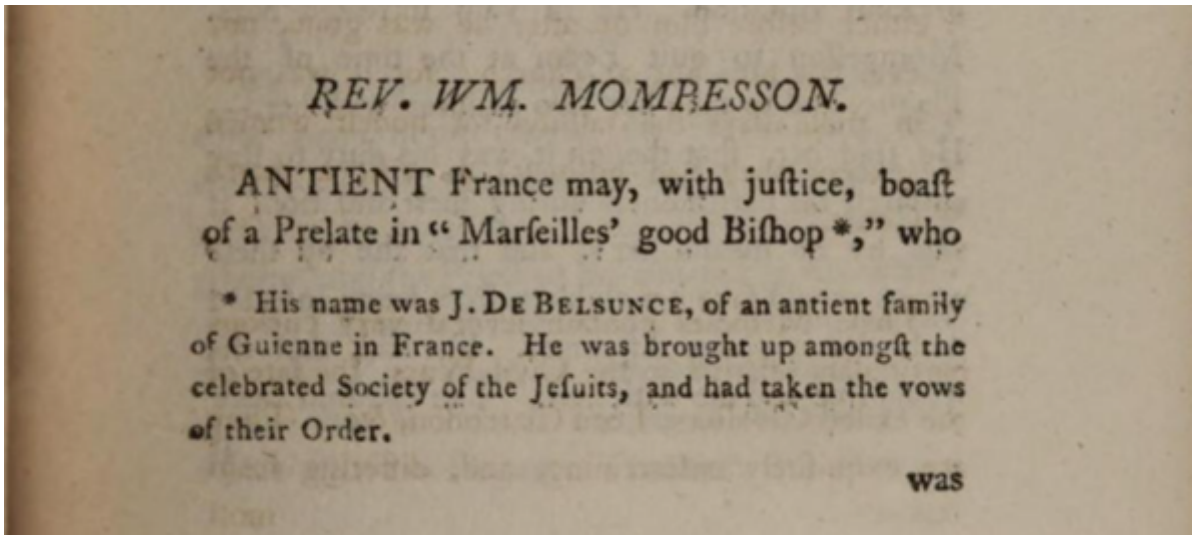
Located At	Staffordshire Record Office
Level	Item
Alt Ref No	D1229/6/6/5
Title	Copies of letters by The Rev. William Mompesson re the Eyam plague
Date	[1666]
Description	Copy letter from Revd Mompesson to his patron Sir George Savile afterwards Earl of Halifax, dated 1 Sep 1666, followed by a copy letter to his children George and Elizabeth (includes news of their mother's death), which continues on a second sheet [torn in two with a portion missing] Copy letter from Revd Mompesson to John Bielby in Yorkshire [his uncle] [The provenance of these copies is unknown and they look to date from the late 18th/early 19th century. There is a connection between the Hill family and the Birds family of Eyam. William Seward printed the letters in Anecdotes of some Distinguished Persons, 1795, ii. 27-44 from what were described as 'the originals, in the possession of a gentleman of Eyam' (possibly the Rev. Thomas Seward of Eyam). See: https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Anecdotes_of_Some_Distinguished_Persons.html?id=-54PZXFjGecC&redir_esc=y
Extent	(3 sheets)

The letters are contained in **Anecdotes of Distinguished Persons** - Chiefly of the Present and Two Preceding Centuries, Volume 2 by William Seward Published T. Cadell Jun. & W. Davies London 1795.

Introduction



REV. WM. MOMPESSON.

ANTIENT France may, with juſtice, boaſt of a Prelate in "Marſeilles' good Biſhop *," who

* His name was J. De Belsunce, of an antient family of Guienne in France. He was brought up amongſt the celebrated Society of the Jeſuits, and had taken the vows of their Order.

was

was the benefactor and the preſerver of mankind; England, however, may congratulate herſelf in having cheriſhed in her boſom a Pariſh-Prieſt, who, without the dignity of character, and the extent of perſons over whom M. de Belſunce diſtributed the bleſſings of his paſtoral care, watched over the ſmaller flock committed to his charge at no leſs riſque of life, and with no leſs fervour of piety and activity of benevolence.

