

## William Cameron of the "Paraphrases."

THERE came recently into my possession a small octavo volume, beautifully printed, bearing the title | Offices | of | Devotion | suited to the | Principal Branches | of | Natural Religion | by | James Foster, D.D. | MDCCLIV | . The book has no printer's name or place of publication. According to the D. N. B., Foster was an English Nonconformist divine in the first half of the 18th century, minister for some years of a fashionable congregation in London, who possessed a great reputation for a certain facile eloquence. A current saying of the time ran, "Those who have not heard Farinelli sing and Foster preach, are not qualified to appear in genteel company". Pope's lines will be recalled :

Let modest Foster, if he will, excel  
Ten Metropolitans in preaching well ;

and Johnson's characteristically pungent comment : "What do you suppose, Sir, Pope meant ?" "Sir, he hoped to vex somebody".

Foster wrote several books, Arian and even Deistic in their theology, and commonplace and stilted in expression, of which the *Offices of Devotion* affords a fair specimen. To his credit be it said, that in 1746 when the Jacobite lords were lying in the Tower under sentence of death, he visited them, gave Lord Kilmarnock the Sacrament, and attended him on the scaffold next day. He received his doctor's degree from Marischal College, Aberdeen, and died in 1753.

What gives this little book in its faded brown leather boards its special interest is that, bound at the end and almost doubling its bulk, are some ninety pages evidently designed for notes. Rather more than half of these are filled with Prayers, Meditations, Forms of Service for Baptisms and Marriages, Graces, Vows—some few in Latin, the rest in English, all in a small but beautifully clear handwriting, the ink beginning to fade after more than a hundred-and-fifty years. On the title-page the owner of the book has written his name, *Wm. Cameron, 1773*.

Internal evidence of exact similarity of handwriting and the fact that no other bearing that name was a minister of

the Church of Scotland in the last quarter of the 18th century, make it practically certain that the book belonged to William Cameron, minister of the parish of Kirknewton, 1786 to 1811, author of poems and sermons long since forgotten, but whose work in connection with a certain famous Committee will be remembered, as long as Scotsmen continue to sing the Paraphrases.

With the exception of a few dates little seems to be known about Cameron. He was born in 1751—in Lochaber, says the *Fasti*. The laboriously accurate Rev. James Mearns, however, in Julian's *Dictionary of Hymnology*, states that he "seems to have been born . . . at or near Pananich, a hamlet near Ballater, his father, a son of Cameron of Glen Nevis, being apparently then a farmer in the parish of Glenmuick". Caution, one feels, could no further go. We may take it that his roots were in the ancient Cameron country, a fact that accounts for one of his poems, *Ode on Lochiel's Birthday*.

In his early 'teens we find him at Aberdeen, studying at Marischal College under James Beattie, professor of Moral Philosophy and author of a once famous *Essay on Truth*, an onslaught on David Hume. The astonishing popular success of this book is witnessed to by Reynolds's allegorical painting now in Marischal College. In this is depicted the complacent Beattie in doctor's scarlet robe, his *Essay* tucked under his arm, the Angel of Truth by his side with one hand holding the scales of justice and with the other thrusting down the anguished but helpless figures of Sophistry, Scepticism, and Folly. As the first of these is represented as lean, and the second fat, it was popularly supposed that Sir Joshua had in mind Voltaire and Hume!

Beattie was kind to the young Highland student, and wrote him a letter of excellent advice about his studies. "Exercise yourself in frequent compositions in English Prose. Write your thoughts on every subject, and carefully keep what you write. Attend to the phraseology of the best English writers with a view to correct and improve your English style. We Scotsmen find it a very difficult matter to get rid of the barbarisms of our native dialect".

Beattie did not confine himself to Philosophy, and of his long and didactic poems it will be sufficient to quote the estimate of Professor Saintsbury: "Beattie would have been a poet if he could, and his sedulous efforts and gentle sensibility sometimes bring him within sight, though at a



long distance, of the promised land. But he never reaches it, and his best work is only made up of reminiscences of others' visits, and of far-off echoes of the heavenly music."

