

Correspondence.

For the Christian Messenger.

A Biographical Sketch of the Rev. Richard McLearn.

[The following is part of a Sermon preached in Granville Street Church, Halifax, on the occasion of Mr. McL's death, by the Pastor Rev. W. H. Humphrey, and is published by request.—Ed. C. M.]

The Rev. Richard McLearn was born in Rawdon, Aug. 22, 1804. Of a family of twelve children he was the youngest of six sons, and the seventh child. His father, James McLearn emigrated in early youth with his parents to this country, from Ireland, settling first at Liverpool—then at Windsor, but after his marriage to Elizabeth Fenton of Rawdon (formerly of York-shire, England.) took up his residence in that township as a farmer. The subject of this notice, is said to have early evinced an unusual capacity of mind and a marked fondness for books. On this account he was kept quite regularly at school between the ages of six and fourteen, it being his father's design to qualify him, ultimately, for mercantile pursuits, or for school-teaching. But in consequence of pecuniary embarrassments, he was compelled to withdraw him from school and put him to labor.

Up to the age of sixteen, his religious associations were mainly with the Episcopalians, his parents, though not professors of religion, usually worshipping with that body of Christians. On this point (in a brief private sketch of his early life, which he has left, and from which I am happy to be able to make frequent and somewhat copious extracts,) he says of himself

"So regular was I in my attendance, and so much praised by my mother, that I became as self-righteous as so young a Pharisee well could be. I prided myself on my regular church-going habits, and conceived I was much superior to those who neglected such duties; while I was a perfect stranger to vital godliness. My habits of apparent piety, and my inclination for reading, induced my acquaintances, from my youth to designate me to the ministry."

But although subject to special religious impressions "from his very infancy," principally from his mother's instructions, it was not till he was sixteen years of age, that his mind received its "first deep lasting convictions." On a Sabbath of August, 1820, after spending the morning with some of his ungodly companions, in an improper manner, he returned home and threw himself down in his bed-chamber and slept, but soon awaking found himself in deep trouble of mind. His "sensations" he describes as peculiar, corresponding to those before experienced at "the loss of a dear little sister." He read his Bible, but felt no relief. He then took the little book called, "Allaire's Alarm to the Unconverted," and retiring to the field sat down on the brink of a small river, where "with many tears and deep regret," he read what the author delineates as the marks of an unconverted sinner. "I plainly saw," he adds, "that I possessed every mark of unregeneracy there described. I saw that I deserved God's everlasting wrath for my sins, having rebelled against him ever since I was capable of lifting up my arm against him. I perceived that it was extremely dangerous for me to remain in my present situation, and how to amend I knew not."

After reflecting for some time on my exposed condition, it occurred to me that my only refuge was to avoid sin in future. * * * I resolved to lead a new life and punctually to observe the duty of prayer. I made my first vocal and extempore prayer there, and afterwards repeated the Lord's prayer. * * * I had no knowledge of the plan of salvation, no conviction of the necessity of regeneration, no apprehension of the merits of the blessed Saviour. I apprehended God only as a merciful Being, who I hoped would pardon me, if I prayed to him, and forgive me, on condition that I served him. But of the claims of justice I had no conception. My convictions soon departed, when I mingled with my associates, and my words and resolutions were easily broken. My confidence was too much in an arm of flesh."

In this state, he seems to have passed on for some months, with no other peculiar exercises of mind, than that "conscience would occasionally speak out and testify against his sin more than before," until the following December, when he was again awakened to a conviction of his lost and undone condition as a sinner in the sight of God, on this wise—

"I was alone in a forest, working with my axe. Although I was not so deeply affected as before, I saw more plainly the spirituality of God's law and his justice in my condemnation. I was convinced that nothing I had done, or possibly could do, would ever merit the favor of the Lord. Musing in this manner an inquiry arose as on the former occasion, 'What must I do, to be saved?' An answer was suggested to me, as it were a voice speaking, though I knew it was but the whisper of the Spirit, 'Come to Jesus Christ and he will save you.' Having no other refuge I was enabled to rely

on the sacrifice of the Redeemer. My mind was filled with joy and peace inexpressible at the sweet discoveries I had of Christ. I did not know whether any other person on earth had such enjoyments as I had, having never heard any conversation on spiritual or experimental religion. I supposed at the time, I was inspired as the Apostles were, because their language flowed so sweetly into my mind and appeared so clear to my understanding, especially on regeneration."

