

William Whiston.

MANY of us will be aware that William Whiston was the man who translated into English the works of Josephus. Not many of us, perhaps, know of anything else that he did. Yet to think of him simply as the translator of Josephus is to content oneself with a very partial conception of the man, and one that does him much less than justice. To conceive him as a man of one book, or as exclusively engrossed in the study of a remote antiquity, would indeed be to adopt a notion exactly contrary to the truth. Whiston was a most voluminous writer, with a surprisingly wide range of interests, and these included living enquiries and burning controversies of his own day.

The primary and chief source of information concerning him is the 'Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Mr. William Whiston . . . written by himself' in 1749. Citations in this article are from the Memoirs, if not otherwise assigned. In this work he mentions more than ninety publications which were, in whole or part, the fruit of his own labour. While professor of mathematics at Cambridge, he edited manuals designed to aid the studies of his pupils. But he showed a keen interest also in other sciences, into which mathematics entered. His were days of rapid and startling discovery in the realm of natural science, and no one followed the successive discoveries of his time with a more eager attention, or showed greater promptitude in seeking to apply them, and make them

known. Whiston was in fact one of the pioneers in the delivery of popular scientific lectures, illustrated with experiments. With the same object he also published treatises. Thus he wrote on astronomical phenomena, and on various modes of determining longitude.

But he was a clergyman of the Church of England; and his primary and most enduring concern was the defence, reformation and propagation of her religion. In his scientific studies he had ever an eye to the maintenance and elucidation of the Christian revelation. Thoroughly characteristic of Whiston's lifelong preoccupations is his first published work—'A New Theory of the Earth' etc., (1696). This work embodied an attempt to vindicate the Biblical account of the beginnings and end of the world, on the principles of the new 'philosophy' recently set forth by Sir Isaac Newton. It betrays a serene confidence in the easy reconcilability of science and revelation; which is characteristic of Whiston no less than of his age. With like confidence Whiston demonstrates against the Deist Collins 'The Literal Accomplishment of Scripture Prophecies' (1724.) He ventured upon suggestions for a revision of the Canon, and also for an improved text of the Old and New Testaments. He wrote, further, on the Chronology of the Old Testament, and the Harmony of the four Gospels (1702.) He produced a Scripture History (1748), and a commentary on the Epistles of John (1719.) He made contributions to Biblical Theology and Ethics. He even extracted a system of 'Scripture Politicks' (1717.)

In the promotion of Christian education, elementary as well as university education, he displayed a practical activity. In 1710 he addressed to the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge 'A Memorial for setting up Charity Schools universally

in England and Wales.' He had himself been the principal mover in the erection of Charity Schools in Cambridge, where he personally took part in catechising the children. In this work he made use of 'A Primitive Catechism,' the work of his youngest brother, Daniel, revised by himself (published, 1718.) This serves to call attention to what, after all, was the dearest object of our versatile cleric. It was to recover and reinstate in general acceptance the doctrine, organisation and practice of the primitive Church. By so doing he hoped to eliminate all controversy and schism, and to exhibit a faith impregnable to all assaults from the world of unbelief.

But the circumstance that gives Whiston a special claim upon the attention of readers of these Transactions is that his sincere and courageous pursuit of sacred truth led him eventually into Dissent, and that it was with the Baptists that he found himself ultimately most at home. To trace the steps whereby he advanced to that position is the purpose of the rest of this paper.

I.

William Whiston (1667-1752) was doubly descended from clergy of the Established Church. His father, Josiah Whiston, was rector of Norton-juxta-Twycross, in Leicestershire; his mother, a daughter of the previous rector. There were, however, family circumstances which may have helped in early days to foster that open and friendly attitude which, in mature life, he showed uniformly towards Dissenters. His father had originally been ordained (1653) under the auspices of one of the classical presbyteries of the Commonwealth. After the Restoration, he learned to maintain the unlawfulness of the civil war, and observed with uncommon solemnity the anniversary of Charles I's death. Nevertheless he preserved un-

interrupted his friendship with his brother Joseph, who had actually been chaplain to the regicide, Colonel Harrison. This brother was 'a very pious Dissenter, that wrote several books on Infant Baptism.' William's father also knew and highly respected Richard Baxter. The influence and example of the latter may have contributed something towards the faithfulness with which he discharged in person all the duties of his office.