Unfortunately Cameron copied his master only too faithfully, and the result is what one might expect—an echo of an echo. The *Poems on Several Occasions* issued by his family two years after his death—in the list of subscribers are the names of Walter Scott, Esq., Advocate, North Castle Street, and Francis Jeffrey, 92 George's Street—are, for the most part, frigid and artificial to a degree. They hardly deserve, as the advertisement prefixed declares, to be "received as a favourable proof of the Author's talents, and as a pleasing memorial of his amiable character which long endeared him not only to his Friends, but to all who enjoyed the benefit of his professional labours in the office of the Ministry". In one poem alone, a continuation of Beattie's *Minstrel* in two books each of sixty-three stanzas—as if the original were not long enough!—the genuine feeling of the man breaks out:

Thou chastest Minstrel of the Scottish grove,  
My friend, instructor, and my dearest pride;  
The tribute due of gratitude and love,  
Permit me here to pay; while I abide,  
Still, in this bleak sojourn, reft of my guide,  
Lonely and sad, without thy wonted smile,  
In every wo that solace kind supplied;  
Beset with snares of Selfishness and Guile,  
Extending now so wide their domination vile.

To thee I owe whate'er this heart can boast,  
Of pious, just, benevolent or true;  
When, in the Sophist's thorny labyrinth lost,  
With nought but Desperation dark in view;  
Thy energetic voice of Truth I knew,  
Warning the wanderer of Confusion's fate,  
The gathering storm of Anarchy, t'eschew,  
By pride engender'd, and profane debate,  
Threatening each holy fane, each hoary tower of State.

Beattie was much interested in the revision of the Psalter, though his proposals thereanent, published in a pamphlet in 1778, never took effect. He was never a member of the Committee on Paraphrases, though he was on intimate terms with many of its number, and it was probably owing to his influence that Cameron was introduced to the work by which his name is remembered. Most of the members were busy ministers and professors and pro-

fessional men, who were quite glad to hand over most of the work of revision to the young licentiate who had come to Edinburgh with good recommendations. Their action was amply justified. It was soon manifest that Cameron—though his original work, as seen in *Paraphrases* xiv. *While others crowd the house of mirth*, and xvii. *Rulers of Sodom ! hear the voice*, was as stilted and jejune as could well be imagined,—had an almost uncanny gift of turning other men's lead into gold. There was no law of copyright in those days, nor sensitiveness of conscience in altering another man's work, if either the matter or the manner of it was for any reason judged unsuitable. Cameron seemingly was given a free hand to do his best with such of Dr Watts's hymns as had already been admitted to the collections of 1745 and 1751, and in seventeen of these and fourteen by Dr Doddridge, Dr Robert Blair of *The Grave*, and others, his work is to be seen. Watts at his best, *O God our help in ages past, When I survey the wondrous Cross, Jesus shall reign*, is almost beyond correction or even criticism, but Watts as he too often is, positively cries out for pretty drastic treatment. In Cameron's hands he most emphatically gets it. Occasionally by the felicitous alteration of a word or phrase it may be freely granted that the intrepid reviser's touch makes all the difference. I choose familiar examples for comparison with the *Paraphrases* as we sing them :

There's an inheritance divine  
Reserved against that day :  
'Tis incorrupted, undefiled,  
And cannot waste away.

or

Then will he own my worthless name.

Sometimes he recasts a whole hymn with the happiest results as in the best-known instance of all, Watts's

These glorious minds, how bright they shine !

. . . . .

From torturing pains to endless joys  
On fiery wheels they rode,  
And strangely wash'd their raiment white  
In Jesus' dying blood.

Now they approach a holy God,  
And bow before his throne,  
With hearts enlarged to serve him still,  
And make his glory known.



The Lamb shall lead his heav'ly flock  
 Where living fountains rise ;  
 And love divine shall wipe away  
 The sorrows of their eyes.

Cameron graduated M.A. in 1770. There is no record, so far as I know, of the date when he left Aberdeen or where he took his Divinity course and became a licentiate. The date of Beattie's letter already quoted is 1774, and, as we have seen, the date underneath Cameron's signature on the title-page of *Offices of Devotion* is 1773. The earliest date on the page of Vows, with which I shall deal later, is 1779, and it was not till 1786 that he was presented by the Duke of Buccleuch to his first and only parish, Kirknewton, Mid Lothian.

If one may judge from the less matured handwriting and the colour of the ink, the earliest entry of all in the book is on the last two pages, *Precatio Latina*. The words are very simple and Scriptural, and, what is rather interesting, they are by no means a transcription of the Vulgate, but a direct translation from the English Bible into grammatical but not very idiomatic Latin. At the other end of the book, written on a fly-leaf are four Graces, of which the first two are :

" Pardon our offences, O God, sanctify our natures, make us always sensible of our dependence upon Thee, and command a blessing on the present instance of thy bounty, thro' : Ch : Amen ".

