

Christian Messenger.

A REPOSITORY OF RELIGIOUS, POLITICAL & GENERAL INTELLIGENCE.

"Not slothful in business: fervent in spirit."

NEW SERIES. }
Vol. XI. No. 4.

HALIFAX, N. S., WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 24, 1866.

WHOLE SERIES. }
Vol. XXX. No. 4.

Biographical.

For the Christian Messenger.

REVIEW.

Memorials of the Rev. William Bull, of Newport Pagnell: compiled chiefly from his own letters, and those of his friends, Newton, Cowper, and Thornton. 1738-1814. By his Grandsons the Rev. Josiah Bull, M. A. 12mo. pp. 368. London, 1865. Second Edition.

In this biographical age, when almost every public man who dies has his life written, it is refreshing to meet with a Memoir which will be interesting, not to a party, but to the christian world at large. Such is the character of the volume now before us. It contains the history of a remarkable man, and is destined, we think, to take a permanent place in the religious literature of the nineteenth century.

William Bull was born Dec. 22, 1738. He was ordained Pastor of the Independent (Congregationalist) Church at Newport Pagnell, Oct. 11, 1764. He died July 23, 1814. His son Thomas succeeded him, and he was succeeded by his son Josiah, the author of this volume.

Mr. Bull was a thinking, warm-hearted, active christian, and a powerful, popular preacher. Living within a few miles of Olney, where the celebrated John Newton was curate for some years, he formed an intimate friendship with him, and with the poet Cowper. The volume is in consequence enriched with many of the letters that passed between them.

Mr. Bull was for many years Principal of a Theological Institution or "Academy," established at Newport Pagnell for the instruction of candidates for the ministry.

We proceed now to cull from the book some extracts for the entertainment and edification of our readers.

HOW HE LEARNED HEBREW.

He had purchased a Hebrew Bible, "hoping the time would come when he should be able to read it." It was accomplished on this wise:—

"He had no tutor, no grammar, no lexicon. All the help he had was an old Bible which had the Hebrew letters heading the different sections of the 119th Psalm. With this slightest possible aid he commenced his task. He at once saw that the Hebrew Bible began at what with us is the end. The first word he knew must be either 'in,' or 'in the beginning.' He looked in his concordance for other places where the word 'beginning' occurred, and finding the same letters, he wrote down the word Bezaseth ('in the beginning'), and thus, with amazing pains, proceeded to make out the text, word by word, till he had formed for himself a rude lexicon, and at length a grammar, and was able to read his Hebrew Bible tolerably well—a marvellous proof of his thirst for knowledge and of his skill in its acquisition. It is no wonder that the Hebrew was always afterwards a favorite study with him." Page 9, 10.

A REMARKABLE SERMON.

"The Rev. Robert Hall and Mr. Foster (of Biggleswade) were conversing together; and the name of Mr. Ryland being brought up, Mr. Hall referred to a sermon he had once heard him preach. It was at an Association of ministers, I think, in Northamptonshire; and it must have been when Mr. Hall was a very young man, yet the impression of it seems to have been most vivid. The text was Mark 14, 38—'And he began to be sore amazed.' The first head—'Christ was sore amazed at the extent of human depravity!' It was, said Mr. Hall, 'as if in the illustration of this point Mr. Ryland had condensed into a brief half-hour's statement the reading of a life-time. You felt that he had expended his whole power upon this one topic, and that it was impossible to rise higher. But under his second division—Christ was sore amazed at the weight of Divine wrath—his exposition was still more striking, and the impression was—This surely cannot be surpassed. But the handling of the last particular (I think it had reference to the malignity of Satan) was the climax of all.

'It was the most wonderful discourse,' said Mr. Hall, 'I ever heard.' And then he most beautifully added, 'It was, sir, as if a man had brought the cattle of a thousand hills and all the incense of Arabia to one single sacrifice.' Page 49.

THE LOVE OF CHRIST.

(William Bull to John Newton) "Yesterday I spoke from John 15, 1-7, about one of the greatest, best, and most dear Masters that ever any servant has had the honour to be employed by. It is impossible to express with too great ardour how pure, holy, wise, powerful, and glorious He is. Nothing in the world can equal my admiration of His glory, on the one hand, nor, on the other, can exceed my contempt for my old carnal self. And yet, I have no new views of Jesus Christ, or particular discoveries of His glory, which I have not had these twenty years; but, somehow or other, the older I grow the more my heart is affected with that little knowledge I have of him. I tell you freely, my friend, that I think myself one of the happiest men alive in this matter—viz. that I do know a little about Jesus Christ. I know there is such a Person. I know a little what kind of person He is in respect of poor lost sinners such as I am; and though I do not know certainly that I am interested in Him, yet I hope, and in general believe I am, if my heart does not cheat and deceive me. There are many things I say and do that don't look as though I really did love Christ, though I may think I do. Be that as it may, by the grace of God I am what I am; and all the rest our dear Master will settle for us very soon, and clear up every thing." Page 82.

