

## THE ELUSIVE JOHN THORLEY, AUTHOR OF "MELISSELOGIA, OR THE FEMALE MONARCHY"

One hundred and thirty-five years after the publication at Oxford of Charles Butler's first edition of "The Feminine Monarchie, or The Histori of Bees," there appeared "Melisselogia, or the Female Monarchy, Being an Enquiry into the Nature, Order and Government of Bees, . . ." by the Reverend Mr. John Thorley, of Oxon. Mr. Thorley's book was printed in London, 1744, "for the author" and sold by N. Thorley, probably a relative, and by J. Davidson.

Like Butler, Thorley was a minister, as well as a beekeeper, but Thorley's book, although practical and correct for his time, is not now so quaint and amusing as Butler's "Feminine Monarchie" which reached a third edition and included such mythical accounts as bees building an altar in a hive, around a consecrated host.

Thorley had 459 subscribers for his book, including 43 ministers, and as many of them subscribed for several copies, and one for 100, the total number of subscriptions amounted to 784.

Almost nothing seems to be on record concerning Thorley's life. He lived at Chipping Norton, in the County of Oxford, when he published his book, and by 1743 he had behind him forty years of experience as a practical beekeeper. He was married, because on page 164 of his book he mentions his little daughter. He also had a maidservant and he was opposed to drinking and did not describe the making of mead and metheglin, as did Butler, 135 years previously. As would be expected, in view of his calling, his book is interspersed with references to divine wisdom, and because of his praise of King George and of the fact that he utilized every opportunity to urge "Britons and Hibernians" to be loyal, we may conclude that he was a faithful subject of the king.

According to the Bodleian Library, although he is described as "of Oxford," he was not a member of the University and did not hold a living or curacy in any Oxford church. In addition, the City Librarian of Oxford was unable to trace any biographical particulars about him. And so for the present at least, apart from his authorship of *Melisselogia*, details of his life are still missing.

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