" Sanctify to us O Lord all the events and dispensations of Thy providence. For this and every other testimony of Thy bounty conferred upon us from time to time, accept our grateful acknowledgments : thro' Ch : Amen ".

The prayers in manuscript which follow immediately after the close of Foster's *Offices* begin : *Of Prayer*, 1st, *Invocation and Adoration*, five closely written pages ; 2nd, *Confession* four and a half pages ; 4th, *Petition* eight pages.

Evidently something has been missed out here. The writing is not continuous, and on various blank pages there are prayers and meditations on certain subjects : *On Benevolence*, *On the Power of God*, *On the Goodness of God*, *On the Liberty and Privileges of the Gospel*, one long Prayer of six pages, *Particular Requests* four pages, and two pages on a paraphrase or expansion of *the Lord's Prayer*. Beside these, there is a form of Marriage Service, a form of Baptism, a Baptismal Prayer, and a page of Vows and Resolutions extending over several years, written partly in Latin, partly in English, with several contractions which make

interpretation not very easy—doubtless deliberately on the writer's part. These prayers are not private Devotions like the famous book of Bishop Andrewes. One could never imagine these neatly written-out pages as being at all like the original manuscript of Andrewes, "happy in the glorious deformity thereof, being slubbered with his pious hands, and watered with his penitential tears". They are entirely designed for public use by one who took the conduct of Divine Service very seriously,—so seriously that he was willing to write out page after page, and commit to memory what he had written. In strong contrast with the vague and woolly periods of Foster, Cameron's prayers are definite, very Scriptural, and wholly free from the *fine* and artificial language of his poems. "Create in us, O God! clean hearts, and root out thereof all covetous affections and desires, and let it be our chief care and concern to lay up a treasure in heaven and provide for eternity, so that, being delivered from pride and vainglory, from a fond conceit of ourselves, or a mean opinion of others, from a censorious or uncharitable spirit, from an envious and malicious temper, and from all those sinful and corrupt affections that are so hateful in thy sight, we may be endued with that wisdom which is first pure and then peaceable, with meekness and humility which is in Thy sight of so great price, and with all those holy and Christian dispositions which thou lovest, and delightest to find in the sons of men. . . . We most humbly beseech Thee, O Lord, who art thoroughly acquainted with all our wants, and knowest what is best and most fitting, both for our souls and bodies, to grant us whatever thy unerring wisdom sees to be good for us, whether we ask it or not, and withhold those things which would be detrimental to us, even altho' we should be so foolish as to ask them".

Long as the sentences are, each clause falls into its own place, and contributes to the march and momentum of the whole. The style and atmosphere are certainly of a very different fashion from that of the present time. But when one remembers the familiarity or the journalese on the one hand, or the preciousness and affectation on the other, which one so often hears in public prayer nowadays, one may well wonder if worshippers are brought to the very heart of things as nearly as were the good people of Kirknewton a hundred and fifty years ago.

The same grave and reverent note is heard in the short address in the *Form of Marriage*. "I hope you have both



duly considered, and still will make it your duty to consider, more and more the respective duties that are incumbent upon you to perform in this particular state into which you have now entered : that you constantly endeavour to live in the habit of mutual affection on the principles of virtue and religion, mutually to assist and comfort each other, alleviating the various cares and concerns of the marriage state, to cultivate love, peace, and unanimity between your selves, and to follow peace to all men . . . . Be frequent and earnest at the throne of grace in praying with and for one another, thus making your house and family a little temple of the worship of God, by which you may hope to be blessed in your basket and store, and to enjoy his continual guidance and protection ”.

Perhaps the most human touch in the whole MSS. is the page immediately before the Latin prayer at the end. It contains a series of Vows written at different times, each carefully dated. They are mostly in Latin of a somewhat primitive kind, and one feels that it is only due to the writer to keep them, as he would have wished, in what Gibbon calls “ the obscurity of a learned language ”. Some of the words are indistinctly written.

“ Hoc die Sabbati 3<sup>tio</sup> Nonas Julii 1779 ita statuo Deo juv : me quotidie, matutino tempore et vespertino, aliquid spatii precatione Deo dedicaturum, ab omni vitii aspectu etiam in mente summo animo aversurum, si a conscientia sit damnatum oratione jam conscripta, de graduali vitii progressu in animo. Ita adjuvat me Deus ”.