William was at first taught by his father. 'I was from my Youth brought up with a religious Education, and under deep Impressions of Piety; and in the diligent Study of the Scriptures.' After less than two years' schooling at Tamworth, under a Mr. George Antrobus, whose daughter he subsequently married, he was entered at Clare Hall, Cambridge, in 1686. Here he studied hard, especially in Mathematics. In 1690 he graduated B.A. Next year he was elected a Fellow of his college. In 1693 he graduated M.A., but already felt great difficulty about the required subscriptions. Though desiring to take orders, he scrupled to receive ordination from any bishop who had superseded one that had refused the oath of allegiance to William and Mary 'and so had been deprived for preferring conscience to preferment.' He avoided the difficulty, however, by having recourse to Lloyd of Coventry and Lichfield, who had been a bishop before the Revolution.

Returning to College, Whiston resumed study of his favourite Mathematics, and the then fashionable philosophy of Descartes. But ere long his whole view of the world was changed by the perusal of Newton's Principia. The 'Newtonian Philosophy' was (as we have seen) the inspiration and basis of his 'New Theory of the Earth' published 1696. In 1699 he married and left college. In the previous year he had been presented by Bishop Moor of Norwich to

the living of Lowestoft-cum-Kessingland, where his revenues consisted chiefly of a certain proportion of the local catch of herring and mackerel! Here he strove conscientiously to perform his ministerial duties, on lines that partly recall his father's example. Among other expedients for attracting and instructing a congregation, he set up a 'catechetick Lecture' on summer evenings; 'to which lecture the Dissenters also would come, and by which I always thought I did more good than by my sermons.' During his tenure of the living he refused to sign a license for a new alehouse in Lowestoft; and also, to read in church an excommunication sent him from the ecclesiastical court of Norwich, against a woman accused of calling another by an opprobrious name. Such excommunication he judged a contravention of the strict discipline of the early church, since enquiry disclosed that the epithet in question was commonly believed by the woman's neighbours to be justified.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century he resigned his living in order to become deputy to the Lucasian professor of Mathematics at Cambridge, Sir Isaac Newton, whom he presently succeeded. None the less, his attention continued to be primarily occupied by matters theological and ecclesiastical. It was a time of much unrest and lively discussion in the religious world. There were disputes, dating from the Revolution, about the relation of Church and State, and the powers of Convocation. The Deistic controversy was raging; and a Trinitarian controversy had begun. Reason was steadily contesting with church authority the control of human thought. Since Reformation times, the Christian world had been distracted and weakened by fierce controversies, divisions, persecutions: reason proposed to reduce orthodox Christianity to a simpler faith, in which the various parties could all unite. It was natural that in particular

the cardinal mystery of the faith, the orthodox, i.e. Athanasian doctrine of the Trinity, should become the subject of scrutiny, and attempts at revision. Whiston followed keenly the various controversies of the time, and talked them over with his friends at Cambridge. At the request of one or two of them, he drew up, in 1708, some 'Directions for the Study of Divinity.' In these he made some attempt to distinguish the traditional doctrine of the Trinity from the original doctrine of the primitive church. Quickly becoming sensible of the serious import of the opinions which he had expressed, and of the gravity of the possible consequences to himself from professing them, he set himself to a detailed study of the subject in question, in which he confined himself almost exclusively to the testimonies of the 'most ancient Christian writers. The result of his enquiry was a conviction of the primitivity of that modified form of Arianism known to church historians as Eusebianism. Accordingly, he now affirmed that Jesus Christ, while Son of God in a sense predicable of no (other) creature, begotten of the Father before all ages, and His instrument in all creation and revelation, is 'a Divine Being, or Person, far inferior to his Father in Nature, Attributes and Perfections,' 'entirely subordinate' to him, and, being our God by the Father's appointment, entitled only to secondary worship. (See Primitive Christianity, revived, vol. IV). What more than aught else confirmed him in his view was the import of certain passages in the (so-called) Apostolical Constitutions, to which his attention was first directed by a 'learned friend.' These Constitutions are an early compendium of church law, under the guise of precepts announced by the Apostles themselves. The general opinion of the best scholarship, in Whiston's day as in ours, is that the work is spurious, and assignable in its ultimate form, to the

