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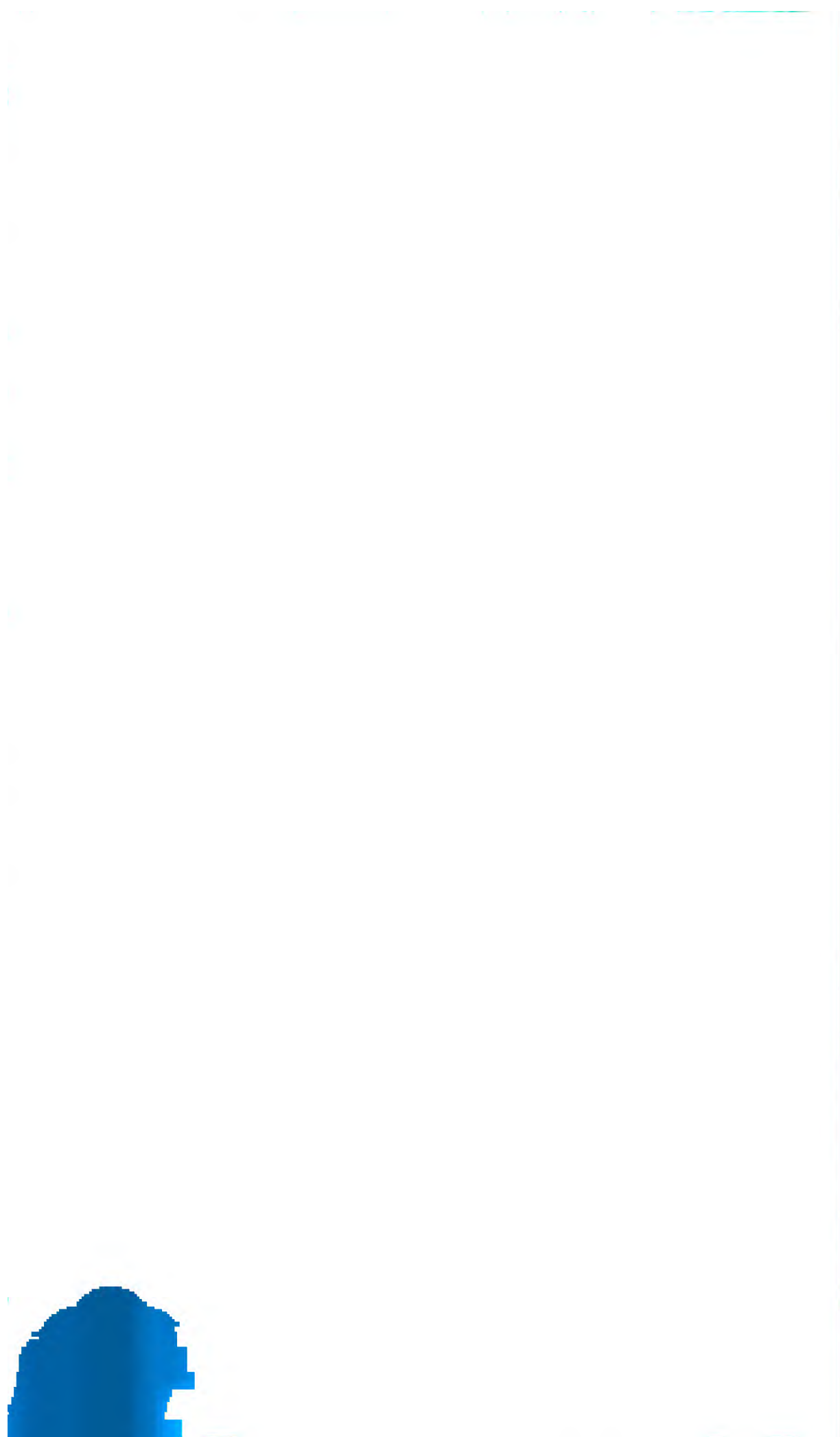
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SOME
ACCOUNT
OF THE
Life and Writings



OF THE
Right Reverend Father in God,
THOMAS SPRAT, D.D.

Late Lord Bishop of ROCHESTER,
and Dean of WESTMINSTER.