In this interesting narrative of our brother's first religious experience, we cannot fail to recognize the essential features of a genuine gracious work. The lines, though not so deeply drawn as often, are yet remarkably full and distinct. Those first peculiar "sensations," of something like bereavement, then of more clearly defined guilt and desert of "everlasting wrath,"—the "only refuge" at first discoverable—works—their failure—deeper convictions of "the spirituality of God's law," and of his utter inability to satisfy it,—his apprehension at length of the all sufficient "sacrifice of the Redeemer" and willing reliance thereon, "with joy and peace inexpressible," all seem to mark with unusual clearness the progress of a soul, under the leading of God's Spirit, "out of darkness into his marvellous light."

But these exercises, although so marked and satisfactory to him. If, yet for want of religious society and sympathy, were not immediately made known; his "chief enjoyment" from day to day, being found, "in repairing to an out building or to the forest where he might pour out his soul to God in fervent prayer."

A few weeks afterwards he learned, that there was "what they called a revival of religion, in another part of the township, in connection with the labors of Elder James Munro." "And although he was of the Baptist persuasion, a sect everywhere spoken against, I resolved," he says, "to go and hear him for my self, that I might judge of his piety and doctrines. Having a long distance to walk, I was rather late. He had read his text and was in the introduction of his sermon. His theme was the depravity of mankind and the goodness of God in the remedy provided for his recovery. My heart was filled with great delight during the sermon, especially that I had found one whose views and feelings on the subject of religion corresponded so much with my own. I went home skipping for joy, delighted for what I heard. From that time I had a fellowship for the Baptist people which never terminated. From this time I desired to unite with that Christian Church in communion, but as I did not, at first, approve of their mode of baptism, I could not apply for admission. I constantly attended their meetings, often walking from five to ten miles to enjoy the privilege."

From this point, or a little later, it is interesting to trace the development of that sympathy and regard for the spiritual welfare of his fellowmen, that led him to the ministry. On the occasion of a sermon preached by Mr. Munro the next Spring, in a School house near his father's, he "was powerfully impressed at the end of the sermon with the duty of rising to warn his friends and neighbours to escape from the wrath to come." But his fears prevailed. He "incurred guilt of conscience" by neglect. This was "the first deep concern he ever felt" for others. That night however, for the first time, he communicated his religious experience to the preacher, "and before all his father's family. The cross was heavy, but he ever after had more confidence."

During that winter (of 1820 and 1821) he, for the first time, witnessed the ordinance of baptism. It was performed in the Meander River, by the Rev. George Dimock. "During the administration of the ordinance," he remarks, "I was greatly impressed with the simple manner, in which the ordinance corresponded with the reading of the New Testament. From this time I was convinced of the propriety of baptism, as performed by the Baptists, and soon became convinced of my duty to submit to the sacred rite. But being naturally diffident and often guilty of conformity to the world," he did not do so, until September, 1821, when he was baptized at Rawdon by Elder George Dimock. "In consequence of his cold neglect of duty for so long a time," he did not experience that "comfort in the ordinance" he anticipated, but "on returning home, he repaired to a lonely spot, and in prayer found much consolation." This took place about a year after his conversion, and a month after his seventeenth year.