fourth century, although incorporating some elements as old even as the second century. Whiston, after a careful examination of the evidence, both internal and external, arrived at widely different conclusions, viz. that they are, in the main 'no other than the original laws and doctrines of the Gospel: the New Covenant, or most Sacred Standard of Christianity: equal in their authority to the four Gospels themselves: and superior in authority to the Epistles of single Apostles: some parts of them being our Saviour's own *Original Laws* delivered to the Apostles; and the other parts the Publick Acts of the Apostles themselves met in councils at Jerusalem and Cæsarea, before their death; and this was the constant Opinion and Testimony of the earliest ages of the Gospel.' Certain phrases here used betray the fact that Whiston thought of the Gospel too much as a body of precepts explicitly regulating in detail the beliefs and practices of its adherents for all time. This conception would make it easier for him than it is for us to find the Constitutions genuine. But it was common to many scholars who denied the genuineness. One cannot help suspecting that Whiston found it easy to credit with apostolic authority a work which endorsed his Eusebianism, and further (as he affirmed) 'does most plainly put an end to almost all the Disputes that are now among Christians.'

Whiston hastened to announce his various discoveries to the archbishops; he intimated that he felt obliged to publish such momentous truths, but would accept advice as to the mode of publication. In the course of the next year (1709), his friends began to take alarm at the opinions which they heard that he was advocating; and opponents began to take steps against him. Early in 1710 he gave further offence by publishing an Essay on the Epistles of Ignatius. In it he declared the genuineness of the *longer* of the

two recensions of these epistles then known—another spurious work which lent support to his interpretation of the Trinity; while in a postscript he gave effect to that interpretation in this revised form of the Doxology: 'Glory be to the Father, by the Son, in the Holy Ghost.' Early in October he published, in 'an Historical Preface,' a history of his obnoxious opinions to date. Towards the end of the month, he was cited before the Heads of Colleges, required to renounce his opinions, and despite his protests against their procedure, banished from the University, within a week of his first appearance before them.

Next year his case was brought before Convocation. After some time spent in discussing the proper mode of proceeding against him, and the competency of Convocation to censure his opinions, his writings were examined, certain passages were condemned, and reported to the Queen. She avoided returning any answer, and the proceedings in Convocation fell through. Finally the case was raised before the Court of Delegates. But here too, it was indefinitely suspended, until it was disposed of by an act of grace of the year 1715.

II.

Whiston claims, with truth, that he was prepared to suffer whatever penalties might be incurred by his bold avowal of his views. In saying this he reckoned with the possibility of a rigorous application in his case of the standing laws against dissent. He hints at confiscation, banishment, imprisonment, even jeopardy of life! The actual consequences were serious enough. His professorship was, in October 1711, declared void by the authorities of his university. Other men, who privately held the same views, or were even notorious sceptics, kept their places. Whiston comforted himself with Milton's Abdiel—'faithful

found Among the faithless; faithful only, he.' But he experienced also more material compensations. By the kind interest of Addison and Steele, he gave astronomical lectures at Button's coffee house. In 1721 a considerable subscription, including royal names, was raised for him and his family. Such help, together with the proceeds of other lectures and gifts, some legacies, and generous hospitality from a few friends, enabled Whiston to pursue his dearest projects without anxiety about ways and means.

Whiston had influential friends to whom even preferment did not seem wholly out of the question. Soon after the accession of the house of Hanover, Sir Joseph Jekyl, Master of the Rolls, enquired his feeling respecting a bishopric, should it be offered him. For Whiston it was wholly out of the question, if only because of the doctrinal subscriptions and unapostolic practices he would have to accept and enforce. Decisive by itself was the 'Apostolical Canon' (31) which forbids the obtaining of a bishopric by means of the rulers of this world. There was no subject on which Whiston felt and spoke more strongly than the system of preferment in the Established Church. 'The Expectation of Preferment! . . . The grand thing commonly aimed at, both by Clergy and Laity; and generally the utter ruin of Virtue and Religion among them all.' For preferment's sake, men of Arian or even skeptical views signed the thirty-nine Articles. Whiston was specially shocked when such dishonest subscription was justified to him by Lord Chief Justice King, who had been 'bred up among Dissenters,' on the plea 'We must not lose our usefulness for scruples.' King himself, when Chancellor 'disposed of his preferments almost wholly at the request of such great men as could best support him in his high station.' Whiston gives also several clerical instances of deterioration in character, attributable to the pur-

