

Thomas Tryon, 1634-1703.

AS Baptists we are sometimes charged with claiming, on the slightest pretext, any considerable person as an adherent. Claims need to be distinguished by our critics and ourselves. For instance, the broad assertion that John Milton was a Baptist, apart from some qualifying epithet, may be too inclusive; for the full confessions of faith, the genius and temper of the Anabaptists of the seventeenth century, in England, cast no spell upon him. It was our practice with regard to baptism by immersion he approved; the integrity of our mode, when traced to primitive precedents, he endorsed. It may be in one point of contact only, that men may be in harmony with us; this should be scrupulously indicated. Candour and precision should characterize our statements; we must not be more courteous in our inclusions, than jealous in our disclaimers.

Thomas Tryon, the subject of this brief sketch, held no ambiguous relation to our body at one period of his life. This he makes abundantly clear in his "Memoirs." He was in full fellowship with a church of "Anabaptists" in London for a period; was the genuine contemporary of John Bunyan—being born six years later—and must have read some of the stirring pamphlets of John Milton still wet from the press. He is here introduced simply as an illustration of the influence of Baptists in London during the seventeenth century upon the young life of the country, that then, as now, poured into the Metropolis. Though he did not remain in fellowship with our people, his first inspirations to a singularly noble life were received from them. Having been acquainted with the writings of Tryon for some time, and always annexing any little volume that came to hand, I at last fortunately stumbled upon his "Memoirs—written by himself." It is a curious, introspective, physiological, psychological little book. In temper calm and confident more resembling Franklin's Life than Bunyan's Grace Abounding, yet at times reminding one of the latter, though lacking its passion and grip.

He opens his life's story by anticipating that people may attribute to him wrong motives in his effort; but affirms that his aims are:

"First, to make an acknowledgment and erect a monument to the Divine Goodness, for his manifold mercies. Second, to engage my own heart to a more humble frame, and great thankfulness for many mercies received. Thirdly, to encourage others, by the example of God's gracious dealing with me, to a cheerful dependence upon his Providence in the ways of Humility, Industry, Temperance, Cleanliness, and Mercy, which are always accompanied with an inward peace and satisfaction of mind, and conduce to a greater knowledge of God, and themselves, than otherwise they can attain to."

Tryon's origin was a very humble one. His parents were named William and Rebecca, who resided at an obscure village called Bibury,¹ in Gloucestershire. Where Thomas was born "in the year 1634; on the 6th of September, at a little before Eleven of the Clock, in the forenoon." His father was a "Tyler and Plaisterer, an honest and sober man of good reputation, but having many children, was forced to bring them all to work betimes." "About five years old," he says, "I was put to school, but I scarcely learnt to distinguish my letters, before I was taken away, to work for my living. Being about six years of age, I had a dream wherein it pleased God to shew me the Kingdom of Love, and the Kingdom of Darkness. I thought that God appeared to me and talked with me Face to Face in a very friendly and loving manner." Many other dreams he had, and attached much significance to them as factors in his life; he affirms that "they pointed out the Work the Great Creator ordained me for." In subsequent years he wrote a book on "Dreams," providing a more rational philosophy on this subject than some writings advance.

At first he was employed in spinning and carding wool, and when eight years of age could earn two shillings a week. At eleven he varied spinning by keeping sheep. At twelve he assisted his father. At "thirteen years old," he says, "I could not read, and I bought a Primer." Having become possessed of two sheep he gave one to a lame young man to teach him to make letters that he might write. From this time he seems to have made good progress. Are these short and simple annals of a poor lad too mean for record? I think not.

¹ Not Bilbury as stated in the New Edition of the Encyclopædia Britannica.

Now follows the great change in his life. Between seventeen and eighteen, he says:

“Having saved Three Pounds by my management of my sheep, I went directly for *London*, and with the money bound myself Apprentice to a Castor-maker at *Bridewel-Dock*, near *Fleet Street*, and I informed my Father what I had done, and he was well pleased, and commended my conduct. My master was an honest sober man, one of those so called *Anabaptists*. After I had been with him about Two Years, I inclined to that Opinion; and was Baptized after their way, and admitted into a congregation of them.”

It is this passage that is so pertinent to our purpose. Words could not make a fact clearer. Possibly the name of his master, his church, and his minister; also some entry in a church minute book, with his name in a roll of members might be found; but a search for these particulars, I have not, at this time, been able to make. The passage is a distinctly creditable testimony to the high-toned character of the London Baptist of the mid-seventeenth century; and of the religious nurture extended by the prosperous citizen to his rustic apprentice.