WITH

A *True Copy* of his Last WILL and
TESTAMENT.

L O N D O N :

Printed for E. CURLL at the *Dial* and
Bible against St. *Dunstan's* Church in *Fleet-*
street. 1715.

(Price 6 d.)

THE HISTORY OF THE

... of the ...



Some ACCOUNT of *Bishop*
SPRAT'S Life and Wri-
tings.



HE was descended from a ve-
ry Worthy, tho' Obscure
Family, being the Son of a
private Country Minister;
but his just Merit raised
him to that Eminent Stati-
on in the Church, wherein he long presi-
ded, and was deservedly accounted one of
the most considerable Prelates of his
Time.

The *Oxford* Antiquary * informs us,
that on the 16th of *January* 1654, he
was enter'd of *Wadham* College, where
he pursued his Studies with the closest
Application, and distinguished himself by
his Prudent and Courteous Behaviour.

His first Appearance as an Author, was
in the Year 1659, when in concert with
a 2 Mr.

* See *Athen. Oxon.*

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Mr. WALLER, and Mr. DRYDEN, he Printed *A Pindarick Ode to the happy Memory of the most Renowned Prince, OLIVER Lord Protector, &c.* 4to. which he Dedicated to the Reverend Dr. WILKINS, then Warden of *Wadham* College, by whose *Approbation and Request* it was made publick; Mr. SPRAT only designing it for a private *Amusement* *.

The next Production of his promising Genius, was another Poem, written in the Style of *Pindar*: *The Plague of Athens, which happened in the second Year the Peloponnesian War.* First described by *Thucydides*; afterwards by *Lucretius*. This Mr. Sprat Dedicated to his worthy and learned Friend Dr. *Walter Pope*. The Performance stood the Test of the severest Criticks, and without Partiality to our Country-man, it was given as the Opinion of the best Judges, That the manner of his great Original was judiciously imitated, and that in the Subject he far excelled both the *Greek Historian*, and the *Latin Poet*.

Shortly after, he proceeded to give the Publick a Specimen of his Abilities in another kind, and succeeded with the
greatest

* See, *The Dedication.*

greatest Applause, which was, his OBSERVATIONS on Monsieur de Sorbriere's Voyage into England: Written to Dr. Wren, Professor of Astronomy in Oxford, 1665. 8vo.

Mr. Sprat, in the beginning of his Letter, acquaints the Doctor with the Motives of his engaging with Monsieur Sorbriere, * *Having now (says he) under my Hands the History of the Royal Society, it will be in vain for me to try to represent its Design to be Advantageous to the Glory of England, if my Countrymen shall know that one who calls himself a Member of that Assembly, has escaped unanswered in the publick Disgraces, which he has cast on our whole Nation.*

In this Performance it must be allowed, Mr. Sprat has given an undeniable Proof, that the Strength and Solidity of an *English Pen*, is infinitely Superior to the Gallant Air of a *French Author*, tho' even an *Historiographer Royal*; † *who is taken into a calm Examination, and the Mistakes, the Incoherences, and the Vanities of his Book, only put together, and compared*; by which the Knowledge of those *Alert Gentlemen* is fully shewn to be chiefly

* See the Observat. pag. 5.

† Observat. pag. 6.

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chiefly superficial, and as my Lord Roscommon* has most judiciously observed,

*The weighty Bullion of one Sterling Line,
Drawn to French Wire, will through whole
Pages shine.*

About two Years after, 1667, Mr. Sprat publish'd his incomparable Work, viz. *The History of the Royal Society of London, for the Improvement of Natural Knowledge*, 4to.

Anno 1668, came out, *Poemata Latina, in quibus continentur Sex Libri Plantarum cum Notis. Auth. A. Cowleius*, with his Picture before them, Engraven by Mr. Faithorne, and a short Account of his Life, written in *Latin* by Dr. Tho. Sprat||.

