

VI.—SOME FURTHER NOTICES OF DR. THOMLINSON, THE  
FOUNDER OF THE THOMLINSON LIBRARY.

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BY THE REV. E. H. ADAMSON, M.A.

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READ ON THE 27TH DECEMBER, 1883.

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ROBERT THOMLINSON, the donor of the library to the town of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, was born in the parish of Wigton, in the county of Cumberland, in the year 1668. He was the youngest of ten children of Richard Thomlinson, Esq., of Blencogo, whose grandfather, Edward, a younger son of Anthony Thomlinson, Bailiff of Gateshead, had bought land and settled in Cumberland. The arms of the family, as appears from the monument at Whickham, are—"Party per pale, wavy, argent and vert, three greyhounds couchant counterchanged." Young Thomlinson entered Queen's College, Oxford, as a bateller, March 3, 1685-6, but when he took the degree of M.A. in 1692, he was Vice-Principal of St. Edmund's Hall under Dr. Mill, the eminent critic and editor of the Greek Text of the New Testament. We find him afterwards contributing £100 to the new buildings at Queen's; and shortly before his death, at the instance of Dr. Shaw, who, on being appointed principal in 1740, had found St. Edmund's Hall in a ruinous state, he gave the sum of £200 towards the restoration of the north side of the quadrangle, afterwards known as Thomlinson's Buildings. Hence, in the Oxford Almanac for 1747, which is illustrated with a view of the renovated hall, his bust is introduced as that of one of its principal benefactors. Having been ordained in 1691-2 by Dr. Hough, Bishop of Oxford, after some interval spent at the university, he was appointed by the Mayor and Corporation of Newcastle-upon-Tyne\* afternoon and holiday lecturer at St. Nicholas, with a salary of £120, and continued

\* The Thomlinson family were connected, by property or otherwise, both with Gateshead and Newcastle. Dr. Thomlinson's sister, Isabel, was the wife of Ralph Reed, Esq., alderman of the latter town, in which two of his nephews, Richard and William, resided for many years and carried on business as merchants.



to fulfil the duties of that office until 1724, when he retired on a pension of fifty guineas being assigned him, which evidently showed how much his services had been appreciated. Meanwhile, his Diocesan, Bishop Crewe, made him one of his chaplains, and collated him first in 1709 to the vicarage of Eglington, and afterwards, in 1812, to the rectory of Whickham. He would seem to have resided in Newcastle until his preferment to Whickham. From Whickham he could easily come into town for the afternoon lecture. Newcastle was fortunate at this time in being supplied with learned, eloquent, and able divines; festivals were duly observed, and in at least two of the churches people had the opportunity of worshipping twice every day. Foremost amongst the clergy was the worthy vicar, Dr. Nathaniel Ellison, a native of the town, who held other high appointments also, being Prebendary of Durham and Archdeacon of Stafford. Between him and Mr. Thomlinson there always existed the greatest friendship and community of feeling in regard to works of piety and charity. They had both of them, from its first establishment in 1698, been corresponding members of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, and were assiduous in circulating its publications and forwarding its objects. They met with much support from the laity, and within a few years charity schools were instituted in each of the four parishes or parochial chapeltries. The Corporation, too, certainly earned a title for generosity when they expended upwards of £800 annually in support of churches and schools. In 1715, this body were so well satisfied with Mr. Thomlinson, that they appointed him Master of the Hospital of St. Mary the Virgin, and shortly after Master of the Hospital of St. Mary Magdalene. He resigned the former appointment in 1738, but retained the latter until within a few months of his death. It must be borne in mind that the duties of these offices would be light and the income inconsiderable, except on the renewal of leases. In 1719, Dr. Robinson, Bishop of London, gave him a prebendal stall in St. Paul's Cathedral, the corps of which was an estate called Chamberlain's Wood, in the parish of Willesden, in the county of Middlesex, and the holders of which were required to preach annually on St. James's Day. It was probably on the occasion of his thus becoming a dignitary of the Church that the degree of D.D. was conferred on him by the University of Cambridge in obedience, we suppose, to Royal mandate. We find him alluding