A further passage bears cordial witness to the equity and consideration of his employer. “Sweating” does not seem to have been a vice of the time. The severities he endured, at this period, were all self imposed. He says:

“I was not put upon this tedious daily working by my master; for in our trade 'tis customary for apprentices to have a certain task allotted them; which task being handy at my trade, I not only fulfilled with ease, but by that my assiduous working, earned Five, Six, or Seven Shillings a week, which my master always readily paid me; and therewith I furnished myself with Books, paid my Tutors, and served all my occasions, but indeed, having no other way to raise money, was thereby forced to work thus early and late.”

Tryon, however, did not abide in close fellowship with the Baptist community; his words are: “I continued in that opinion about Three Years: In which time I was mightily addicted to reading and study.” The memoir now becomes disappointing, not chiefly because our author ceases to meet with his Baptist brethren; for he does not seem to have broken with them in any violent manner; but because he gives no detailed account of his association with any other body of Christians. It is, however, clear that for about five years he assembled for worship with

Baptists; and they have the distinction of instructing him in spiritual truth, and of receiving him into Christian communion.

Following the sequence of events as recorded in the "Memoirs," we are next brought into contact with his study of astrology, a science much in vogue at this time; many of its professors being men of sincere philosophic spirit, others mere charlatans. This he recognises in forcible language. His personal indebtedness to this pursuit is thus stated:

"But the great benefit I found in this study, was, That it enabled me in some measure to discern the Complexion and Qualities of Animals, Minerals, and Vegetations; for no judicious man can deny the influence of Celestial or inferior Bodies; and therefore he that is most knowing in their Natures and Operations, he distinguishes best the Natures and Qualities of the things of this World, and likewise best understands the humane Nature, and himself; for there is an Astrology within Man, as well as without him. A Microcosmical Sun and Moon, and all the rest of the Planets, we carry about us; that is, the qualities of our own Natures correspond with, and are derived from the seven grand qualities, or glorious Governors of the great world."

It was now, he says, about his twenty-third year:—

"And the blessed Day-Stars of the Lord began to arise and shine in my Heart and Soul, and the Voice of Wisdom continually and most powerfully called upon me for Separation and Self-denial; and through his great Mercy I was enabled to obey, retrenching many vanities, and flying all Intemperance; for then I betook myself to Water only for Drink and forbore Eating any kind of Flesh or Fish, and confining myself to an abstemious self-denying Life."

Thus Tryon received his vision and call to his prophet-like service; and never was man more devoted to his ideal, nor more consistent in its advocacy, both by teaching and example. From this time he became an apostle of the "Simple Life"; only much more simple than advocated to-day. The amount of nutriment he subsisted upon at times was incredibly small. Abstinence from all strong drinks was strictly imposed. He opened a relentless attack upon the insanitary conditions of the people; and introduced many social reforms. He was regarded as a fanatic by many. His sincerity was so transparent however, his teaching so humane, and his advocacy, both by speech and writing, so eager and continuous, that he secured many disciples. Dietary, including vegetarianism, and spare at that; cleanliness; light

clothing; care of mothers and infants; self-denial, abstinence, and temperance in their fitting degrees; fresh air and gentle exercise, etc.; indeed, a programme so extended was imposed, that in instructions at least the simplicity of the system seemed stultified. He imposes what he calls a "Pythagorian Life, in meats, drinks, exercises, and communications." He is a radical reformer. His call is for an austerity so noble that only heroic spirits will bid for it. For instance, his "Wisdom's Dictates," published 1696, contains many such aphorisms as the following:

"In this way there are no Inns no Ale Houses, but a few poor Cottages; their Beds are clean straw; and the most currantest Money that goes amongst these poor People is Self-denial and content, and their Watch Word is, *Let all Flesh be silent.*"

Being an omnivorous reader he must have been acquainted with some of the works of Jacob Behmen, then being translated by John Sparrow. Traces of his "Theosophy" are found in many passages of Tryon. Thus:

"Thou art to believe that as all the illuminated and beautiful Creatures both of the Celestial and Terrestrial Globe, are the works of the Eternal Creator, and have his Image and Signature stamped upon them, each according to its kind: So likewise, that his Paternal Love, Care, and preserving Power, is equally dispensed to each in due measure, according to its kind, even to the meanest of them."