suit of preferment. 'Happy is that man' he wrote, greatly daring, to Archbishop Wake, in 1721, 'who is not made a worse Christian by being made a Bishop; and thrice happy that man who is not made a much worse Christian, by being made an Archbishop.'

Whiston's experience of the Church of England, contrasted with his views of true Christianity, steadily pushed him towards some form of Dissent. While his case was before Convocation, he was deeply pained by being excluded from the Communion. In remonstrating with the responsible curate, he hinted that, if persisted in, such exclusion might drive him, however reluctant, into separatism.

The promised statement in detail of his views appeared before the end of 1711, as 'Primitive Christianity Revived' in four volumes, to which a fifth was added next year. The contents included the Apostolical Constitutions, in Greek and English, with an Essay to prove them genuine. This concluded with 35 'Inferences from the whole.' The points that more immediately concern our enquiry shall be briefly summarised.

The Constitutions should be added to the Canon of Scripture.—The government of a church by a bishop, presbyters and deacons was set up by the apostles, in accordance with the appointment of Christ himself: these officers are to be elected (and deposed), as ordained in the Constitutions.—To the clergy are entirely confined 'sacred offices, ministrations, and authority properly ecclesiastical.' They are not to intermeddle with worldly affairs and employments.—The exact order for Sunday public worship is prescribed in the Constitutions, including 'the Apostles' own Liturgy.' The Sabbath [Saturday] should be celebrated, in a minor degree.—Wednesdays and Fridays, and some annual occasions are to be observed

as fast-days. In the Eucharist the wine should be mixed with water.—‘Prayers for the faithful departed’ are ‘an original institution of the Gospel.’—Baptism is for those only who have been through a sufficient course of catechising, and is to be administered by trine immersion.—Purity of life is to be enforced by strict discipline, in which the bishop judges, the clergy vote, and the people assent.—Clergy should not marry after ordination, nor be twice married.—Christians should avoid oaths as far as possible, abstain from blood and things strangled.—The doctrine of a (retributive) intermediate state is an ‘undoubted principle of the Christian religion.’

So far as he had opportunity, Whiston practised what he preached. In June 1710, he drew up ‘a form for the baptism of infants, agreeable to the Constitutions of the Apostles.’ It was not long, however, ere he was led to abandon infant baptism. While arranging for the baptism of a Mr. Shelswell and his sister, he was asked by the former if it would not be better for instruction to precede rather than follow the baptism. Whiston enquired of the New Testament and the earliest Fathers, and soon discovered that in the first two centuries none but persons capable of catechetical instruction were ever baptised. ‘This most important discovery’ he communicated to the world in a pamphlet, ‘Primitive Infant Baptism revived’ (1712.) Whiston here finds (among other things) that baptism is only regeneration as it is accompanied by an inward change (repentance and faith); that belief as well as baptism is a prerequisite to reception of the Eucharist; and that baptism constitutes a motive and obligation to the strictest holiness. In 1714 he baptised, confirmed and communicated the Shelswells, using on this occasion the form set forth in his ‘Liturgy of the Church of England reduced nearer to the Primitive Standard.’ This was substantially the first Prayer

Book of Edward VI., with modification of passages that breathed the Athanasian 'heresy.'

