

Christian Messenger.

A REPOSITORY OF RELIGIOUS, POLITICAL, AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE.

"NOT SLOTHFUL IN BUSINESS: FERVENT IN SPIRIT."

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WHOLE SERIES.
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Poetry.

For the Christian Messenger.

LINES

SUGGESTED BY THE DEATH OF

MISS JOSEPHINE B. STEVENS.

Oh! shed not a tear that the loved one is free
From the storms that assail us on life's troubled sea:
That, released from temptation and sorrow and pain,
She has proved that to die—to the Christian—is gain:
That another glad spirit has joyously flown
To join the bright throng 'round Immanuel's throne,
And swell the loud anthems of praise to his name,
Who died to redeem them from sorrow and shame,
Oh! how selfish the grief that could weep for her bliss!
That could mourn at her leaving a world such as this,
To dwell in the presence of Jesus above,
And bask in the sunshine of Infinite love!
Shall we say we love Jesus—and rejoice when we know
Of sinners born into His kingdom below,
Yet mourn when He takes them His glory to share
In those mansions of bliss He has gone to prepare?
Shall we offer our all on the altar of love,
Yet unwillingly yield what He deigns to approve?
Profess to be plants of His hand—yet refuse
When His Love condescends one sweet blossom to
choose?
Wear a gem for a while from His radiant crown,
And weep when He claims it again as His own?
Oh! let us be true to the vows we have made:
Let our ALL on the altar be cheerfully laid:
And when He recalls what we tenderly love,
Let our faith in His goodness the mandate approve.
Oh! how sweet from a wearisome voyage returning
To a home for which long our fond hearts have been
yearning:
To know that the dear ones we missed from our side—
Whose barks were too frail the fierce storms to abide,
That on life's troubled ocean—the traveler assail—
Are through mercy and love anchored safe from the
gale—
That the Heavenly Pilot has guided them home
To the harbor of peace, where no sorrow can come.
There they're eagerly watching—their trials all o'er—
Our tempest-torn vessels approaching the shore:
And will joyously shout when—the danger all past—
The storm-scattered fleet is moored safely at last,
Blessed Spirit of Peace, let thine influence be shed
O'er the hearts from whose dwelling the sunlight has
fed.
May they feel that in mercy the stroke has been given,
That called their belov'd one so early to Heaven:
And the prospect of meeting in glory, impart
The patience of Hope to each sorrowful heart.

Lower Steviacke, Nov., 1858.

J. B.

Baptist History.

For the Christian Messenger.

A SERIES OF LETTERS TO A YOUNG CHRISTIAN.

LETTER LVI.

The Quiet Period.

From A. D. 1688 to A. D. 1792.

Continued.

MY YOUNG FRIEND,

I wish it were possible to give you a pleasing and favourable portrait of the celebrated Robert Robinson. Gifted with remarkable talents—of sprightly genius—vigorous in imagination—capable of writing in an easy, clear, and flowing style—and well-informed on all subjects—he might have rendered eminent service to the cause of truth, had truth really obtained a lodgment in his heart.

Mr. Robinson professed to be converted under the ministry of Mr. Whitefield. He began to preach almost immediately after his baptism. He took charge of a small church at Cambridge, with which he continued all his life. As a preacher he was deservedly popular with all classes. The educated admired his discourses; the illiterate could understand them. As a writer, he attracted great attention. His "Village Discourses" are models of exquisite tact in the adaptation of style and manner to special circumstances. To his translation of Claude's "Essay on the Composition of a Sermon" he appended voluminous notes, curious and instructive, containing plans of sermons, illustrative of the advice given by the author, together with pertinent and pithy observations. His Tracts on Nonconformity were like "sharp arrows of the mighty with coals of juniper." The "History of Baptism" exhausts the

subject; all writers on the controversy, on our side of the question, make use of the work. When he compiled his "Ecclesiastical Researches" he had renounced the Trinity and other truths connected with it. The effects of his change of sentiments appear in every part of the volume. There is a constant endeavour to write down the Orthodox, or Trinitarian party, while all excellence is ascribed to Arianism and other isms of a lower kind. But being a posthumous work it is less open to criticism, as it did not receive a final revision from the author; I will only add, therefore, that the statements in the text should be always carefully compared with the authorities cited in the notes, and that the originals should be consulted, whenever practicable.

Mr. Robinson died at Birmingham, June 9, 1790, in the 55th year of his age. He had preached in Dr. Priestley's meeting-house on the preceding Lord's-day. "His discourse," said Dr. P., "was unconnected and desultory, and his manner of treating the Trinity savoured rather of burlesque than serious reasoning. He attacked orthodoxy more pointedly and sarcastically than I ever did in my life."—(Dyer's Memoir of Robinson, p. 397). On the following Tuesday morning he was found dead in his bed. What a difference between his beautiful hymn, "Mighty God, while angels bless thee," &c., and that last sermon!

