

THE
WORKS
OF
ROBERT LEIGHTON, D.D.

VOL I

THE
WORKS
OF
ROBERT LEIGHTON, D.D.
ARCHBISHOP OF GLASGOW.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED
A LIFE OF THE AUTHOR,

BY
JAMES AIKMAN, ESQ.

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L I F E

OF

ARCHBISHOP LEIGHTON.

IN an age when the study of Theology was the universal and leading pursuit, and amounted almost to a passion, ROBERT LEIGHTON was a pre-eminent Theologian; not so much from his acquirements in that species of Literature, in which, however, he was deeply skilled, as from the delightful example he exhibited in his life and writings, of a religion he cordially believed, and as far as his apprehensions extended, faithfully copied. He was not free in his conduct from the errors of humanity, but he was one of the very few, who err on the lovelier side; his amiability of temper, and purity of principle, led him to carry, among men of sterner stuff, the proposals of Charity which he professed, farther than either accorded with the situation he held, the rights that were in peril, or the temper of the times. It therefore happened to him, as must happen to all placed in similar circumstances, that his character was viewed by his contemporaries in extremes; and as posterity do not easily get rid of the feelings of their ancestors, it has even in our own days been looked at in very different lights.

Men have no right to visit the sins of the fathers upon the children, yet it is no indefensible propensity to esteem the seed of the righteous, to feel grief for them when they leave the paths of their progenitors, and if they have descended from persecuted parents, and join their persecutors, to address them as the prophet did Jehoshaphat, "Shouldst thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? therefore there is wrath upon thee from before the Lord: nevertheless there are good things found about thee."

That such sentiments should have been entertained, respecting the subject of this memoir, by many excellent men in Scotland, will not appear strange when the cruel infliction his father Dr Alexander Leighton underwent is considered; and however his own mind might have felt justified in the change, it was not to be expected that Presbyterians, who were themselves suffering for the same cause, which they were fully persuaded was for righteousness' sake, could be easily convinced of the strength of those reasons, that influenced the son of such a father, to leave their ranks, and join their opponents.

Dr Alexander Leighton was descended, it is said, of an ancient family in Forfarshire, whose chief seat was Ulys-haven, or Usen, but

the fact is as obscure as it is unimportant ; it is certain that he was one of the numerous host of confessors who bore testimony against the enormous abuse of Prelatic power in his day, and suffered severely for it.

As was not uncommon in these times of persecution, although a minister of the Gospel, he had also studied medicine, and afterwards practised it in London during the reign of James I. and early in that of Charles I. where he also exercised his ministry, but whether to any stated congregation does not appear. Warmly attached to Presbyterian principles, he took part in the violent and dangerous controversies then agitating England, and published a work entitled, "An Appeal to the Parliament, or Zion's Plea against the Prelacie: The summe whereof is delivered in a Decade of Positions. In the handling whereof the Lord Bishops and their appurtenances are manifestly proved, both by divine and humane lawes, to be intruders upon the prevelidges of Christ, of the King, and of the Commonweal: and therefore upon good evidence given, she hartelie desireth a judgment and execution—printed in the year and moneth wherein Rochelle was lost, 1628." The style of the book is in perfect accordance with what unhappily is the general style of polemics, and such as we have seen exemplified, even in our own day, when men allow their passions to intermingle with their controversies: yet it was not more virulent, if it was as much so, as many of those which appeared on the opposite side.

For this work he was brought to trial, and the arguments of the book, which plainly proved that an overgrown, ambitious, and tyrannical prelacy, was not the ministry appointed by Christ in his church, were it seems aggravated by the imprint, as marking his dissatisfaction to government,—it being the general belief, that if England had interfered in behalf of the French Protestants, Rochelle would have been saved from the hands of the Papists; and by the book being also decorated, according to the fashion of the day, with two hieroglyphical cuts explanatory of the subject, the first a burning lamp, supported by a book and two armed men guarding it; the legend, not remarkably elegant, explained the meaning:

Prevailing prelates strive to quench our light,
Except your sacred power quash their might.

The other represented an elder bush growing out of a ruinous tower, from whose branches a parcel of bishops were tumbling, one of them with a strong box in his hand,—the legend,

The tottering prelates with their trumpery all,
Shall moulder down like elder from a wall.

These, which were grating subjects in the days of Charles to the members of the English Hierarchy, and not over pleasant in the days of George IV. * will scarcely be deemed any palliation of the conduct of the Star Chamber, in their treatment of the author, even although it was under the influence of the Bishops.

* Vide Pearson's Life of Archbishop Leighton, prefixed to the last London edition of his Works, 1828.