"NAUGHTY SELF."

(John Newton to William Bull.) "I have many pleasant and kind connexions; but I have a troublesome inmate—a lodger—who assumes as if the house were his own, and is a perpetual incumbrance, and spoils all. He has long been noted for his evil ways, but though generally known, is not easily avoided. He lodged with one Saul of Tarsus, long before I was born, and made him groan and cry lustily. Time was when I thought I would shut the door to keep him out of my house; but my precaution came too late. He was already within; and to turn him out by head and shoulders is beyond my power. Nay, I cannot interdict him from any one single apartment. If I think of retiring to the closest corner, he is there before me. We often meet, and jostle, and snarl at each other, but sometimes (would you believe it?) I lose all my suspicion, and am disposed to treat him as an intimate friend. This inconsistency of mine, I believe, greatly encourages him, for I verily believe he would be ashamed and afraid to be seen by me if I always kept him at a proper distance. However, we both lay such a strong claim to the same dwelling, that I believe the only way of settling the dispute will be (which the landlord himself has spoken of) to pull down the house over our heads. There seems something disagreeable in this mode of proceeding; but from what I have read in an old book I form a hope that when things come to this crisis I shall escape, and my enemy will be crushed in the ruins." Page 122.

THE SPIRITUALIZERS.

(John Newton to William Bull—the latter having been supposed to maintain, in his "Messiah," that passages in the Old Testament should not be applied to Jesus, "unless they are expressly quoted in so many words in the New.") "I have met with such trash from some who pretend to spiritualize, and obtruded with so much confidence, that I thought it right to enter my protest against the practice, especially as I think it obtains most amongst rash and injudicious preachers. And though sometimes wise and good men give a little in to it, I think it is rather countenanced than justified by their example. For instance, I remember to have heard Mr. Bull preach a sermon, and a very good one, from Exodus 4, 14; but though the sermon was a good one, I thought the points enlarged upon were no more deducible from the text than from the first verse in Genesis. Mr. Bull, however, knew what he was about; but when such men as Mr. Page (the curate at Olney) attempt to preach from Genesis 35, 8,

that Deborah is the law—the oak under which she was buried, the cross, &c., they make wild work of it. I have allowed the propriety of preaching by way of accommodation, and I think I have not said that we should apply no passages to Jesus unless quoted in so many words in the New Testament; but that when we propose our own sentiments, which are not so supported, we should do it under great modesty, which perhaps you will readily allow. After all, if in this point the observation that doctors differ should apply to you and me, I have still the comfort of thinking that there are not many doctors who differ less, or in fewer particulars, than we do. I like to have the proofs of the subject lie plainly in the text; but if another preaches solid scriptural truth from 'Higgaion, Selah,' I am content. My censure is only intended against those who affect to please, and to show their superior sagacity by the singularity, quaintness, and novelty of their conceits, and who think they can discover mysteries in a text, when, perhaps, they do not understand even the literal sense of it." Page 158.

A MELANCHOLY STATE.

(William Cowper to William Bull.) "Both your advice and your manner of giving it are gentle and friendly, and like yourself. I thank you for them, and do not refuse your counsel because it is not good, or because I dislike it, but because it is not for me. There is not a man upon earth that might not be better for it, myself only excepted. Prove to me that I have a right to pray, and I will pray without ceasing; yea, and praise too, even in the belly of this hell, compared with which Jonah's was a palace, a temple of the living God. But let me add, there is no encouragement in the Scripture so comprehensive as to include my case, nor any consolation so effectual as to reach it. I do not relate it to you, because you could not believe it; you would agree with me if you could. And yet, the sin by which I am excluded from the privileges I once enjoyed you would account no sin; you would even tell me it was a duty. This is strange. You will think me mad; but I am not mad, most noble Festus—I am only in despair; and those powers of mind which I possess are only permitted to me for my amusement at some times, and to acuminate and enhance my misery at others. I have not even asked a blessing on my food these ten years, nor do I expect that I shall ask it again. Yet I love you, and such as you, and determine to enjoy your friendship while I can. It will not be long. We must soon part for ever." Page 112.

Poor Cowper! The cloud was not dispersed on earth. It is all sunshine now.

REV. ROBERT ROBINSON.