Robert Hall of Arnsby has been mentioned as the author of the valuable and useful book, "Help to Zion's travellers." He also wrote several of the Circular Letters of the Northamptonshire Association, which were in fact brief treatises on doctrinal and practical subjects. Mr. Hall died March 13, 1791.

John Collett Ryland, A. M. was in some respects an extraordinary man, though now reckoned among the forgotten ones. His "Contemplations on Religious Subjects," in three volumes, 8vo, were received by the public with considerable favour. His Address at the grave of Dr. Andrew Gifford, entitled, "The first and second coming of Christ contrasted," was a rare specimen of sublime eloquence. He was an enthusiast in education, and his influence over the young was peculiarly powerful. After a successful ministry at Northampton, where he laboured twenty-six years, he resigned his charge into the hands of his son, afterwards Dr. Ryland of Bristol, and spent the remainder of his life at Enfield, Middlesex. There he presided over a large and flourishing school, in which many were trained for future usefulness. The late Dr. Newman of Stepney College was for some time his assistant. Mr. Ryland died July 24, 1792. "Well do I remember," said Dr. N., more than forty years afterwards, "the awful stillness of that evening. I felt as if all the world were dead! * * * When a large allowance has been made for his eccentricities, we shall find much to admire in his quick apprehension—his lively imagination—his tenacious memory. To use an expression of his own, "All his brains were fish-hooks." Who that ever knew him did not express astonishment at his insatiable thirst for knowledge; his unwearied zeal in the instruction of the rising generation; his aptness to teach; his tongue of fire? Surely there are some still living that can never forget his love of country; his ardour in the cause of civil and religious freedom; his child-like, unsuspecting simplicity; his noble disinterestedness, and uniform devotedness to the cause of God and truth; the unimpeachable integrity and purity of his life, from the period of his conversion to his death; his affection for all good men; and especially the condescending encouragement he gave to the young, the poor and the weak, among his brethren in the ministry." (Pritchard's Memoir of Dr. Newman, p. 51).

The Baptist denomination is under deep obligations to the Stennett family. Edward Stennett was some time pastor of the church at Pinner's Hall, London, where he was succeeded by his son Joseph, in the year 1690, who presided over the church till his death, in 1713. Both were Sabbatarians. Distinguished among his brethren

for the extent and variety of his literary acquirements, his earnestness of soul, his profound and practical wisdom, and his unswerving integrity, Mr. Joseph Stennett was held in high esteem by all religious parties. If he would have conformed to the Church of England he might have attained an exalted position; but he was proof against temptation, though liberal offers were made him. His influence was known to be powerful, and strenuous efforts were employed by the Court, on the latter end of Queen Anne's reign, to gain him over to the Tory policy, in the hope that other Dissenters might be induced to follow him. Mr. Stennett understood the principles of freedom too well to be caught in such a trap. His firmness had a happy effect on others.—Numerous treatises on religious subjects and a considerable number of poetical compositions were published by Mr. Stennett. A collected edition of his works was issued after his death. He is most advantageously known among Baptists by his "Answer to Russen," a learned and elaborate work on baptism, to which succeeding writers have been much indebted.

His son and grandson were also "shining lights." Dr. Joseph Stennett, who died Feb. 7, 1758, was upwards of twenty years pastor of the church in Little Wild Street, London. He distinguished himself for loyalty and patriotism during the rebellion in 1745. He enjoyed the esteem of the king, George II., and was on terms of friendship with some of the great ones of the day. Adverting to an interview with the then bishop of London, Dr. Gibson, he said, in a letter to a friend, "I told his Lordship that I more than ever saw the usefulness of the Book of Common Prayer; for, considering how little the scriptures are read by the common people, and how little the gospel preached by the clergy, if it were not for what is said of Christ in the Prayer Book, multitudes would forget there was any such person. He heartily joined in my observation, and told me he had lately heard a sermon by an eminent preacher, who seemed to labour to keep the name of Christ out of it. 'For my part,' added he, 'my time is now short, and therefore my charge to all my clergy is short too. I say to all of them that come to me, 'See to it that you preach Jesus Christ; don't preach Seneca, nor Plato, but preach Jesus Christ.'"—(Ivimey, iii. 581.)