About three months afterwards, by an arrangement of his father, he entered on a term of service with Mr. James Stevens of Rawdon, whose house thereafter "became his home the principal part of his time for ten years or upwards." "As an instance that God hears the prayers of his people," he records the following. "In the morning before I commenced my labor with Mr. Stevens, I travelled there before daylight, and frequently, on the way, I bended my knees in prayer to God that he would bless me, and sanctify to me my residence in that family. And I knew that my prayers were heard and

answered. I have cause for much thankfulness, that I was placed under the care of that pious family." See in this "instance," brethren, how good it is to "commit our way unto the Lord!" Behold here, a fulfilment of that precious Scripture,— "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and he shall direct thy paths."

But another important chapter of our sketch remains to be given. He who

"— moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform."

Who was pleased to lead Moses, David, "His well beloved Son" even, through scenes of peculiar temptation and trial, preparatory to the great work assigned them, had a similar path marked out, it seems, for our brother's feet. During several years of his first religious experience, he was subject to a great variety of mental changes,— "sometimes rejoicing aloud as he walked the road or worked alone," at other times so deeply depressed, as to "doubt much if he ever had known the love of his blessed Redeemer." In the year 1822 he was "for six months together without confidence to call God his Father." Meanwhile, he was regular in his attendance on the means of grace, punctual in his observance of duty, and he often "disclosed his distress to the ministers of the gospel. But miserable comforters were they all!" These severe and protracted times, he was afterwards convinced, "were for the correction of his religious views and to deepen his religious experience, and to lead him to rely more firmly on the atonement of Christ."

In February, 1823, his mind was "again powerfully impressed with the value of souls, on hearing Mr. Munro preach from 2 Thess. i. 10: "When He shall come to be glorified in His saints," &c. At the close of the sermon the preacher "appealed to the Lord's people on the danger of neglecting souls,—and inquired, if it were possible, if they would not be filled with remorse, at the day of judgment, for neglecting the souls of those around them? I was conscious of guilt," he adds, "and went home weeping bitterly."

These impressions appear to have remained or were frequently revived for some months, leading him to entertain seriously the question of giving himself to the ministry. Toward the close of the year, however, he thought to engage in school-keeping, but was disappointed in his applications, to which providence he was sorely unreconciled.

The following year, 1824, having "relinquished all hope of usefulness to his fellowmen," he entered into contract for a lot of land, and "went so far as to ride nearly one hundred miles to engage a mechanic to erect a mill" thereon. But in all this also disappointment overtook him.

The next year his mind was once more forcibly awakened to the "necessity laid upon him to preach the Gospel," constraining him frequently to exclaim, "Oh that my head were waters," &c. "Often did I repair to a lonely spot to pray," he writes, "that God would remove the impression from my mind, judging it a temptation, but as oft-n when I would draw near to God, my prayer would be, 'Lord prepare me for the ministry, and make me useful in the work.' I had many struggles in my mind about an education and probably had gone to the United States to seek one, only that I was in debt, and my labor was required to meet the demand."

In an imperfect diary, carried a year or two beyond this date, are the following records:

"March 26, 1826.—I have endeavoured at suitable opportunities during the past winter, according to the grace given me, to improve in public, by prayer and exhortation; and on last Sabbath was requested by the church to take the lead in the exercises of the day, and after the close of the meeting was informed that it was their desire, if I conceived it my duty to meet with them in their private meetings; and improve by speaking from passages of Scripture. I never before realized so much the worth of sympathy among brethren. It is my soul's desire that I might be made useful in the cause of God."

"July, 1826.—I have been endeavouring for some time past, to address my fellowmen from some passages of Scripture on suitable occasions, but my mind is so little engaged in divine things, that I fear it will have no effect."

"Aug. 1826.—Endeavored this day to speak to a goodly number—but my capacity is so small, and my communication so indifferent, that I conceive I am a burden to the people, and feel such a sense of my unprofitableness, that I think I must refrain from speaking, until God more clearly discovers it to be my duty."

"Nov. 22, 1826.—I have been in the practice of public speaking, but it occasions very great trials of mind to know my duty." * * * "A desire to acquire learning has occupied my mind much of late, but no opportunity that I can embrace, offers. I wish to know the will of God, and would desire to be useful to my fellowmen. Oh, that I could be stripped of all self-righteousness and pride, that God might be 'all and in all.'"