At the end of 1713 he wrote 'an Argument' for the validity of the ministerial acts of Dissenting ministers (published 1714.) From a dictum of the Apostolical Constitutions—'no lay baptism!' he infers that Dissenting baptism can be valid only if Dissenting 'orders' are valid. Strictly speaking, however, there are no valid orders 'among us'; for there are no ministers appointed according to the 'apostolic' mode, and enforcing none but 'apostolic' rules. It follows that there is no valid baptism or Eucharist, or true Church. Perhaps then, all clergy should be re-appointed and all Christians rebaptised. But where are the validly ordained ministers to do this? Having brought matters to this deadlock, Whiston pronounces the principle from which such conclusions are drawn to be false—contrary to God's justice and goodness, and His promises in Scripture, and that irregularly appointed ministers are to be recognised, provided they have the excuse of ignorance or 'exigency of affairs,' and are prepared to amend upon opportunity. After criticising the orders of the Roman and Protestant Churches, Whiston comes to 'our Protestant Dissenters.' The ministers of the Establishment are irregularly *chosen*; those of the Dissenters, irregularly *ordained*; who can say which is worse? Both are equally sincere—and equally prejudiced. The Baptists are truly primitive in their insistence on immersion and delay of baptism till grown years; 'so that the Baptists' ministerial acts, so far at least as that ordinance is concerned, and so far as they have also preserved a sort of episcopacy, and some other original laws of the Gospel, which do not often appear in the rest of the Dissenters, are of all others most certainly valid.'

But since in many respects the Baptists themselves departed from Whiston's primitive purity, he could

see nothing for it but to start a new congregation. For several years from Easter, 1715, he held, at least at the three great annual festivals, a solemn assembly for worship and the Eucharist, in his own house in London. In July of the same year, in pursuance of 'Proposals' published as early as 1712, he started a 'Society for promoting Primitive Christianity' which lasted about two years, and attracted to its discussions such well known men as Hoadley and Rundle, Samuel Clarke, John Gale and Thomas Chubb.

Some years later (1726) Whiston's restless spirit of enquiry broke new ground. He had models prepared of the Tabernacle and the Temple, on which he lectured in London and several provincial towns. At the time of writing his memoirs, he purposed 'many more the like lectures,' and some preparatory to the restoration of the Jews. This he took to be his 'peculiar business at present.' He had discovered that the Messiah would return in 1766 to inaugurate the Millenium, 'when the last of these temples, the temple of Ezekiel, will be built on Mount Zion.'

But to return. In 1735 another question of primitive practice demanded his attention. A 'great and good friend' of his, Samuel Collet, Baptist, thinking himself dangerously ill, asked Whiston to anoint him with oil. Whiston durst not venture to do that, till he had enquired of antiquity. (Fortunately Collet recovered meanwhile.) Antiquity answered Whiston in the affirmative; and having also been assured by some Baptist Church officers whom he interrogated, of authentic cases of healing, he became 'clear that it is a certain law of the Gospel.'

III.

And now we may pass to his final breach with the Church of England. In August 1746 he resolved henceforth to withdraw from church while that 'mon-

strous' creed, the Athanasian, was recited. For years past it had been his habit to take no part in it. His new resolve was stimulated by reception of an anonymous letter, which pointed out courteously the grave inconsistency of an 'Arian' being present where his views were cursed, and asked advice as to where such an one should worship. In October (the first opportunity that occurred) Whiston withdrew during the recitation of the obnoxious creed. He hesitated still to withdraw altogether from the communion of the Established church, until he could find a suitable number—say 120 (Acts i. 15) to set up a truly primitive congregation. But on Trinity Sunday, 1747, the Athanasian creed being read in the church at Lyndon, where he was then staying, he 'was obliged to go out, and to go to the Baptist meeting at Morcott, two miles off.'

With a view to an understanding with his new fellow-worshippers, Whiston wrote, in November 1747, 'A friendly Address to the Baptists.' For the last 35 years he himself has been 'a real Baptist,' in so far as he has baptised none but adults, and this by immersion. In other respects he has adhered to the Established Church, but recently the Athanasian creed has proved too much for him, and he now abandons her 'as utterly incorrigible.' He intends, when in the country, to go to the Baptist Meeting at Morcott, until he finds opportunity for a more completely primitive service. He chooses the Baptists, because 'I take them (meaning the Remonstrant or *general* Baptists: for I have no acquaintance with the Calvinist or *particular* Baptists at all) to be the best Christians, both in doctrine and practice here among us; and the nearest to the primitive settlements of Christ and the apostles, of any I have yet met with.' (3) They are of good character. (2) Such modest learning as they have is "sacred Scripture learning." (3) They