“ 16th August, 1804, 7 o'clock a.m. Ita statuo dehinc ire cubitum hora 11<sup>ma</sup> p.m. et surgere ante 7<sup>ma</sup> horam a.m. utpote somnus et diuturna quies debilitat et quatit nervos et stomachum et spiritum obumbrat melancholia ”.

“ 1st Jany., 1805. Abjuro Aquam Vitae per se, Herbam Tentaculi\*(?) omnino—pro uno epulo pleno, cupio frui tribus modicis per diem, sed nunquam quarta merenda ”.

Of other works published by Cameron in his lifetime there is room to mention only two. The first is *The Abuse of Civil and Religious Liberty*, a sermon preached at the opening of the Synod of Lothian and Tweeddale on November 13th, 1792. The sermon is immensely long, thirty-four closely printed pages, and must have occupied at least an hour and a half in delivery. The reason for its

\* *Note*.—I am not quite sure what this is—perhaps that potent old Scottish cordial, *Rosa Solis*, compounded of whisky and the “tentacular herb” Sundew (*Rosa Solis*), a dram of which, it will be remembered, in *The Heart of Midlothian*, Mrs Glass offers to Mr Archibald, as something of which he will be “ nane the waur ”.

publication was that so often adduced in similar circumstances—the earnest solicitation of friends who felt that “the doctrines therein upheld were pointed against real and radical evils which are seen and felt widely and unhappily, prevalent at this very hour”. The text is I. Peter, ii., 16. “As free, and not using your liberty as a cloak for maliciousness”, and in the discourse the preacher considers the abuse of liberty both religious and civil in making it a cloak for maliciousness or any evil, and explains the duty of his hearers in this respect, as Christians, as the servants of God, and as the subjects of civil government.

Cameron is an uncompromising Church-and-State man, and has no doubt whatever as to the soundness of the position which he expounds and enforces with resounding rhetoric. “Next to the total want of establishments, which would soon produce the total want of all religion, is that boundless rage of schism, by which the great body of the Church is rent in pieces, and frittered down into a thousand petty discrepant sects of no vigour or permanency, where the light of truth is almost entirely lost, or obscured amid the dust raised by the contending parties . . . . We cannot pretend to be exempted from the defects attending every human institution, but we may justly boast of one of the purest churches and best placed establishments ever formed under heaven”. Again, “We cannot pretend to say that our Government is perfect, and entirely free from abuses; but we have this comfort and security, that there is inherent in the very nature and form of our excellent constitution, a vital energy capable of rectifying these abuses, and that we may have any grievances redressed in a legal and constitutional manner, without an appeal to the people at large, which is highly imprudent and dangerous, and directly subversive of lawful authority. This would be setting up the authority of club-law to overawe and dictate to legal power; and that government which cannot repress such seditious usurpation, and maintain its proper power and dignity, is unworthy to be preserved, as unable to defend and secure the rights and liberties of its subjects”.

One remembers Braxfield's full-blooded address at the trial of Thomas Muir in the following year, 1793, accusing him of trying to overturn “our present happy Constitution, the happiest, the best, and the most noble Constitution in the world. To promote Parliamentary reform was to be guilty of sedition. Mr Muir might have known that no



attention could be paid by Parliament to such a rabble. What right had they to representation? A Government in every country should be just a corporation, and in this country it is made of the landed interest, which alone has a right to be represented".

In explanation, at least, of Cameron's attitude, it may be recalled that at the very time, almost to a day, of the delivery of his sermon, the army of the newly constituted French Republic won its first pitched battle at Jemappes, and that, two months later, Louis XVI. was executed, and that everywhere "men's hearts were failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which were coming on the earth." More modern parallels need only be mentioned in passing.

Turning to something much pleasanter, we have Cameron's description of Kirknewton in the Old Statistical Account, great part of which might well have been written by Galt. Under *Miscellaneous Remarks*: "About fifty years ago it was usual for the most substantial farmers to appear at Church and Market in home-spun cloth and plaiden hose. Now their menial servants and cottagers are equipped in English broadcloth, silk and satin. This turn for finery is a great loss to them as they live up to their wages, notwithstanding their being so high" (one shilling to one shilling and twopence in summer and tenpence in winter a day, for a woman, sixpence). "Thus they enter into a married state with their whole substance upon their back, especially women: and when sickness or any misfortune prevents their daily labour, they immediately sink into the depth of poverty. It is generally observed that the inhabitants of villages are more licentious and dissipated than those who live in separate and sequestered hamlets and are employed in agriculture. The almost universal use of tea and spirits, of an inferior quality, tends greatly to hurt both the health and morals of the lower people".

