

Sir Matthew Hale.

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THE tercentenary of the birth of so illustrious a personage as Sir Matthew Hale, Lord Chief Justice of England in the reign of Charles II. (which occurred in November, 1609), must not be allowed altogether to escape notice. As a lawyer and a judge he was renowned, not merely for his vast erudition and immense industry, but also for his stern integrity and delicate sense of honour, which caused him to be trusted by Royalist and Roundhead alike. During the fierce times of political strife he was employed by many of the King's party. He appeared as counsel for the Earl of Strafford, for Archbishop Laud, for the Duke of Hamilton and Lord Capel, and was appointed to defend the King himself. Under the Commonwealth he was prevailed upon to become a judge, while at the Restoration he was made Lord Chief Baron, and eleven years later Lord Chief Justice of England. His practical sagacity was no less conspicuous than his amazing knowledge. We are told in Burnet's "History of His own Time" that after the Great Fire in 1666 an Act was passed for rebuilding the City of London which gave Lord Chief Justice Hale a great reputation, for it was drawn up with so true a judgment and so great foresight that the whole city was raised out of its ashes, without any suits of law, which, adds the Bishop, "if that Bill had not prevented them, would have brought a second charge on the city, not much less than the fire itself had been."

It is not, however, in his legal capacity, as a lawyer and a judge, that we desire to commemorate Sir Matthew Hale; it is rather in his religious character, as a man of deep spirituality, as one who in that age of sectarian bitterness and controversy maintained a calm and constant sense of the eternal verities, a Christian whom no particular party could claim, who was on terms of intimacy with High Churchmen like Seth Ward

Bishop of Salisbury, with men of latitude like Tillotson and Bishop Wilkins, with Nonconformists like Richard Baxter.

As a young man at Oxford—so we learn from Bishop Burnet's charming little biography, "The Life and Death of Sir Matthew Hale, Kt., Chief Justice of England," Hale loved fine clothes and delighted much in company, and being of a strong robust body, he was a great master of all those exercises that required much strength. He was, however, shortly afterwards, when studying law at Lincoln's Inn, led to more serious thought by a circumstance which occurred at a convivial meeting, when one of his companions "fell down as dead before them." This, says Burnet, wrought an entire change on him; now he forsook all vain company, and divided himself between the duties of religion and the studies of his profession. For many years he worked at the rate of sixteen hours a day, rising always betimes in the morning, spending very little time in eating or drinking, and entering into no correspondence by letters except about necessary business or matters of learning. His strenuous life and keen ability soon attracted the attention of Noy, the Attorney-General, and of that great and learned antiquary, Mr. Selden, under the inspiration of whose friendship he extended his studies to matters beyond the range of his own profession. At this time he was much impressed by the life of Pomponius Atticus, written by Cornelius Nepos, whom he resolved to take as his model, whereby he was enabled to preserve his integrity and to live securely during the unhappy times of the Civil War.

Amid his intense application to business Judge Hale did not neglect his religious duties. Prayer "gave a tincture of devotion" to his secular concerns: it was, he says, "a Christian chemistry converting those acts which are materially natural and civil into acts truly and formally religious, whereby all life is rendered interpretatively a service to Almighty God." He was a strict observer of Sunday, on which day he never once failed for six-and-thirty years to attend Divine service. This observation, we learn, he once made when a fit of ague first

interrupted that constant course of duty. Besides this regularity of public worship, he was further accustomed to call all his family together, and repeat to them the heads of the sermons, with some suitable additions of his own ; after which he had a habit of shutting himself up for two or three hours, which he spent either in his own devotions, or in writing down such profitable meditations as occurred to him. In this way he produced a large number of manuscripts, which were found tied together "in bundles" at his death. One work on the "Defence of Christianity" he sent anonymously to Bishop Wilkins to desire his judgment on it ; but he that brought it would give no other account of the author but "that he was not a clergyman." The Bishop and Dr. Tillotson read the manuscript with delight, wondering who the writer could be. At last Dr. Tillotson guessed it must be the Lord Chief Baron, to which the other presently agreed. So they went to him immediately, and the Bishop thanking him for the pleasure his work had given them, Sir Matthew blushed extremely, not without some displeasure, thinking that the person he had trusted had discovered him. But the Bishop soon cleared his friend, and told him "he had discovered himself, for the learning of that book was so various that none but he could be the author of it."