in one of his letters with considerable satisfaction to the circumstance of his attending on his patron, Bishop Robinson, that same year when acting on Lord Crewe's behalf he consecrated the newly-erected parish church of Sunderland. About this time Mrs. Anne Davison by her will left him and three other gentlemen—Mr. John Ord, Alderman William Ellison, and George Grey, Esq., counsellor—the disposal of her property, which resulted in the establishment of a hospital at Newcastle for six widows of clergymen or merchants. In 1720, May 23rd, died at Whickham, the Rev. John Thomlinson, rector of Rothbury, the eldest brother of Dr. Thomlinson, leaving him and their nephew, the Rev. John Thomlinson, rector of Glenfield, in Leicestershire, his executors. The discharge of this trust must have added considerably to Dr. Thomlinson's care and responsibility; for there were many legatees that were under age, and other charitable bequests which required much consideration in the disposal and regulation of them.

To the example of this brother we may, perhaps, trace the large-hearted spirit and munificence which characterised the subject of this notice. Not only did he carry out the will of his brother, Mr. Thomlinson of Rothbury, by founding at Wigton the College of Matrons, or Hospital, for six widows of clergymen, but he added considerably to the endowment, and at his own cost erected the necessary buildings. At Wigton, also, he built a school with a house for the master. At Whickham, he built and endowed the school, besides beautifying and adorning the church, though possibly not in the most approved fashion or best taste as we should now regard the work. At Allonby, where his brother was lord of the manor, not without considerable opposition from the Quakers, he at last succeeded in building a chapel and school-house very much wanted on account of the distance of the town from the mother church of Bromfield. He had the satisfaction to live long enough to hear of this chapel being consecrated by his old friend, Fleming, Bishop of Carlisle, when he generously gave £200 more to procure a grant from Queen Anne's Bounty towards the endowment. After enumerating some of what we may call his public charities, it may be interesting to notice others of a more private character. We find amongst disbursements of a similar kind a subscription of one guinea for four years towards maintaining a brother clergyman's son, young Potter of Cramlington, at Queen's College, Oxford, and help fre-

quently extended to the widow, sister (Mrs. Close), and children of Mr. Burn, whom we cannot fail to identify with the genial historian of Newcastle, who was cut off in the prime of life and before the publication of his valuable work. The obligation of preaching occasionally in St. Paul's Cathedral took Dr. Thomlinson to London, and in 1721 we find he revisited his old *Alma Mater* and was admitted *ad eundem* D.D., Sub-Dean Terry, of Christ Church, presenting him. The same year he was also present at the Bishop of Durham's jubilee, or 50th year of his consecration, when Dr. Lupton, one of the Prebendaries of Durham, preached before him, on Sunday, July 2nd, in the chapel at Steane, his lordship's seat in Northamptonshire, and on the day following we are informed the Vice-Chancellor and some of the heads of houses from Oxford came to dine with my lord. As Dr. Thomlinson had consulted those eminent physicians, Dr. Mead and Sir Hans Sloane in 1720 for asthma, so he consulted them again in 1734, when his sight began to fail. After the couching of his eyes, in 1736, which seems to have proved an unsuccessful operation, he became entirely blind, and not only was he unable to pay his annual visit to the Metropolis, but he was confined to his rectory-house, only leaving it to attend church on Sundays and prayer days. At the monthly sacraments he was in the habit of consecrating the elements and administering the bread to upwards of 100 communicants, whilst at the greater festivals that number was largely increased. He had cords stretched from one end of the room to the other, so that he might take exercise, and with the help of a reader and amanuensis he managed to keep up his correspondence and despatch business. No doubt his wife, who seems to have been a lady of superior qualities of mind, and largely to have shared his charitable disposition, contributed to make him easy, cheerful, and contented. He corresponded frequently, not only with numerous relations, who all appear to have looked up to him for advice and help, and towards whom he exercised the *animus paternus*, but with Dr. Edmund Gibson, Bishop of London, Archdeacon Sharp, the Rev. Mr. Brown, Vicar of Wigton, who had been his brother's curate at Rothbury, and was father of Dr. Brown, afterwards Vicar of Newcastle, Dr. Bearcroft, and Mr. Newman, the secretaries of those societies in whose work he ever took so lively an interest, the S.P.G.F.P. and the S.P.C.K. To the former of these he bequeathed £500, and to the latter £100. All his life he had been collecting a valuable library, which must have been a labour of love