The Rev. Mr. Mompeſſon was Rector of Eyam in Derbyſhire during the time of the Plague that nearly depopulated the town in the year 1666, the year after the Plague of London. He married Catherine the daughter of Ralph Carr, Eſq. of Cowpon, in the county of Durham, by whom he had two children living at the time of this dreadful viſitation. He in vain intreated Mrs. Mompeſſon to quit Eyam at the time of the Plague, and to take her two children with her.--- He told her, that though it was his duty to ſtay amongſt his pariſhioners during their affliction, it was by no means her's, and that ſhe by theſe means would ſave her children from being infected with the reigning diſtemper. She ſaid, that ſhe would live and die with him. The children were

at

at last sent away. A monument has been erected to her with this inscription:

"CATHARINA,
"*Uxor* GULIEL. MOMPESSON,
"*Hujus Ecclesiæ Rectoris*;
"*Filia* RODOLPHI CARR,
"*Nuper de Coupon in Comitat. Dunelm. Armig.*
"*Sepulta est xxiii. Die Mens. Augusti.*
"*Anno Domini* 1666."

Under a Death's-Head on one side of the tomb is this inscription:

"*Mors mihi lucrum.*"

On the other is an Hour-Glass, with these words:

"*Cavete! Nescitis horam.*"

Mr. Mompesson, who appears to have been an ailing man, never caught the Plague, and was enabled, during the whole time of the calamity, to perform the functions of the Physician, the Legislator, and the Priest of his afflicted parish, assisting the sick with his medicines, his advice, and his prayers. Veneration, no less than curiosity, must lament that so little is known of this venerable Pastor after the Plague. Tradition still shews a

cavern

cavern near Eyam, called at this day Cucklett's Church, and formerly called Cucklett's Fields, where this reſpectable man uſed to preach and to pray to thoſe of his pariſhioners who had not the diſtemper. This fatal diſeaſe viſited ſeventy-ſix families, out of which two hundred and fifty-ſix perſons died. The church-yard not being able to contain the bodies of thoſe that periſhed by the Plague, many perſons were buried in the hills and the fields adjoining. Many of the tomb-ſtones erected to their memory are ſtill viſible, particularly thoſe of the family of Hancock, one of whom is ſaid to have ſet on foot the Plating Trade at Sheffield. The Plague broke out in the Spring of 1666, and ceaſed at the beginning of October in the ſame year. It was ſuppoſed to have been brought from the metropolis in ſome woollen cloths that were purchaſed in that city ſoon after the Plague of 1665, and which had not been ſufficiently ventilated and fumigated.

To prevent the contagion from ſpreading into the neighbourhood of Eyam, the Earl of Devonſhire, then reſident at Chatſworth, ſix or ſeven miles from Eyam, cauſed proviſions and the neceſſaries of life to be placed upon the hills at regular times, and at appointed places, to which the inhabitants reſorted, and carried off what was left for them. By the perſuaſion and authority of the excellent

excellent Rector, the inhabitants were prevailed upon to remain within a certain district.—Mr. Seward, the last Rector, the father of the elegant Poetess of his name, preached a Centenary Sermon upon the Plague in 1766, in the parish-church of Eyam, composed with such power of description, and such a pathetic appeal to the feelings of his auditors (many of whom had lost their ancestors by that dreadful visitation), that he was continually interrupted by the exclamations and tears of his audience.

By the kindness of a Gentleman of Eyam, the Publick is presented with Three Original Letters of the Rev. Mr. Mompesson, written during the time of the Plague. I hope that neither I nor my friends shall ever know that person who can read them without tears.

LETTER I.

TO MY DEAR CHILDREN GEORGE AND ELIZABETH MOMPESSON, THESE PRESENT WITH MY BLESSING.

Eyam, August 1666.

" DEAR HEARTS,

" THIS brings you the doleful news of your " dear Mother's death, the greatest loss that ever

" yet

" yet befel you! I am not only deprived of a " kind and loving conſort, but you alſo are " bereaved of the moſt indulgent mother that " ever dear children had. But we muſt comfort " ourſelves in God with this conſideration, that " the loſs is only ours, and that what is our ſorrow " is her gain: the conſideration of her joys, which " I do aſſure myſelf are unutterable, ſhould refreſh " our drooping ſpirits.

" My dear hearts, your bleſſed mother lived " a moſt holy life, and made a moſt comfortable " and happy end, and is now inveſted with a " crown of righteouſneſs. I think that it may " be uſeful to you to have a narrative of your " dear mother's virtues, that by the knowledge " thereof you may learn to imitate her excellent " qualities.