Another factor in shaping this man's philosophy and character would be Quakerism. This movement was a swiftly rising tide, beating in upon his young manhood, that would take him on its crest and bear him forward. A nature so inward and independent of forms, would inevitably yield to its offer of buoyancy and liberty in the spirit, combined with simplicity of life; albeit the leather garments of George Fox might cause a twinge in his conscience in after years; for were not such garments once the living skins of beautiful creatures, that must, of necessity, be murdered for such vile uses! Certainly the Quakers left decided marks upon him. Hear him on the "Inner-light":

"That every man that is born into the world, is endued with an Eye or Ray of Divine Light, for a Director and Guide to the Mind and Soul; which Holy Voice is as certain, constant and regular in its motions, advices, illuminating echoing, and corresponding operations, as the Illustrious Lamp and Light of the World, the Sun; by whose shining Beams,

and warming splendid Rays, all the Children of the Creator are preserved and sustained."

These elements went to the making of many men of this period. "Muggletonians," "Fifth Monarchy men," and others. They did not always issue in a character so spiritual, clean and sweet as Tyron's. He was on the gentle, humane, and practical side of life, an anticipation of John Woolman himself. He carried to the end something of the same vigour of thought, and robust character, imparted by his early "Anabaptist" teaching, but cast off something of its severe Calvinism, and ceased to attach due importance to the New Testament ordinances. He organised a sort of family religion, with services in the homes of the people. Thus there were "Governors and Inspectors over Ten families." "You shall keep one Day in a Week as a Sabbath," he says; "that is, you shall set apart one Day in a Week, for Prayer and Worship of the Creator, which Day shall be *Sunday*, or any other Day that the public Government has ordained." Respecting place and manner of worship he says: "Learn to know thy Teacher in thyself, and then thou wilt need no Houses of Brick, Stone, Timber, or outward Temples, to meet for God's worship, but every man shall withdraw himself from the noise of men, and worship the Lord alone in the centre of their souls." At meal times he inspires the following: "Before eating, the Head of the Family shall have a silent Pause for about Three Minutes, and then shall speak something in praise of the Eternal Creator." And the same at the close.

Another effort at the regeneration of society is registered in these records. A Christian Republic—a Holy Commonwealth—was aimed at. A pure, loving, spiritual community was the desideratum. But through lack of idealism, charity, and spiritual power; through want of binding fibre and sincere union, the heaven-born conception is not realized; and the high-minded prophet and his lovely dream, are to-day as though they had not been. No, not quite! Seeds of social reform, of holy ideals, were sown, which are still bearing fruit.

In returning to the "Memoirs," I can only touch a few salient points. Tryon married and became the father of two sons and three daughters. His wife did not share his ascetic views, possibly to be noted as one element of failure. He took voyages to Holland and Barbadoes in connection with his business. "At about thirty-five years of age," he says, "I attempted to learn music, and made pretty good progress with the Base-viol." This seems to have been the only recreation he had. He is described physically as being "of middle stature. A little sloping,

slender but very compacted, active and nimble. Aspect discovering something extraordinary; his air cheerful, lively and brisk, but grave with something of austerity though he was of easiest access. Through his great Temperance, Regularity, and prudent management of himself, by the strength of his Spirits and Vigour of his Mind, he was capable of any fatigue even to the last." He died on the 21st of August, 1703. John Dunton, in his "Life and Errors," says of him: "He was a man of sweet temper, an excellent husband, and very sincere in his dealings." A testimony not to be despised, coming from such a quarter. He was the author of many books, most of which appear below.

On the last page of the "Memoirs" is this quaint epitaph:

Here lies his Dust, whose Heavenly Mind
 Mov'd, like Angelick Nature unconfin'd;
 Which lest his Body shou'd control,
 He almost work't it up to Soul:
 What some by Reading, and hard Study wrought,
 He did compendiously by thought:
 Such refin'd Notions to the world he gave,
 As Men with Angels Entercourse might have
 Shewed how to live on cleanest Food,
 To abstain from Flesh, and Fish, and Blood.
 Harmless his Life was, as his Food,
 Both Patriarchal Primitively Good.
 His Works will Eternize his Fame,
 And his best *Epitaph's* his Name:
 In short, here doth Entombed lie
 All of Great *Tryon* that could die.

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JOHN C. FOSTER.