alone rightly constitute their three orders of ecclesiastical governors, bishops (though they avoid this ambitious title), presbyters or elders, and deacons, and nearly in the way appointed by Christ through the apostles, i.e., election by the Christian people, without subscription to false or uncertain articles, but with regard to the proper qualifications; and ordination with fasting, prayer, and imposition of hands by one or more of their own neighbouring bishops. (4) They alone in these parts of Europe practise "real Baptism." (5) "If Dr. Wall was rightly informed, the Baptists commonly believe the Millenium." (6) According to the same authority, "all the Baptists in England do hold that that decree—of abstaining from blood and things strangled, does still oblige all Christians." (7) "Several of the Baptists seem" to hold the doctrine of an intermediate state. (8) Some of the Baptists are "observers of the Saturday Sabbath, as well as of the Lord's Day." (9) Many do not believe in original sin; which, in Whiston's opinion, is an inference from the practice of baptising new born infants. (10) Some Baptists at least observe the anointing with prayer of James v. 14-16, Ap. Constt. viii. 29. (11) "The more inquisitive and learned Baptists . . . are much more willing to examine and receive . . . the Apostolical Constitutions, than any other party of Christians now amongst us."

Whiston next proceeds to enumerate the principal imperfections which he discerned in his Baptist brethren. (1) The frequent omission in public worship of the Lord's Prayer, (2) of the reading of the Scriptures, (3) of the singing of psalms and hymns, (4) single (instead of trine) immersion, (5) omission, by some few Baptists, of imposition of hands, for confirmation after baptism, (6) failure to mix water with wine in the Cup, (7) the requirement, by almost all Baptists, that persons baptised in infancy shall be re-

baptised as a condition of communion—which Whiston cannot accept, (8) the suffering of deacons and even lay teachers to put up the solemn public prayers of the church, and pronounce the Benediction, (9) the suffering of many to delay baptism unduly.—Whiston's objection to extemporaneous prayer he is willing to waive.

This address Whiston sent to 'our messenger,' Mr. Goode, of Boston; to an elder, a teacher, and two deacons, of the Morcott church; and to other prominent local Baptists. He received friendly replies from Mr. Goode, and from the other four officers jointly; and thereupon invited them to meet him at the house of his son-in-law in Lyndon, where he was staying. 'They all came and spent a day very agreeably.' Unfortunately, Whiston tells us nothing more specific of their intercourse. But from what we know of his opinions, and the persistence with which he asserted them, we may suspect that he did not find himself altogether at home, even in the meetings of the Morcott church.

IV.

We shall hardly adopt Whiston's estimate of his own importance. He did indeed take himself very seriously. He wishes that his discoveries may be only second to Newton's philosophy as a prelude and preparation to the coming of Christ's Kingdom. That eminent man himself was for his last thirteen years 'afraid' of Whiston, who considerably postponed publication of his refutation of Newton's Chronology, lest it should kill him! Naturally, such a man shows immense self-confidence. His pamphlets on the Athanasian heresy are 'perfectly unanswerable papers.' Though he condemns controversy for its pernicious effects, he is also strongly controversial. He himself admitted to the Archbishop of Canterbury, offences against gentleness and meekness. Another character-

istic is a certain shallowness and lack of thorough criticism. We suspect this when we hear him assert concerning his peculiar views that he has 'studied these points to the bottom.' We have actual proof of it in the facility with which he demonstrated the authenticity of numerous apocryphal and pseudonymous works.

It would be easy to point out further defects. But it is equally easy to mention virtues that make Whiston notable and worth recalling. None will question his tireless industry. He once read over in the original all the Christian writers of the first two centuries (apart from the New Testament) twice in five months. Further, he showed a certain independence of mind. He read the early Christian writers for himself, with some detachment from traditional interpretations. (Of course, his exclusive devotion to the first two centuries was as arbitrary as some other churchmen's preference for the first six.) That he had high candour and sincerity will already be manifest; and no less, admirable courage. In an age when the established clergy very rarely enforced the church's discipline against the prevalent immorality, Whiston dared to call to account even members of the Prince of Wales's household. We may add that while his religion, in consonance with the spirit of his age, was of a rather sober and utilitarian temper, he must be credited with an unaffected personal piety.

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