" In the firſt place, let me recommend to you " her piety and devotion (which were according " to the exact principles of the Church of " England). In the next place, I can affirm of " her, that ſhe was compoſed of modeſty and " humility, which virtues did poſſeſs her dear " ſoul in a moſt eminent manner. Her diſcourſe " was ever grave and meek, yet pleaſant withal; " a vaunting immodeſt word was never heard to " come out of her mouth. Again, I can ſet " out in her two other virtues, *i. e.* Charity and

" Fru-

" Frugality. She never valued anything ſhe " had, when the neceſſity of her poor neighbours " did require it, but had a bountiful heart to all " indigent and diſtreſſed perſons. And again, " ſhe was never laviſh or profuſe, but was com- " mendably frugal; ſo that I profeſs in the pre- " ſence of God, I never knew a better houſewife. " She never delighted in the company of tattling " women, and abhorred as much a wandering " temper, of going from houſe to houſe to the " ſpending of precious time, but was ever buſied " in uſeful occupation. In all her ways ſhe was " extremely prudent, kind, and affable; yet to " thoſe from whom ſhe thought no good could be " reaped from their company, ſhe would not un- " boſom herſelf, but in civility would diſmiſs their " ſociety.

" I do believe, my dear hearts, upon ſufficient " grounds, that ſhe was the kindeſt wife in the " world; and I do think from my ſoul that ſhe " loved me ten times more than herſelf. Of this " I will give you a notable inſtance: Some " days before it pleaſed God to viſit my houſe, " ſhe perceived a green matter to come from the " iſſue in my leg (which ſhe fancied to be a " ſymptom of the raging diſtemper amongſt us), " and that it had got vent, and that I was paſt the " maturity of the diſeaſe, whereat ſhe rejoiced

" exceedingly. Now I will give you my thoughts
" of this buſineſs: I think that ſhe was miſtaken
" in her apprehenſions of the matter, for certainly
" it was the ſalve that made it look ſo green;
" yet her rejoicing on that account was a ſtrong
" teſtimony of her love to me; for I am clear
" that ſhe cared not (if I were ſafe) though her
" own dear ſelf was in ever ſo much pain and
" jeopardy. Farther I can aſſure you, my ſweet
" babes, that her love to you was little inferior
" to her's to me; for why ſhould ſhe be ſo
" deſirous for my living in this world of ſorrows,
" but that you might have the comfort of my
" life. You little imagine with what delight ſhe
" was wont to talk of you both, and the pains that
" ſhe took when you ſucked on her breaſts is
" almoſt incredible. She gave a large teſtimony
" of her love to you upon her death-bed. For,
" ſome hours before ſhe died, I brought her
" ſome cordials, which ſhe plainly told me ſhe
" was not able to take. I deſired her to take
" them for your dear ſakes. Upon the mention
" of your dear names ſhe lifted up herſelf, and
" took them, which was to let me underſtand
" that (whilſt ſhe had any ſtrength left) ſhe would
" embrace any opportunity ſhe had of teſtifying
" her affection to you.

" Now

" Now I will give you an account of her " death.—It is certain that ſhe had a ſad con- " ſumption upon her, and her body was then much " waſted and conſumed; however, we being " ſurrounded with infected families, ſhe un- " doubtedly got the diſtemper from them. Her " bodily ſtrength being much impaired, ſhe " wanted not to ſtruggle with the diſeaſe, which " made her illneſs ſo very ſhort, all which time " ſhe ſhewed much ſorrow for the errors of her " ſoul, and often cried out, One drop of my " Saviour's blood to ſave my ſoul! At the be- " ginning of her ſickneſs ſhe intreated me not " to come near her, for fear that I ſhould receive " harm thereby; but I can aſſure you that I did " not deſert her, but (thank God) I ſtood to my " reſolution not to be from her in all her ſickneſs, " who had been ſo tender a nurſe to me in her " health. Bleſſed be God, that he enabled me to " be ſo helpful to her in her ſickneſs, for which " ſhe was not a little thankful. No worldly " buſineſs in her ſickneſs was any diſturbance to " her, for ſhe minded nothing but the making " her calling and election ſure; and ſhe aſked for- " giveneſs of her maid for giving her ſometimes " an angry word. I gave her ſeveral ſweating " antidotes, which had no kind of operation, but

" rather ſcalded and inflamed her more; where-
" upon her dear head became diſtempered, which
" put her upon impertinences, and indeed I was
" troubled thereat; for I propounded ſeveral
" queſtions in divinity to her; as—By whom,
" and on what account, ſhe expected ſalvation?
" and, What aſſurance ſhe had of the certainty
" thereof? Though in other things ſhe talked
" at random, yet at the ſame time to ſuch queſ-
" tions as theſe ſhe gave me as good an anſwer as
" I could poſſibly deſire or expect; and at theſe
" times I bid her repeat after me certain prayers
" and ejaculations, which ſhe always did with
" much devotion, which was no little comfort and
" admiration to me, that God ſhould be ſo good
" and gracious to her.