"Mr. Bull was asked to preach at the opening of a Baptist Chapel at Thrapston, in Northamptonshire; and there were some interesting circumstances worthy of record in connexion with that visit. The well-known and highly gifted Mr. Robinson of Cambridge was engaged to take part in the same service. He had already become very latitudinarian in his views, but still ministered among the professedly orthodox. This extraordinary man was remarkable, amongst other things, for a very musical voice. He had also wonderful self-possession. He took the morning service. The hymn which he gave out from Dr. Watts's collection though familiar to his audience, seemed to them, when Robinson read it, as something entirely new. He then took up a miniature Bible and read the fourth chapter of John in a way that riveted the attention of the congregation. When he came to the verse, 'Go, call thy husband, and come hither,' there was a general movement, as if every one felt, he must obey the injunction. Then changing his tone, in a tremulous voice he uttered the woman's reply, 'I have no husband;' and so through the whole narrative. His text was from the same chapter, 'God is a Spirit, and they who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.' The sermon was remarkable for its eloquence, and as remarkable for its utter deficiency of all gospel truth. Amongst its many striking thoughts, there occurred a statement somewhat to the following effect:—'He was contrasting the works of man with the works of God. An artist, he said, may represent upon his canvas a field of corn in all

the ripe beauty of autumn. The picture may be perfectly true to nature; but it is the great God alone who can make the gentle breeze to pass over that field of golden grain, and cause it to wave and glisten beneath the noon-day light. Mr. Greathead, who was present, and who in his early days had been a great admirer of Garrick, said how much the exhibition of Robinson's powers reminded him of that celebrated actor." Page 171.

AN ECCENTRIC LETTER.

(Rowland Hill to William Bull.) Mr. Bull had been preaching at Surry Chapel. One evening the King's organist was there, and occupied so much time with the musical part of the service that a small remnant was left for the sermon. Mr. Hill was greatly annoyed at it, and wrote the following "characteristic letter":—

"MY DEAR BROTHER BULL,—How you must think of my treatment last Tuesday evening, when his Majesty's tweedle-dee and tweedle-dum man interrupted our worship; and that after such a serious introduction of singing with our organ which we enjoyed the Sabbath before. Pride must have its fall, and for the future all the tweedle-dums that kings love they shall keep among themselves. Their fine airs will never do for a Methodist meeting-house. And so farewell to the first and last of the business. Brother Bull, thanks, a thousand thanks for your last visit. The people sucked it in very greedily. That proves they desired the sincere milk of the word, that may grow thereby.

"But I forgot the design of my letter. After my Tuesday blunder, Mrs. Hill and I came over to Mr. Neale's, in hopes of an interview with you at his house; but, like a nimble jack, we found you gone, and so we did our very best to patch up our bad behaviour. I rejoice with you that your lovely son is as he is, Jesus gives you this joy. His great sacrifice procured all we ever had, now have, and ever shall have.

"Past ten o'clock; eyes half shut; mind marvellously stupid; spirit much exhausted; and candles burning to waste. I shall therefore save the best part of a halfpenny if I finish directly.—Yours very gratefully and affectionally,

R. HILL.

"Madam Hill's love to Madam Bull.

"LONDON, (some day, I know not what, in the month of February, 1793, and here ends my present knowledge.)" Page 218.

A MODEL MINISTER.

"He that would excel as a minister must unite the union of the Mystic, the simplicity of the Moravian, and the deep, clear, sound judgment of the Calvinist. If either is wanting, the preacher is naught."

GOOD ADVICE.

(William Bull to his son.) The more retirement you have before you preach, the better, in general, will you preach. I like to read, before I preach, some good book, and the more spiritual it is, the better. Then I like to preach my sermon over to myself for at least two hours. When I do this I am sure to feel liberty. In all your praying and preaching, never lose sight of Divine union. Be as spiritual as you can, and as orthodox as you may be. Remember, we are not heathen philosophers nor philosophical moralists, but ministers of Christ, and are called to preach nothing but, what is peculiar to the gospel of Christ,—either its doctrines, or its precepts, or its promises." Page 323.

SLEEPY HEARERS.

"In my grandfather's days, afternoon congregations were always large; and in summer time not unfrequently drowsiness would overcome the hearers. Observing this to be the case, on one occasion Mr. Bull said, in a loud tone, 'My chest aches very much, and I will sit down and rest till you are all awake, and then I will proceed.' At another time, under similar circumstances, he paused, took up a Greek Testament and began to read. The sleepers were at once aroused, and all looked on with wonder, and some thought 'the old gentleman was struck.' But, looking up from his book, he said, 'Well, I thought you could understand Greek as well as English when you were asleep; now I will put this aside, and go on with my sermon.' Here is another story about sleepy hearers.