poor people would work off in so long a time for him only; but he trusted to the providence of the Father of mercies, who we may be sure, observed with pleasure and approbation such an instance of compassion and tendernefs. His expectations of being some how or other assisted in the disposal

* See all the Histories of that Time.

of this great stock were not disappointed. On his return to London, a wealthy chapman, who was much pleased with this useful and adventurous charity, made an extraordinary purchase of these goods, and by that means Mr. Firmin avoided any loss by then employing the poor*.

The plague was followed, the next year, by that dreadful fire, which laid almost the whole city of London in ashes, the churches and public buildings, as well as the habitations of the poor and the rich being involved in one common ruin. Mr. Firmin's house in Lombard Street was burned in that great conflagration, but he immediately took another, with a warehouse belonging to it, in Leaden-Hall-Street. In this he was fortunate above many others, since few could be accommodated with houses, the fire having spared but a comparatively small number, which had been occupied before this distressing event happened. Most persons were therefore obliged to confine themselves to strait lodgings, and lose the benefit of their trades, till the

* Life, page 27.

immense heaps of rubbish were cleared away, and new buildings raised in the places of the old.

Mr. Firmin was now become a person of note, his noble spirit and generous way of trading having greatly recommended him ; and in a few years he so improved his stock, as to be able to rebuild his own house, and almost the whole of the court in which he lived. As soon as he had performed this duty to himself and his family, he began to build for the benefit of the poor ; for whose service he erected a warehouse near the banks of the river Thames*. In this, corn and coals were laid up, to be sold in dear seasons at a moderate price, that was never to exceed their first cost, unless the stores were any way damaged by keeping ; in that case, the loss was to be made up by selling the rest at a higher rate. This was a very useful charity, and of much service to the objects of it, since it prevented them from feeling the inconveniences of dearth, which must ever be attended with want, when families are large, and the wages only sufficient

* Life, page 28.

for a bare support at cheaper times. Besides being at the trouble of attending to this business, which was not small, it does not appear that Mr. Firmin made any account of the expense he had been at in building, or of the interest of his money which at that time was considerable, 8 per cent. being common, and even 10 being to be had on reasonable security.

Mr. Firmin very wisely judged that no charity could be so serviceable to the poor, as that which kept them out of idleness, and therefore in the year 1676, (at which time it was that his capital amounted to about nine thousand pounds) he did the most eminent service both to them and the public, by erecting a warehouse in Little-Britain near Smithfield, for the employment of the needy and industrious in the linen manufacture*. Dr. Tillotson mentioned this design with great approbation in his funeral sermon for Mr. Gouge, preached in 1681, which sermon is preserved amongst the other works of that celebrated prelate.

* Life, page 29.

“ He (Mr. Gouge) set the poor of
 “ St. Sepulchre’s parish, of which he was
 “ minister, to work at his own charge.
 “ He bought flax and hemp for them to
 “ spin; when spun, he paid them for their
 “ work, and caused it to be wrought into
 “ cloth, which he sold as he could, him-
 “ self bearing the whole loss. This was a
 “ very wise and well chosen way of cha-
 “ rity, and in the good effects of it a much
 “ greater charity than if he had given
 “ to those very persons freely, and for
 “ nothing, so much as he made them
 “ earn by their work: because by this
 “ means he rescued them from two most
 “ dangerous temptations, idleness and
 “ poverty.

“ This course so happily devised and
 “ begun by Mr. Gouge, gave, it may be,
 “ the first hint to that useful and worthy
 “ citizen Mr. Thomas Firmin, of a much
 “ larger design, which has been managed
 “ by him some years in this city with
 “ that vigour and good success, that
 “ many hundreds of poor children and
 “ others who lived idle before, unpro-
 “ fitable both to themselves and the
 “ public, now maintain themselves, and
 “ are also some advantage to the commu-
 “ nity.

" nity. By the assistance and charity of
 " many excellent and well disposed
 " persons, Mr. Firmin is enabled to bear
 " the unavoidable loss and charge of so
 " vast an undertaking; and by his own
 " forward inclination to charity, and un-
 " wearied diligence and activity, is fitted
 " to sustain and go through the incre-
 " dible pains of it."