and a source of great pleasure. Of this library Bourne, who died in 1732-3, speaks in terms which show that even at that early period the fame of it had already spread, and that the intention of the owner to bequeath it to the town was an open secret. "The worthy and learned Dr. Thomlinson is expected to leave at his death to this library (St. Nicholas) his whole study, which is, perhaps, considering the vast number of books, their being so well chosen, so neatly and curiously bound, their great variety, being of all manner of subjects, treating of all arts and sciences, a library outdone by few private gentlemen in the kingdom." In the letter he wrote to Mr. Blackett in 1735-6 he expresses his desire that his books should be placed near the sacred walls of the church in which he spent the flower of his age as an unworthy lecturer, and moreover speaks of a plan for a library which he had designed, asking Mr. Blackett to undertake the cost of erecting it. The building, however incongruous when considered as an adjunct to a Gothic church, taken by itself is not perhaps a bad specimen of the then prevailing classical style. No sooner was it completed than he placed within it 1,600 volumes, about one-third of his whole collection, and appointed his friend, the Rev. N. Clayton, B.D., librarian in 1741. The rest of his books he bequeathed by will to the same repository. We cannot but feel that the removal of the library elsewhere would be a violation of the donor's intention.

Dr. Thomlinson was a clergyman of the old-fashioned orthodox type, and steadily adhered to the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England. His references to the visits of John and Charles Wesley to Newcastle and the neighbourhood, show that he did not regard their proceedings with any favour, and he stoutly opposed the building of a meeting-house at Swalwell as under the circumstances altogether unnecessary, in which opinion Mr. Crowley, the grandson of Sir Ambrose, and owner of the factory, seems to have concurred. We have seen that he was not ordained till after the Revolution, and was not therefore troubled, as non-jurors were, with scruples of conscience about oaths of allegiance and abjuration, nor would he appear to have entertained any chivalrous feeling of regard or compassion for the exiled dynasty. Writing to his nephew, he says, "I congratulate you on the glorious victory the Duke of Cumberland has gained over the rebels; and we hope to have no more disturbance from that quarter, but peace and quietness both in Church and State. The honour of victory is

entirely owing to his courage and good conduct; the North has been rejoicing ever since." This exemplary man departed this life at Whickham, March 24th, 1747-8, in the eightieth year of his age, leaving behind him a high character for learning and judgment, for piety and charity. He is said to have been an excellent preacher and an ornament to religion. By his last will he provided handsomely for his widow, and remembered many of his relations, nor did he forget his servants, nor the poor in the parishes of Whickham and St. Nicholas. He desired that his funeral should be decent, but not expensive and without the pomp of escutcheons. His executors were Archdeacon Sharp and the Rev. N. Clayton, B.D. Mrs. Thomlinson, whose maiden name was Martha Ray, and who was, we believe, sister of the Rev. John Ray, Vicar of Warden, survived her husband many years. Her death occurred at Whickham on Saturday, December 16th, 1769, when she was in her 102nd year. She is described in the local papers as "remarkable not only for her great age and perfection of faculties, but for her excellent disposition, being truly pious and benevolent to an uncommon degree, having given upwards of £2,000 in charity." Her name appears as a subscriber of £100 to the building fund of the Newcastle Infirmary in 1751. She evidently trod in the footsteps of her deceased husband.

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## APPENDIX.

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In connection with the foregoing, the following letters were read by the Rev. E. H. Adamson:—

*Dr. Thomlinson to the Bishop of London, Edmund Gibson.*

May the 3rd, 1744.

