

CHRISTIAN BIOGRAPHY.

LIFE OF
THE REV. JOHN HOWE.

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ABRIDGED.

Religious Tract Society,

Instituted 1799;

PUBLISHED AND SOLD AT THE DEPOSITORY, 56, PATER
NOSTER ROW; BY J. NISBET, 21, BERNERS STREET;
AND OTHER BOOKSELLERS.

London: J. Rider, Printer, 14, Bartholomew Close.

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REV. JOHN HOWE.

Mr. JOHN HOWE was born May 17, 1630. The place of his birth was Loughborough, of which town his father was for some time the worthy minister. I have heard his father commended as a person of singular piety and probity; and his mother as a woman of distinguished sense.

The father of Mr. Howe was settled in the parish of Loughborough by archbishop Laud, and afterwards thrust out by the same hand, on account of his siding with the puritans, contrary to the expectation of his promoter. He was one of those who could not be satisfied to give in to that nice and punctilious conformity, upon which that prelate laid so great a stress; and therefore it was not thought fit to suffer him to continue in the exercise of his ministry in that populous town. Great was the rigour that was at that time used in the ecclesiastical courts, by which several were driven into America, and others into Holland, and other foreign parts. This worthy person, from whom Mr. John Howe immediately descended, was driven into Ireland, whither he took this his son, then very young, along with him. While they continued in that country, that execrable rebellion broke out, in which so many thousands of the poor protestants, who were altogether unprovided, were so miserably butchered, and a great number of flourishing families ruined and undone, by the enraged papists, whose very tenderest mercies were found to be cruelty. Both father and son were at that time exposed to very threatening danger, the place to which they had retired being for several weeks together besieged and assaulted by the rebels, though without success. A very special providence upon this occasion guarded that life, which

was afterwards made so serviceable to great and considerable purposes. Being driven from thence by the war, which continued for some years, the father returned back into his native country, and settled in the county palatine of Lancaster; and there it was that our Mr. Howe went through the first rudiments of learning, and was trained up in the knowledge of the tongues, though I have not been able to get any certain information, who were his particular instructors, nor any farther notices relating to his infancy and childhood.

He was sent at an early age to Christ College in Cambridge, where falling among such persons as Dr. Henry More, and Dr. Cudworth, of both whom he was a great admirer, I think it is not to be wondered at, that, in his early days, he received that platonic tincture, which so remarkably runs through the writings which he published in his advanced years. As for Dr. More, there was an intimacy between him and Mr. Howe, which continued till the doctor's death.

He continued at Cambridge till he took the degree of B.A. and then removed to Oxford. Mr. Wood, the antiquary, says that he was of Brazen-nose College in Oxon, and was bible clerk there in Michaelmas term, 1648, and that he there took his bachelor's degree, Jan. 18, 1649. It was common then to take the same degree in both universities.

He followed his studies closely; and his great attainments in learning, joined with his exemplary piety, so recommended him, that he was elected fellow of Magdalen College, of which famous society he was a bright ornament, after he had been made demy by the parliament visitors.

The famous Dr. Thomas Goodwin was president of the college, at the same time that Mr. Howe and the others whom I have now mentioned were fellows. He had a gathered church among the scholars of that house, and finding Mr. Howe, who had an established reputation among them, did not offer himself to join

with them, he took occasion to speak to him about it, when they two were by themselves, without any other company with them; and signified his surprise that one of his character for serious piety, should not embrace such an opportunity of christian fellowship, which might be likely to have many good consequences attending it. Mr. Howe, with great frankness, told him, "that the true and only reason why he had been so silent about that matter, was because he understood they laid a considerable stress upon some distinguishing peculiarities, for which he had no fondness, though he could give others their liberty to take their own way, without censuring them, or having any unkind thoughts of them; but that if they would admit him into their society upon catholic terms, he would readily become one of them." The doctor embraced him, and told him "he would do so with all his heart; and that to his knowledge, it would be much to the satisfaction and edification of all that were concerned:" and he thereupon became a member of that society.

Mr. Howe's promotion and reputation in the college, and through the university, added new spurs to his diligence and application, which was so great, that he furnished himself with a large fund of rational and theological learning, the fruits whereof were very conspicuous in his following life. He took the degree of M.A. July 9, 1652. By this time he had not only gone through a course of philosophy, conversed closely with the heathen moralists, read over the accounts we have remaining of pagan theology, the writings of the schoolmen, and several systems and common places of the reformers, and the divines that succeeded them; but, as he himself signified to one from whom I had it, he had also thoroughly studied the sacred scriptures, and from thence drawn up a body of divinity for himself and his own use, which he saw very little occasion afterwards to vary from, in compliance with the schemes of others