Dr. Samuel Stennett, son of the above, succeeded his father at Little Wild Street, and held the pastorate till his death. He had been assistant-pastor for ten years previously. Few men have risen so high in general estimation. His learning—his discretion—his benevolence—his earnest zeal—his holy and uniformly consistent conduct, secured for him an amount and power of influence rarely enjoyed. His pulpit labours were highly appreciated; his writings were acceptable and much valued. Besides two treatises on the baptismal controversy, he published three volumes of discourses, "on personal religion," "on domestic duties," and "on the parable of the sower."

The celebrated John Howard honoured Dr. Stennett with his friendship, and was accustomed to attend his ministry when he visited London. In a letter addressed to him from Smyrna, dated Aug. 11, 1786, he says:—"With unabated pleasure I have attended your ministry; no man ever entered more into my religious sentiments, or more happily expressed them. It was some little disappointment when any one occupied your pulpit. Oh! Sir, how many sabbaths have I ardently longed to spend in Wild Street: on those days I generally rest, or, if at sea, keep retired in my little cabin. It is you that preach, and I bless God I attend with renewed pleasure. God in Christ is the work, the portion of my soul. I have little more to add—but accept my renewed thanks. I bless God for your ministry; I pray God reward you a thousand fold."—Dr. Stennett died Aug. 24, 1795.

Benjamin Beddome, A. M., who ministered to the church at Bourton on the Water more than fifty-four years was one

of those whose "memory is blessed." We are indebted to him for many excellent hymns, in the use of which the churches praise God, and will probably continue to praise him for many ages yet to come. He was accustomed for a long time to compose a hymn to be sung after his sermon on the Lord's-day morning; these were afterwards collected into a volume. It was somewhat remarkable, that having preached on Lord's-day, Jan. 4, 1778, from Psalm 31. 15—"My times are in thy hand"—and read at the close of the discourse that most appropriate hymn, "My times of sorrow and of joy," &c., he received intelligence next morning of the sudden death of his son, a young physician of great promise. God had graciously prepared him for the stroke by the spiritual exercises connected with the sermon and hymn.

A writer in the *Baptist Register* (probably Dr. Rippon) gives the following account of Mr. Beddome's preaching:—

"The labours of this good man among his charge were unremitting and evangelical. He fed them with the finest of the wheat. No man in all his connexions wrote more sermons, nor composed them with greater care—and this was true of him to the last weeks of his life. In most of his discourses the appreciation of a student and the ability of a divine were visible. He frequently differed from the generality of preachers by somewhat striking either in his text or in his method. If the passage were peculiar or abstruse, simplicity of illustration and familiarity in discussion characterised the sermon; or if his text were of the most familiar class, he distributed it with novelty, discussed it with genius, and seldom delivered a hackneyed discourse. Indeed, sermonising was so much his forte, that at length when knowledge had received maturity from years, and composition was familiarised by habit, he has been known, with a wonderful facility of the moment, to sketch his picture at the foot of the pulpit stairs, to colour it as he was ascending, and, without turning his eyes from the canvass, in the same hour, to give it all the finish of a master. One instance of this will long be remembered, which happened at a ministers' meeting at Fairford, in Gloucestershire. After public service began, his natural timidity, it seems, overcame his recollections. His text and his discourse, for he did not preach by notes, had left him; and in the way from the pew to the pulpit he leaned his head over the shoulder of the Rev. Mr. Davis, pastor of the place, and said, "Brother Davis, what must I preach from?" Mr. Davis, thinking he could not be at a loss, answered, "Ask no foolish questions." This afforded him considerable relief. He turned immediately to Titus iii. 9., "Avoid foolish questions;" and he preached a remarkably methodical, correct, and useful discourse on it."

Mr. Beddome died Sept. 3, 1797, in the 75th year of his age. Three volumes of his sermons were published after his death, and extensively circulated.

A few more names may be more briefly referred to.—John Piggott was several years pastor of the church in Little Wild Street. He was a powerful and popular preacher, and a leading man in the Denomination. Preaching at the first meeting of an Association of Baptist churches in London, in 1704, he said, "We have work of the highest importance on our hands; let us not waste the little time we have to do it in. It was a cutting-reproof which the mariners gave the philosopher, who would have entertained them with an impertinent harangue in the midst of a storm—'we perish while thou triflest.' All our warm disputes about indifferent things are but laborious trifling."—(Ivimey, ii. 452.) Mr. Piggott died in March, 1713.

Edward Wallin (died in 1753), and his son, Benjamin Wallin (died in 1782) were pastors of the Church in Maze Pond, London; the first for twenty years, the second for forty years. They were exceedingly beloved and revered.

Samuel Wilson, upwards of twenty years pastor of the church in Prescott Street, London, of whom Dr. Gill said, "He came forth, even at first, with clear evangelical light, with great warmth, zeal, and fer-