MY GOOD LORD,—Your judicious and learned labours are so serviceable to all impartial and unbiassed readers, and your advice upon emergent difficulties are so useful to your friends, that I, who have tasted of both, cannot but earnestly wish this may find you in as perfect health as I enjoy, who am advanced within a few months of 76. I have been 8 years blind, yet by the blessing of God am not only easy and contented, but cheerful, and as much disposed as ever to works of piety and charity, in which for five years last past I have bestowed more than the net produce of my living, prebend, &c. I go nowhere but to the house of God, which, when I entered, 1712, was in a sorry condition, covered over with green mould, but is now ceiled and beautified, adorned with three galleries, 2 of my erection, for the benefit of my charity school, a handsome chancel, with elegant wainscoat and sash windows, and the communion table and pulpit enriched with such ornaments as no country church I know of can exceed or equal. Here I delight to be on prayer days, and especially on Sundays, when we have constantly full congregations, and at monthly sacraments when I consecrate the elements and give the bread. When I drew near 70, the common term of man's life, my mind was frequently filled with

uncommon apprehensions of the uncertainty of life, the great importance of charity, and of laying up treasure in heaven, and the awful and endearing speech of our Judge to the sheep on His right hand at the day of judgement, which then inspired me with a resolution to devote the income of my spiritual preferments to the finishing of such charities as I had then in hand, and to act the wise merchant, who, before he removes into a foreign country, sends his effects before him. That wise resolution which moved me as a divine impulse produced the building of two charity schools, two houses for the masters, the endowment of two charity schools, one here and another at Bellingham, in the parish of Simonburn, which is computed 24 miles in length, and perhaps 10 or 20 in breadth, besides the library in Newcastle, of which your lordship had a particular account in 1741. I mention these, my lord, not by way of vanity, for I disclaim all merit, and do know that in me there is nothing I can call my own but the abuse of mercies, my follies and imperfections. If there is anything in me that is good it is all from God, to whom I owe all my good thoughts and dispositions, and my very abilities to do good. For I was the youngest of 10 children, and God's providence was my inheritance. This, my lord, I presume to offer as the best apology I can make for my neglect in your lordship's cathedral, where for many years I have been an unworthy member. And I hope you will be so favourable as to conclude, that though I cannot labour in the vineyard, as I did near 50 years before the loss of sight, yet I am not now altogether useless and unprofitable. Above a year ago, when I had erected these small monuments and memorials of my gratitude to the Divine bounty, and had intended to put an end to my public charities, I met with such a melancholy account of the want of a chapel at Allonby, in Cumberland, as engaged me in building one there, with a school annexed, which will be finished this week, of which I shall give a full account to your lordship. Allonby is situated on the banks of Solway Frith, 10 miles west of Wigton, where in 1724 I put six clergymen's widows into a college of matrons, whose statutes your lordship was pleased to revise. Then a year or two after I built a school, with a dwelling-house for the master, in one fabrick of ashlar work, with hewn door, case windows, and rustic coins, 106 yards long. That is accounted a handsome building, but that which I have built here two years ago exceeds it in size and beauty. I beg your lordship's pardon for trespassing so long upon your patience, and remain, my good lord, your most obedient, obliged, and humble servant.

Whitehall, May, 1744.

GOOD SIR,—I received your letter, and perusing it, was much pleased with the cheerful contentment you express under the want of sight, and with the account of the good things you are carrying on for the service of God and the benefit of mankind. I have not the like exercise of patience that you have, but I thank God enjoy as good a share of ease and health as can reasonably be expected in the 75th year of life, and though I endeavour sincerely, and from a true sense of duty, to do as much good as I can in my station, yet in the point of public charities I must be content to come far short of you by the obligation I am under to make due provision for a numerous issue. The Provost of Queen's dines with me now and then, and he seldom fails to remember you and Mr. Brougham, who, together with ourselves, are the only persons of our time that are now living as far as we can recollect. With hearty wishes of health and happiness, and that you may live to see all your good designs finished, and as much longer as pleases God.—I remain, your affectionate friend and brother,—EDM. LONDON.

May 7, 1744.