"March 19, 1827.—Various have been the exercises of my mind, through the past winter, respecting the important work of preaching the gospel, and from time to time I have conceived

it must necessarily be the last. Yesterday, preached twice, in Newport, and never before was so much distressed, concerning the state of sinners, apparently bound to eternal misery, without the smallest concern! I was so much overcome, that I thought it would be my greatest satisfaction to weep day and night in secret places."

A week or two later, he set out on a preaching tour, through Windsor, where at Mr. DeWolf's "he felt as if he had a message to deliver to a number of his family, but suppressed the conviction,"—Falmouth, where "some complained that he preached terror, which was not right, as their people were all converted and wanted consolation,"—Horton, where he preached several times, and "visited from house to house,"—Cornwallis, where "he preached from R. v. i. 7, 'Behold he cometh with clouds, &c.' A very great solemnity appeared." Returning home in about three weeks he continued his labors in his own and neighbouring parts, till the following note was penned.

"July 21, 1827.—It is some time since my last notation. I have passed through distressing doubts respecting my call to preach—often disposed to pray that the Lord would take me to himself, but notwithstanding have continued to preach. Since May I have preached in Newport, Kempt, Kempt Town, Douglas, Rawdon and at Chester at the Association—am at this time engaged through the week in studying English Grammar."

Unfortunately this happens to be the last record, in the brief notes of personal history, which he has left, and from which I have now so largely quoted. But from all I am able to gather from other sources it appears that he continued in about the same course, until the next Spring, when he was publicly set apart to the Gospel Ministry in Rawdon, March 10, 1828, taking the pastoral oversight of the little church, that had in that place five years before, been organized of members from the church in Newport, himself among them.

May 30, 1829, he was called to the pastorate of the Windsor church, having laboured a part of the time with that church for a year or more previously. He accepted the call. And the next year, and for three or four years succeeding, he was pastor of both the Windsor church and the Rawdon Church,—afterwards of the Windsor church alone, until somewhere about the year 1838 when, greatly to the mutual grief and disappointment, both of himself and people, he was compelled, in consequence of bronchial affection and failure of voice, to desist from all regular preaching.

It was during this year, June 26, 1838, that he was married to Harriet Stout Bown, of Sydney, C. B., who after faithfully and affectionately sharing his toils almost to their close, departed this life June 14, 1859.

In the commencement of bro McL's disability, it was confidently hoped, he might recover and become able to resume the labors of his chosen profession. In this view he decided to indulge his long eager thirst for knowledge by spending a few years mainly in study. "He had, at different periods, during his connection with the Rawdon and Windsor Churches, attended at Horton Academy, and from the fruits of such studies was enabled to matriculate at Kings College," where he graduated in due course, and "took his degree of Bachelor of Arts." And it is worthy of special note, as evincing alike his rare capacity for mental effort, and his ardent attachment to his people, that during a part of his College course, he was in the habit of preparing manuscript sermons, which Dr. Harding read to his congregation on the Sabbath. Before his graduation, however, his indisposition, continuing—his prospects of returning health and usefulness in the ministry, becoming more and more dubious, "he thought it best to resign the pastorate altogether, that the church, if possible, might obtain other ministerial assistance." At the same time he deemed it his duty, to turn his attention and engage his energies, at length, in some other employment. Accordingly in 1842, after completing his Collegiate studies, he removed from Windsor to Dartmouth, and became established in Mercantile business in this town. Since which time, of his character and career as a Christian and as a man, I have no need to speak in this place. Is not his praise in all these churches—all these families—all this community? Who of us, my hearers, will hereafter doubt the impracticability of religion and business being properly conducted and adorned together? So conspicuous an example of unbending Christian integrity, and earnest, steadfast devotion to the cause of Christ, in all the associations and embarrassments of commercial and social life may well command our admiration and excite to emulation.

Says one, (E. F. Harding, M. D., Windsor.) whose judgement and means of information