" A little before her dear ſoul departed, I was
" gone to bed; ſhe ſent for me to pray with
" her: I got up and went to her, and aſked her
" how ſhe did. Her anſwer was, that ſhe was
" but looking when the good ſhould come, and
" thereupon we went to prayers.

" She had her anſwers in the Common-Prayer-
" Book as perfect as if ſhe had been in perfect
" health, and an Amen to every pathetic ex-
" preſſion. When we had ended our prayers
" for the Viſitation of the Sick, we made uſe of
" thoſe

" thoſe prayers which are in the book called " The Whole Duty of Man; and when I heard " her ſay nothing, I urged her, and ſaid, My dear, " doſt thou mind? — Yes, was the laſt word " which ſhe ſpoke. I queſtion not, my dear " hearts, but that the reading of theſe lines will " cauſe many ſalt tears to ſpring from your eyes. " Yet this may be ſome comfort to you, to think " (as I conclude) your dear mother a glorious " Saint in Heaven.

" I could have told you of many more of your " dear mother's excellent virtues, but I hope that " you will not in the leaſt queſtion my teſtimony, " if in a few words I tell you that ſhe was pious " and upright in her converſation.

" Now to that God who beſtowed theſe graces " on her, be aſcribed all honour, glory, and do- " minion, the juſt tribute of all created Beings, " for evermore.—Amen.

" WILLIAM MOMPESSON."

LETTER II.

TO SIR GEORGE SAVILLE, BARONET *.

Eyam, Sept. 1, 1666.

" HONOURED AND DEAR SIR,

" THIS is the ſaddeſt news that ever my pen " could write! The Deſtroying Angel having " taken up his quarters within my habitation, my " deareſt Dear is gone to her eternal reſt, and is " inveſted with a crown of righteouſneſs, having " made a happy end.

" Indeed, had ſhe loved herſelf as well as me, " ſhe had fled from the pit of deſtruction with " her ſweet babes, and might have prolonged her " days, but that ſhe was reſolved to die a martyr " to my intereſt. My drooping ſpirits are much " refreſhed with her joys, which I think are un- " utterable.

" Sir, this paper is to bid you a hearty farewell " for ever, and to bring you my humble thanks " for all your noble favours (and I hope that you " will believe a dying man). I have as much " love as honour for you, and I will bend my

* Patron of the Living of Eyam.

" feeble

" feeble knees to the God of Heaven, that you,
" my dear Lady, and your children, and their
" children, may be bleſt with external and eternal
" happineſs, and that the ſame bleſſing may fall
" upon my Lady Sunderland and her relations.

" Dear Sir, let your dying Chaplain recommend
" this truth to you and your family, that no hap-
" pineſs nor ſolid comfort can be found in this vale
" of tears like living a pious life; and pray ever
" retain this rule, Never to do anything upon
" which you dare not firſt aſk the bleſſing of God
" upon the ſucceſs thereof.

" Sir, I have made bold in my will with your
" name for an executor, and I hope that you will
" not take it ill. I have joined two others with
" you, that will take from you the trouble.
" Your favourable aſpect will, I know, be a
" great comfort to my diſtreſſed orphans. I am
" not deſirous that they may be great, but good;
" and my next requeſt is, that they may be
" brought up in the fear and admonition of the
" Lord.

" Sir, I thank God I am contented to ſhake
" hands with all the world, and have many com-
" fortable aſſurances that God will accept me upon
" the account of his Son; and I find God more
" good than ever I thought or imagined, and I

" wiſh from my ſoul, that his goodneſs were not
" ſo much abuſed and contemned.

" I deſire, Sir, that you will be pleaſed to make
" choice of an humble pious man to ſucceed me
" in my parſonage; and could I ſee your face be-
" fore my departure from hence, I would inform
" you which way I think he may live comfortably
" amongſt his people, which would be ſome ſatiſ-
" faction to me before I die.

" Dear Sir, I beg your prayers, and deſire
" you to procure the prayers of all about you,
" that I may not be daunted by all the powers of
" Hell, and that I may have dying graces; that
" when I come to die, I may be found in a dying
" poſture; and with tears I beg, that when you
" are praying for fatherleſs infants, that you
" would then remember my two pretty babes.