Under *Manners*: "The people in general are sober and industrious, and that wild and gloomy fanaticism which formerly raged with such turbulent unhallowed zeal, seems now, except among very few over the whole country as well as here, to wear a milder and brighter aspect, and the rancour of party spirit is daily abating, as also that rage of schism which once prevailed, so hurtful to the peace of society, and to the interests of religion. . . . The middle ranks of the people maintain much decency of character, with regard both to a religious deportment and to honesty of manners. They are emerging from the gloom

of ignorance, rudeness, and superstition, and as yet are happily strangers to the vitious refinement, scepticism, and licentiousness which, from the example of the metropolis have lately much infested the neighbourhood. Some loose and libertine principles, the poisonous spawn of a false philosophy, and false patriotism, have recently corrupted the minds of half-learned witlings and smatterers in Science, who implicitly receive their opinions at second-hand. . . . One cause of the uncommon number of sectaries (277) is that a Burgher meeting-house was several years ago erected in the parish, and another of the Anti-Burgher kind on the borders of it, which at their first erection were much crowded : but which, however, have not gained seven proselytes from the Parish Church for the last seven years ; they rather seem to be on the decline. These establishments must be a heavy burden upon poor people ; but they are productive of worse consequences in directly counteracting the design of Christianity, which is to make men live together as brethren ; and in supporting superstition and fanaticism, which are mistaken by many for religion, and maintained with a violence and flaming zeal proportioned to the ignorance of their deluded votaries ”.

Poor Mr Cameron ! The times for him were much out of joint, and, unlike his contemporary, the Rev. Micah Balwhidder, minister of the parish of Dalmailing, he was not able to envisage a state of things when, as that good man prophesied, “ by the mollifying influence of knowledge the time will come to pass that the tiger of Papistry will lie down with the lamb of Reformation, and the vultures of Prelacy be as harmless as the Presbyterian doves ; when the Independent, the Anabaptist, and every other order and denomination of Christians, not forgetting even those poor wee wrens of the Lord, the Burghers and Anti-Burghers, will peck from the hand of patronage and dread no snare ”.\*

I wish there was a portrait of Cameron so that we could have some definite idea of the outward aspect of the man who walked about the roads at Kirknewton and went in and out of its red-tiled cottages doing his duty faithfully among his people, as the Session Records, written in the same beautifully clear penmanship as the manuscript prayers, abundantly testify. Local traditions about him are vague and scanty. One relates to his taste for astronomy. Part of the present Manse dates from his time or before it,

\* *Annals of the Parish*. Chapter LI.—Year 1810.



and in one of the rooms upstairs, said to have been his study, with an outlook to the Pentlands, can still be seen on the floor several circles marked by brass-headed nails. These, I was informed, were placed by him as a help in calculating the courses of the stars, and we can imagine the minister at his window, some clear moonless winter night, prospect-glass in hand, watching Orion stoop and wheel in the southern sky.

A large family of children were born in the manse, seven sons and four daughters, the youngest of whom, Helen, married Alexander Christison, minister at Foulden in the Merse. She, like her mother before her, was a mother of many children, several of them notable in their day. I remember, many years ago, standing in Foulden Churchyard reading the truly remarkable family record on the Christison tomb-stone. Some had died in infancy, three grew up to be pioneers in the early days of Colonial life in Australia, one was drowned, one died at sea, one, bearing his grandfather's name, Cameron, was killed by pirates in China. Underneath the long list of sons of the manse so widely scattered have been placed the words of proud and reticent faith, "Seek Him that maketh the seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning".

No such memorial exists in Kirknewton. The church in which Cameron preached has long been a ruin, and in the graveyard with its sunny southern slope, no stone marks the spot where he was buried. He died on the 17th of November, 1811, in the sixtieth year of his age, and the twenty-sixth of his ministry.

One cannot help thinking that, though more than a century and a half has passed since his ordination, part of a long-standing debt might, even yet, be paid. A few pence contributed by every minister of the Church of Scotland who has given out to be sung "How bright those glorious spirits shine" would make it possible to set up some marble tablet or brass, commemorating in his own parish the name, the worth, and the altogether distinctive contribution to the worship of the Church made by William Cameron of Kirknewton.

WILLIAM T. CAIRNS.