Shortly after, he lost his Dear Friend Mr. Abraham Cowley, who died the same Year, and by his † *Will recommended to his Care, the Revising of all his Works that were Printed, and the collecting of those Papers which he had designed for the Press.*

This Trust Mr. Sprat faithfully performed, and to the New Edition of Mr. Cowley's Works, he prefixed, An Account of his *Life and Writings*:
Writ-

* See his *Essay on Translated Verse.*

|| See *Athen. Oxon. pag. 798.*

† See *Mr. Cowley's Life, pag. 1.*

Bishop SPRAT's Life. V

Written to the Celebrated Mr. Martin Clifford; which he thus excellently concludes, || Perhaps it may be judged, that I have spent too many words on a private Man, and a Scholar; whose Life was not remarkable for such a Variety of Events, as are wont to be the Ornaments of this kind of Relations. I know it is the Custom of the World to prefer the pompous Histories of great Men, before the greatest Virtues of others, whose Lives have been led in a Course less Illustrious. This indeed is the general Humour. But I believe it to be an Error in Mens Judgments. For certainly that is a more profitable Instruction, which may be taken from the eminent Goodness of Men of lower Rank, than that which we learn from the splendid Representations of the Battels, and Victories, and Buildings, and Sayings of great Commanders and Princes. Such specious Matters as they, are seldom delivered with Fidelity, so they serve but for the Imitation of a very few, and rather make for the Ostentation than the true Information of Human Life. Whereas it is from the Practice of Men equal to our selves, that we are more naturally taught how to command our Passions, to
direct

|| Ibid. pag. xliii. & seq.

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direct our Knowledge, and to govern our Actions.

For this Reason I have some hope, that a Character of Mr. Cowley may be of good Advantage to our Nation. For what he wanted in Titles of Honour, and the Gifts of Fortune, was plentifully supplied by many other Excellencies, which make perhaps less Noise, but are more Beneficial for Example. Besides this, I had another Design in it, that only concerns our selves; that having this Picture of his Life set before us, we may still keep him alive in our Memories, and by this means have some small Reparation for our inexpressible Loss by his Death.

On the 3d of July 1669, Mr. Sprat took his *Master of Arts* Degree, and the same Day commenced Doctor in Divinity*.

In 1683 broke out the *Rye-House* Plot, a Relation of which K. CHARLES II. ordered to be drawn up, and Dr. Sprat was pitched upon as the most proper Person for such an Undertaking. Accordingly it was composed and ready for the Press, when it pleased Almighty God to take that Excellent Prince to his Mercy. † But it
came

* See *Athen. Oxon. ubi Supra.*

† See *K. James's Order.*

came not out till the Year 1685, when by King JAMES'S Direction it was published under the following Title, *A True Account and Declaration of the horrid Conspiracy against the late King, his present Majesty, and the Government; as it was ordered to be Published by his late Majesty.* Fol.

He was made Dean of *Westminster* Ann. 1683. and Bishop of *Rochester* the Year following. These Promotions were generally thought to be given him for the pretended Service he had done the *Royal Family* in drawing up the Account of the foresaid Conspiracy; for he was grossly imposed upon in this Affair, and suffered very much in his Reputation by engaging in it; for it must be confessed, that he complied too readily with K. JAMES'S Measures, and by committing another false Step, which was his Sitting in the *Ecclesiastical Commission*, he drew upon himself an almost universal Censure; this he acknowledged to be Just, as appears by a Letter he wrote upon that Occasion to the Earl of *Dorset*, in the Year 1689. beginning thus,

My LORD,

I think I should be wanting to my self at this time, in my own necessary Vindication, should I forbear any longer to give my Friends a true Account of my Behaviour in the late Ec-

b

clesiastical

eclesiastical Commission. Tho' I profess, what I shall now say, I only intend as a reasonable Mitigation of the Offence I have given, not entirely to justify my sitting in that Court; for which, I acknowledge, I have deservedly incurred the Censure of many good Men; and I wish I may ever be able to make a sufficient Amends to my Country for it, &c.