" Sir, pardon the rude ſtyle of this paper,
" and if my head be diſcompoſed, you cannot won-
" der at me. However, be pleaſed to believe that
" I am,

" Dear Sir,

" Your moſt obliged, moſt affectionate,

" and grateful ſervant,

" WILLIAM MOMPESSON."

LETTER

LETTER III.

TO JOHN BEILBY, ESQ. OF ——— IN YORKSHIRE.

Eyam, November 20, 1666.

" DEAR SIR,

" I SUPPOSE this letter will ſeem to you no " leſs than a miracle, that my habitation is " *inter vivos*. I was loth to affright you with a " letter from my hands, therefore I made bold with " a friend to tranſcribe theſe lines.

" I know that you are ſenſible of my condition, " the loſs of the kindeſt wife in the world (whoſe " life was truly imitable, and her end moſt com- " fortable). She was in an excellent poſture " when Death came with his ſummons, which " fills me with many comfortable aſſurances " that ſhe is now inveſted with a crown of " righteouſneſs.

" I find this maxim verified by too ſad expe- " rience: *Bonum magis carendo quàm fruendo* " *cernitur* *. Had I been ſo thankful as my con-

* " Good is more perceivable in the privation than in " the enjoyment."

" dition

" dition did deſerve, I might yet have had my " deareſt Dear in my boſom. But now farewell " all happy days, and God grant that I may repent " my ſad ingratitude!

" The condition of this place has been ſo ſad, " that I perſuade myſelf it did exceed all hiſtory " and example. I may truly ſay that our town " has become a Golgotha, the place of a ſcull; " and had there not been a ſmall remnant of us " left, we had been as Sodom, and like unto " Gomorrah. My ears never heard ſuch doleful " lamentations—my noſe never ſmelled ſuch " horrid ſmells, and my eyes never beheld ſuch " ghaſtly ſpectacles! Here have been ſeventy-" ſix families viſited within my pariſh, out of " which two hundred and fifty-nine perſons died!

" Now (bleſſed be God) all our fears are " over, for none have died of the infection ſince " the eleventh of October, and all the peſt-houſes " have been long empty. I intend (God willing) " to ſpend moſt of this week in ſeeing all woollen " cloaths ſumed and purified, as well for the " ſatisfaction as for the ſafety of the country.

" Here hath been ſuch burning of goods, " that the like, I think, was never known; " and indeed in this I think that we have been too " preciſe. For my part, I have ſcarce left my-" ſelf apparel to ſhelter my body from the cold,

" and

" and have waſted more than needed merely for " example.

" As to my own part, I cannot ſay that I had " ever better health than during the time of the " dreadful viſitation; neither can I ſay that I " have had any ſymptoms of the diſeaſe. My " man had the diſtemper, and upon the appear- " ance of a tumour I gave him ſeveral chemical " antidotes, which had a very kind operation, " and, with the bleſſing of God, kept the venom " from the heart, and after the riſing broke he " was very well. My maid hath continued in " health, which is as great a temporal bleſſing as " could befall me; for if ſhe had quailed *, I " ſhould have been ill ſet to have waſhed, and to " have gotten my own proviſions.

" I know that I have your prayers, and " queſtion not but I have fared the better for " them. I do conclude that the prayers of good " people have reſcued me from the jaws of death; " and certainly I had been in the duſt, had not " Omnipotency itſelf been conquered by ſome " holy violence.

" I have largely taſted the goodneſs of the " Creator, and (bleſſed be his name) the grim " looks of Death did never yet affright me. I

* Quailed (old Engliſh), fell ſick.

" always

" always had a firm faith, that my dear babes " would do well, which made me willing to " ſhake hands with the unkind froward world; " yet I hope that I ſhall eſteem it a mercy, if I am " fruſtrated of the hopes I had of a tranſlation " to a better place, and (God grant) that with " patience I may wait for my chance, and that I " may make a right uſe of his mercies: as the one " hath been tart, ſo the other hath been ſweet " and comfortable.

" I perceive by a letter from Mr. Newby, that " you concern yourſelf very much for my welfare. " I make no queſtion but I have your unfeigned " love and affection. I can aſſure you, that " during all my troubles you have had a great deal " of room in my thoughts.

" Be pleaſed, dear Sir, to accept of the pre- " ſentments of my kind reſpects, and impart them " to your good wife, and all my dear relations. " I can aſſure you that a line from your hand " will be welcome to

" Your ſorrowful and
" affectionate Nephew
" WILLIAM MOMPESSON."

Frontispiece