



PORTRAIT OF DR. WATTS.
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ISAAC WATTS;

His Life and Writings,

HIS HOMES AND FRIENDS.

"Few men have left behind such purity of character, or such monuments of laborious piety. He has provided instruction for all ages, from those who are lisping their first lessons to the enlightened readers of Malebranche and Locke; he has left neither corporeal nor spiritual nature unexamined; he has taught the art of reasoning and the science of the stars."—*Dr. Johnson.*

"The Independents, as represented by Dr. Watts, have a just claim to be considered the real founders of modern English hymnody."—*Lord Selborne.*

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MOST men who have left behind them a name so universally honoured and beloved as that of Isaac Watts have shone in many biographies; he reverses the rule, and really has more monuments in stone erected to his memory than there have been readable biographies to record the transactions of his life.

From time to time it seems necessary and natural to attempt some fresh record of the memory of honoured men; even the best biographies wear out, and succeeding ages demand a tribute in harmony with varying impressions or increased information. The life of Watts was one of the most quiet and equable of lives; it flowed on in almost unbroken tranquillity and peace; it was passed in much seclusion, neither his taste nor his health permitting him to come much personally into the presence of the world. The authentic incidents of his career, of which we have any record, are, indeed, very few, yet, such as they are, they should surely be gathered up, and put into some fitting memorial. Besides this, it is a life always good to contemplate. Acquaintance seems to lift the reader almost into that region whose air the good man breathed so freely.

The object of the following pages will be to attempt to do some justice to the various attributes of his mental

character. His fame as a writer of hymns has, by its very brightness, obscured departments of work which cost him far more labour. Watts was modest; in every estimate of himself he disclaimed any title to the rank of a poet; but in truth his powers, as manifested in his writings, whether we regard him as a preacher, theologian, or metaphysician, are all equally luminous and instructive. Beyond all these, a character exalted by seraphic piety and all-embracing charity makes the narrative of such a life well worthy of the study of all to whom it is pleasant to contemplate human nature in the finer proportions of genius, sanctified and illustrated by Divine grace. It is curious, and almost amusing, to notice that Samuel Johnson quite tamed down his rugged temper and speech when he wrote the life of Watts. He speaks of him as one who maintained orthodoxy and charity not only in his works but in his innermost nature: not a discourteous or disrespectful word flaws the sketch he has written.

Watts was the Melancthon of his times,—not only in the ranks of Nonconformity, but within the pale of the Establishment there was no other mind so resembling the mild and uniform spirit, and graced by the many-coloured scholarship of the great Reformer. It cannot indeed be expected that those should know or care for Watts, who are not in affinity with his mild and temperate, and yet majestic nature. Equally removed from the servility which would have enslaved, or the fanaticism which would have inflamed, the portrait of Watts is one which will be studied to advantage at all times. When Johnson characterized the philosophical and literary writings of Dr. Watts as “productions which, when a man sits down to read, he suddenly feels himself constrained to pray,” he also describes the influence which

the reading or the study of his whole life is calculated to have upon the mind. It is not fertile in personal incidents, but it has been well remarked that the Christian biography has other objects—it may be hoped that many other biographies have higher objects—than that of merely exciting the imagination, or agitating the mind by the recital of romantic adventures, brilliant actions, or daring exploits. Watts reminds us of that saying of Richard Sibbes, that “a Christian must be neither a dead sea nor a raging sea.” His frequent illnesses, as in the case of Richard Baxter, “set him upon learning to die, and thus he learned how to live.” For the greater portion of his life he lived painfully within sight of the world to come; he hovered on the border-land of life; he is a fine illustration of power in weakness, and he adds another to the list of those men who surprise us by the results of amazing industry, plied beneath all the interferences of sickness, and a weak and fragile frame.

Thanks are due, and are hereby heartily rendered, to the Rev. Herman Carlyle, LL.B., of Southampton, for permission to engrave the portrait from the vestry of Above Bar Chapel—it has never been engraved before, and is believed to be the portrait presented by his pupil, early in life, to the Rev. John Pinhorne, master of the Southampton Grammar School; and also to J. Hunter, Esq., of Dr. Williams' Library, for his invariable courtesy, and for permission, obtained through him, to use the portrait formerly the property of Miss Abney, and the bust, of which also engravings are given in the work.

E. PAXTON HOOD.

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