Mr. Gouge was a man most eminent
 for piety and usefulness, and in the tem-
 per and disposition of his mind greatly
 resembled Mr. Firmin, who highly es-
 teemed him, and prevailed on him to
 live at his house *. Never did one house
 contain two persons of such different
 ages and professions, whose souls were
 more nearly allied. Both their hearts
 were warmed with benevolence and
 love, and their mutual friendship could
 not fail of cherishing those divine prin-
 ciples. Mr. Firmin, being the youngest
 by almost thirty years, must have derived
 great benefit from such a connection; and
 his activity and zeal undoubtedly afforded
 the highest satisfaction to Mr. Gouge,
 who could with pleasure devise methods

* Life, page 49.

of doing good, when he found another so ready to execute them. All that one man could do, he himself did; and, to his unspeakable pleasure, he met with another ready to adopt and pursue every charitable scheme, which he, whose whole attention was directed to the service of his fellow creatures, could point out. To recount all his benevolent labours would require a volume; but a brief memorial may serve to give us some ideas of his excellencies, whom Mr. Firmin most gladly chose to be a fellow inhabitant of his mansion.

Mr. Gouge was born in the year 1604, at Bow in Middlesex, and received his school education at Eton, and his university learning at Oxford. He left the university and his fellowship, for the living of Collden in Surry, where he had not been long, before he was removed to the large and populous parish of St. Sepulchre's in London; of which he was, for twenty-four years, a most diligent and faithful minister. He was unwearied in the laborious duties of constant preaching, visiting the sick, and catechizing in the church all who would come. To encourage the poor (who were generally

the most ignorant) to seek for instruction, he distributed money amongst them once a-week, changing the day that they might be obliged constantly to attend. As for the poor who were able to get their own living, he set them to work, buying flax and hemp for them to spin, which when manufactured he sold as he could amongst his friends.

The Bartholomew act obliged him to quit his living in 1662 *; for he was dissatisfied with the terms of conformity then imposed. This was a great loss to his parish and also to himself, as the living was a very valuable one; but as he had then a good estate, his charity to the poor was continued. He made it the great business of his life to serve them, and applied himself to it with as much constancy and diligence, as other men do to their trades. He suffered much by the fire of London, and this, together with settling his children, reduced his income to one hundred and fifty pounds yearly. Of this he always spent one hundred in works of charity, urging others to assist him in his benevolent designs, though it

* Nonconformist's Memorial, last edition, p. 144.
does

does not appear, that he persuaded any to do so largely as himself.

Besides employing the poor, he was much set on instructing them in religion, well knowing from his own experience, that piety is the foundation on which all other virtues must be built. And in that he judged rightly. For certainly those are most likely to submit to the evils of life with patience, and to fulfil the duties of it amidst temptations and snares, who have a firm faith in, and a good hope towards God, as the bountiful and powerful rewarder of all those who diligently seek his favour, by yielding a willing obedience to his commands. To promote these valuable ends, he freely gave to the poor such books as *The Whole Duty of Man*, *The Practice of Piety*, and others of the like kind, containing such things only as good christians are agreed in, and not matters of doubtful disputation. These he caused to be printed in Welch, and his spirit was so far from partaking of narrowness or bigotry, that he procured the *Church Catechism* with a practical exposition of it, and also the *Common Prayer* to be printed likewise in that language, and given to such as

would otherwise have been unable to get them. It has however been insinuated, that his charities in Wales, were designed only to serve a party, and that the dissenters have increased in consequence of them*. If this be the case, it must be purely owing to the increase of piety, for Mr. Gouge never gave the people a single book, nor can be charged with having used a single argument to persuade them to nonconformity. Indeed no one can wonder, who considers by what wretched and despicable hirelings the Welch churches are frequently served, that teachers of any denomination, who appear to have some degree of zeal and seriousness, should be attended to and followed. Until the established clergy of that principality pay more regard to their duty, than has hitherto been customary amongst them †, all those, whose views are superior to the interests of any particular party, will rejoice that there are preachers of any persuasion, labouring to instruct a neglected people in the principles of our common christianity, and

* Mr. Wynne's edition of Powel's History of Wales.

† See View of the State of Religion in the diocese of St. David's, written by D. D. of that principality.

ardently

ardently join in the wishing that another Mr. Gouge may arise and help them.

In the latter part of his life, he confined his services chiefly to that country, where he thought they were most wanted. Besides distributing books, having obtained a licence from some of the bishops to preach in Wales, he took an annual journey thither, and when more than sixty years of age, used to travel about, distributing his charities, instructing the ignorant, and settling schools in the chief towns, to the number of three or four hundred; where women were employed to teach children to read, and books provided for them gratis, or sold at a small price. He used often to say with pleasure, "that he had two livings " which he would not exchange for the " greatest in England; viz Christ's Hof- " pital, where he used frequently to cate- " chize the poor children, and Wales, " where he went sometimes twice in a " year to spread knowledge, piety, and " charity." He was ever ready to embrace and oblige all men, and if they did but fear God and work righteousness, he heartily loved them, how different soever from him in judgment about things less necessary,