His Crime in this particular, was somewhat alleviated, by his renouncing the Commission, when he perceived the Illegal Practices they were going to put in Execution *. As to the *Rye-House Plot*, he was likewise as sensible of his Error on that Account; for in a *second Letter*, to the same Nobleman, he thus Apologizes †, *As for the Book of the Conspiracy, 'tis true, I have often heard that some noble and eminent Persons, whose Kindred or Friends were unhappily concern'd in the Subject of that History, had entertain'd a Prejudice against me thereupon. But to them I shall make this equitable Request, that they would suspend any farther Censure of me for what I did write, till they shall be fairly inform'd how much there is that I have not written.*

I will not deny, that it was at the Request, or rather the Command, of King Charles the
Second,

* See, *The Bishop's first Letter to the Earl of Dorset.*

† See, *The second Letter.*

Second, that I drew up a Relation of that Plot: And to that end, I had free liberty to consult the Paper-Office and Council-Books, whence I was plentifully furnish'd with such Authentick Materials, either of Papers printed by Authority, or of sworn Depositions and Confessions, as have been alway thought the best Ground for an Historian to work upon.

But now, my Lord, I can still alledge, that tho' a vast heap of such Matter was immediately supply'd to my hands; and tho' I often receiv'd earnest Messages, and some sharp Words from that gentle King to quicken my Slowness, yet more than Twelve Months had past before I could be brought to put Pen to Paper; out of my natural Aversion to any Business, that might reflect severely upon any Man: My own Inclination rather leading me to the other Extreme, that is, rather to commend too much what in the least seems well done, than to aggravate what is ill done by others.

However, upon King Charles's frequent Commands, and continu'd Importunity, I did at length obey; and the rather, because I had formerly somewhat incurr'd that King's and his Brother's Displeasure, by my declining to write against the States of Holland, during the time of the first and second Dutch Wars.

Being thus over-persuaded, I made my Collections, and presented them to that King: Which his Majesty having himself perus'd, was pleas'd to direct me to put them into the hands of the Lord Keeper North, who carefully read and corrected

what I had done, and added divers Matters of Fact, which had escap'd my Observation.

Thus the Work stood in Preparation for the Press, when the deplorable Death of that King happen'd. And shortly after K. James II. calling for the Papers, and having read them, and alter'd divers Passages, caus'd them to be printed by his own Authority; as is to be seen before the Book.

But now, my Lord, I can truly declare, that during my composing those Collections, I earnestly requested King Charles the Second (and your Lordship knows, as well as any Man, how agreeable such a Request was to the benign Temper of that King) I requested him, I say, that few or no Names of Persons should be mention'd, whatever probable Suggestions might be against them, but only such, upon whom publick Judgment had pass'd, which it could be to no purpose for me to conceal.

I could indeed have wish'd, that my Lord Russel's, and some other Names of Persons of Honour, might have been of the number to be omitted; upon that very account; but 'twas none of my fault that they were not. I could not hinder, nor did I in the least contribute to their Fall: Nay, I lamented it, especially my Lord Russel's, after I was fully convinc'd by Discourse with the Reverend Dean of Canterbury, of that noble Gentleman's great Probity, and constant Abhorrence of Falshood; but that was a good while after. All that I did, was the publishing, or rather indeed the putting together methodically, what before was sufficiently published in printed Papers that were licens'd:
And

And out of them to draw the Substance of a Declaration of State, in Vindication of that which the Authority of the Nation, at that time, call'd, The Publick Justice of the Kingdom.

But, my Lord, to return to what I was saying, King Charles having granted my Desire of concealing divers Names, according to this Allowance I proceeded, leaving out some, and abbreviating others; endeavouring all along to spare Parties and Families, and particular Persons, as much as would be allow'd. All which may be demonstrated from the Copies of the Depositions, as they went out of my hands, where there were several Names visibly mark'd by my own Pen, to be pass'd by in the Publication. So that if some indifferent Man should now compare the Informations as they are in Print, with the Originals in the Secretary's, or the Paper-Office, he would, it may be, be apter to suspect me of Connivance, than of Calumny on that side.

If I have now given your Lordship any Satisfaction touching my fair Dealing in my Part of that Book, I doubt not but what follows will give you more; when I shall assure you of my having refus'd to write a Continuation of the same History. For, my Lord, it was some time after the Duke of Monmouth's Overthrow and Execution, that K. James the Second requir'd me to undertake such another Task, and presently to set about a Second Part. To that purpose his Majesty gave me a sight of multitudes of Original Letters and Papers, together with the Confessions of several Persons then taken in England and Scotland; who did indeed seem
all

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all to outvie one another, who should reveal most both of Men and Things relating to the old Conspiracy, as well as to the Duke of Monmouth's, and the Earl of Argyle's Invasion.