Towards the end of his life, when living at Acton, Justice Hale formed a close intimacy with Richard Baxter, and the two men often held converse together, chiefly on philosophical matters, such as the nature of spirits and the immortality of the soul. Baxter himself seems to have regretted that his distinguished friend was not more communicative on matters of personal religion ; but, unlike the Puritans of his day, the Lord Chief Justice was reticent on such subjects. His discourse, Baxter tells us, was also sparing about religious controversies ; but that, while he did not believe in any Divinely appointed form of ecclesiastical government, he yet thought that Episcopacy was most fit and convenient. He greatly lamented that so many worthy ministers were silenced, and would fain

have drawn up a new Act of Uniformity, such as would embrace all reasonable men. In his discourse on the "Nature of True Religion," published after his death by Richard Baxter, Sir Matthew Hale gives clear and characteristic expression to what he conceived to be of the essence of Christianity. The whole passage is, indeed, a golden one, but we have only space for a single paragraph :

"He that fears the Lord of heaven and earth, walks humbly before Him, thankfully lays hold of the message of redemption by Christ Jesus, strives to express his thankfulness by the sincerity of his obedience, is sorry with all his soul when he comes short of his duty, walks watchfully in the denial of himself, and holds no confederacy with any lust or known sin ; . . . is true to his promise, just in his actions, charitable to the poor, sincere in his devotions ; . . . that dare not do an unjust act though never so much to his advantage, and all this because he sees Him that is invisible, and fears Him because he loves Him, fears Him as well for His goodness as His greatness. Such a man, whether he be an Episcopal or a Presbyterian or an Independent, whether he wears a surplice or wears none, whether he hears organs or hears none, whether he kneels at the Communion or for conscience' sake stands or sits, he hath the life of religion in him, and that life acts in him, and will conform his soul to the image of his Saviour, and walk along with him to eternity, notwithstanding his practice or non-practice of these indifferents."

To Richard Baxter, in his will, the Lord Chief Justice bequeathed a legacy of forty shillings, with which the good Presbyterian minister bought himself a great Bible, on the fly-leaf of which, beneath his friend's portrait, he wrote a long inscription, from which the following is taken :

"Sir Matthew Hale, that unwearied student, that prudent man, that solid philosopher, that famous lawyer, that pillar and basis of justice ; . . . that godly, serious, practical Christian, the tower of goodness and all good men ; . . . that pattern of honest plainness and humility, who, while he fled from the

honours that pursued him, was yet Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench. . . . This man, so wise, so good, so great, bequeathing me in his testament the legacy of forty shillings, merely as a testimony of his respect and love, I thought this book, the testament of Christianity, the meetest purchase by that price to remain in memorial of the faithful love which he bare and long expressed to his inferior and unworthy but honouring friend, who thought to have been with Christ before him, and waiteth for the day of his perfect conjunction with the spirits of the just made perfect."



Easter Morning.

"At early dawn they came unto the tomb, . . . and found not the body of the Lord Jesus."—LUKE XXIV. 1-3.

AT early dawn, the freshest hour of day,
When the resistless sun
Comes forth to run :

In early Spring, when in their bright array,
After long buried hours,
Spring up the flowers :

At early dawn they hasted to the tomb,
After the Sabbath's rest,
Seeking its Guest :

In early Spring to Calvary they clomb,
Where in that garden lone
The SEED was sown.

But from the tomb the everlasting SUN
Of Righteousness had ris'n
From out His pris'n ;

And the late buried SEED—new life begun—
From out the fecund earth
Had sprung to birth !