MY GOOD LORD,—Having promised in my last to give you a full account of what I have done at Allonby, I shall now do it with the motive that induced me, and then beg your lordship's advice and directions. Allonby is a large village in the parish of Bromfield, of about 100 families, increasing yearly by the increase of company resorting thither to dip in the sea, which is three leagues over, having Workington 8 miles to the west and Whitehaven 16, ingrossed by Quakers who enjoy 10 parts in 12 of the land, have a meeting house and sepulchre, in which last,

it is said, most of the people that die are buried without Christian burial. Being above seven miles from their parish church, and four miles from any other, few men go to church and fewer women, and many not at all. There is a good man who goes now and then to Bromfield. He reckons when he does so he rides 15 miles. Chancellor Waugh being there with his family in 1742, deploring the melancholy situation of the inhabitants, who had neither public worship nor observed the Lord's Day, proposed a collection for the building a little chapel, gave himself a guinea, and spirited up the inhabitants to buy bricks and lime, and laid them on the lord's waste, who gave leave to build, but as soon as the Quakers were apprised of it they opposed it might and main, and that good design was quashed at once. A relation of mine coming to see me in February that year, who lives in the same parish, but at eight miles distance, giving me this account, and what trouble the disappointment was to the inhabitants, I asked whether a small spot of ground could be purchased, to which he answered that none could be bought but of one Quaker with whom he was well acquainted. This account having fired me with zeal for the honour of God and the good of souls labouring under the famine of the word, and abandoned to the temptations of Quakerism and their own unbounded vices, I immediately desired him to use his utmost skill to buy it as for himself, and then convey it to me, which he artfully did, and then I sent a plan with proper directions. When I, who had no estate or acquaintance, then began to build, the clergy and gentlemen were surprised, and magnified it as the greatest charity; and some called it propagating the gospel in a Christian country at home, which they preferred to the doing it abroad. And the Quakers being overcome with the surprise and strangeness of the charity now desire to have their children taught in the school. The chapel stands well and is strongly built. The walls of stone, the roof of oak, the covering of a blue Welsh slate, that makes a great show; the windows arched, and they and the doors and rustic coins of hewn stone all handsomely finished, and the walls rough cast with a shining sea pebble. The chapel, which is 18 yards long, more than 7 yards wide, is ceiled, plastered, completely pewed, with pulpit, reading desk, a communion table, with rails before and wainscoat behind, all handsomely painted. And it is thought that no little chapel in the north can compete with it, either in outward or inward appearance. I am the more particular in these things that your lordship may see how far my zeal for the honour of God has carried me, and in what manner I build. It would carry me yet further, was I assured that the Queen's Bounty could be obtained for this chapel and Dr. Crow's legacy of £100 towards the procuring of that. I have sometimes thought of making this known to the Incorporated Society, of which I am a member, hoping that some of their many worthy members would give me their assistance in procuring them, but being uncertain as to these, your lordship's advice and directions will much oblige, my good Lord, your most obedient and obliged humble servant,

August, 12, 1745.

I am commanded by my Lord Bishop to acquaint you that on Sunday, the 4th inst., your chapel and chapel yard at Allonby were duly consecrated, and the perpetual nomination thereof reserved to your heirs and assigns, and to say that his lordship had great pleasure in the doing thereof, and returns his most hearty thanks to the pious founder for this great and necessary charity. His lordship also bids me say that Mr. Wilson performed the duty of the day very much to his lordship's satisfaction; and that the Rev. Mr. Archdeacon Law preached an excellent sermon upon the occasion. Your agent, Mr. Donald, had provided a dinner for his lordship and attendants, but the fatigue and hurry of the day were so great that it was judged absolutely necessary for his lordship to leave the crowd as soon as possible and retire to Nether Hall. And now the consecration is over, his lordship is very ready to make a return thereof to the Governors of the Queen's Bounty in order to entitle it to an augmentation, and to do any other act in his lordship's power for the completing of this most charitable work that shall be deemed necessary and you desire. His lordship sends you his blessing, and rev. sir, I am yours, &c.

JOS. NICHOLSON.