But finding the Innocence of divers Persons of Worth and Honour touch'd in those Papers, and by that time beginning vehemently to suspect things were running apace towards the endangering of our Laws and Religion, I must say, I never could be induc'd by all his Majesty's reiterated Commands, to go on with that Work. Instead of that, tho' I had all the Materials for such a Narrative within my Power, for above three Years, and might easily have finish'd it in a Month or six Weeks space, yet I chose rather to suppress and silence, as much as I could, all that new Evidence; which, if openly produc'd, would have blemish'd the Reputation of some honourable Persons.

Give me leave, my Lord, only to add, That I am confident there are several Original Papers still in being, which would be more than enough to convince all impartial Men, how moderate and tender I was in that Cause.

My Lord Dorset, as a true Advocate and sincere Friend, took his Apology into the most serious Consideration; he justly charged the ill Conduct of both Affairs upon K. James and his Ministers, and thereby restor'd the Bishop's Opponents to a perfect Reconciliation with him.

Notwithstanding this Accommodation, such was the Inquietude of the Times, that his Lordship had not been long easy, before there was

was hatched one of the most villanous Contrivances ever heard of, not only to take away his Life, but the Lives of Archbishop *Sancroft*, my Lord *Marlborough*, and several other Persons of Honour and Distinction, by forging an Instrument under their Hands, setting forth, that they had an intent, *To Restore King James, to seize upon the Person of the Princess of Orange, Dead or Alive; to surprize the Tower, to raise a mighty Army; and to bring the City of London into Subjection.*

However, this Plot was nipped in the very Bud, and by the over-ruling Providence of God, was brought to Light, and fully detected: The whole Management of which his Lordship drew up and made publick, *viz. A Relation of the wicked Contrivance of Stephen Blackhead, and Robert Young, (alias Youngs, alias Brown, alias Hopkins, alias Hutt, alias Green, alias Jones, alias Smith, &c.) against the Lives of several Persons, by Forging an Association under their Hands. In Two Parts. The first being a Relation of what passed at the Three Examinations of his Lordship by a Committee of Lords of the Privy-Council. The second being an Account of the Two Authors of the Forgery. 1692. 4to.*

His Lordship was Honourably Acquitted, and he ever after looked upon this Escape, as one of the most Signal Blessings of his Life. * *In such a Critical time, (says he) how very little Evidence would have sufficed to Ruin any Man, that had been accused with the least Probability of Truth?*

* See the Relation, part 2. pag. 163. and seq.

Truth? I do therefore most solemnly oblige my self, and all mine, to keep the grateful Remembrance of my Deliverance Perpetual and Sacred.

Hereafter, his Lordship spent the Remainder of his Days in a happy Tranquillity, and in the Year 1710. he collected all his Sermons that had been occasionally Printed, into one Vol. 8vo.

He died of an Apoplexy, *May 20. 1713.* at the Episcopal Seat at *Bromley in Kent*, in the 79th Year of his Age, and was Interred in the Abbey Church of *Westminster*.

The Name of this Venerable Prelate, deserves the first Rank in History, for his Mastery in the *Art of Oratory*, and his raising the *English* Tongue to that Purity and Beauty which former Writers were wholly Strangers to, and those who come after him can but imitate.

As to his Taste in *Poetry*, it was equally skilful, of which his own Works, and the great share it is well known he had in the *Rehearsal*, are lasting Monuments: The Duke of *Buckingham* being often heard to say, *That he never thought any of his Compositions perfect, till they had received Mr. Sprat's Approbation.*

To Conclude, the WILL hereunto subjoin'd, is exactly agreeable to his other Writings, and may be justly esteemed an Original in its kind; for upon Perusal, the Reader will not only be pleas'd with the modest Account he gives of himself, his Affection to his Family, and his Gratitude to his Friends, but will find the whole drawn up with the Spirit of a *Gentleman*, in the Style of a *Scholar*, and with the Piety of a *Christian*. A

