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**Religion in Earnest A Memorial of
Mrs. Mary Lyth, of York**

John Lyth

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RELIGION IN EARNEST.

A MEMORIAL OF MRS. MARY LYTH, OF YORK.

BY

HER SON JOHN LYTH.

1861.

**DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF MY BE-
LOVED SISTER ELIZA HILL, WHOSE RARE AND
UNOSTENTATIOUS VIRTUES SHED FRA-
GRANCE ON EARTH, BUT ARE ONLY RECORD-
ED IN HEAVEN.**

PREFACE.

In compiling the following sheets, the Author has discharged what he felt to be an act, not merely of filial affection, but of Christian duty. To his deceased and venerated Mother he owes more than words can express;—a Mother whose consistent example, earnest piety and frequent effectual prayers, perhaps even more than her oft-repeated counsels, produced upon his mind, while yet a child, the settled conviction that religion is the one business of life. But he believes it also due to the cause of Christ, that an example of "Religion in Earnest," so pre-eminent, should not pass unrecorded and unimproved.

Those who think the charm of biography consists in startling incident; or who seek for material to gratify a literary taste, will discover here little to meet their respective views. We have only to offer them a simple record of one, whose history possessed no romantic interest, and who made no pretension to intellectual attainments. But such as love to trace the development of Divine grace in the human heart, and to see its power uniformly exemplified in the several phases of every-day life;—who are willing to learn how much may be accomplished by decision, simplicity of purpose, and undeviating consistency;—in a word, how every Christian even in private life, may become a centre of happiness, life and power, are in this volume presented with no common illustration.

The method of arrangement which the writer has adopted has been determined, partly by his materials, and partly by the desire to render his subject practical as well as interesting. How far he has succeeded must be decided by the impression made upon the mind of the reader. He now commends his work to God, who alone can give success to every good purpose, earnestly praying that Christ, who was magnified in the life of his now sainted mother, may be yet more abundantly magnified in her death.

J.L.

Stetten, O.A. Cannstatt, Württemberg.

December 27th, 1860.

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I.

ANTECEDENTS.

"A GOOD MAN LEAVETH AN INHERITANCE TO HIS CHILDREN'S CHILDREN." Prov. xiii. 22.

Within the grounds attached to the mansion of the Earl of Harewood, in the West Riding of Yorkshire, is a substantial and well-built farm house, furnished with suitable outbuildings, and surrounded by a fine cluster of fruit-trees. It stands on the side of a hill, which slopes gently down to the river Wharfe, and commands a prospect, which, though not extensive, is singularly picturesque. In front, a little to the right, the ruined fortress of Harewood peeps out of a scattered wood, which crowns the summit of the hill, and shelters one of the neatest and trimmest villages in England. On the left flows the beautiful Wharfe but soon loses itself among the adjacent heights. Behind, towers the logan of Arlmes cliff, an interesting relic of druidical skill and superstition; while Riffa wood and Ottley Shevin complete the beauty of the landscape. A row of trees, protected by a lofty wall, effectually conceals the house we have mentioned, from the highroad, which for some distance runs at the foot of the hill and almost parallel to the river. Formerly there was only a sandy lane, which passed immediately in front of the house, and winding up the hill, entered the village between the castle and the church. From this circumstance the adjoining farm was called Sandygate, but with the changes that have taken place, the appellation is now almost forgotten, although the house still retains the name of its original occupant, and is known in the neighbourhood as 'Stables House.'

Just a hundred years ago, this house was built for the accommodation of Wm. Stables, a wealthy yeoman, who resided at Heatherwick (now Stanke), about a mile from Harewood; and who, success-

ful in the cultivation of his paternal acres, sought to extend his interests by renting the farm of Sandygate. His removal was however unpropitious to his domestic happiness; for entering the new house before it was fully fit for occupation, his wife, already in a delicate state of health, took cold and died; leaving him with four children, the eldest of whom was six years old, and the youngest but an infant. Mr. S. is said to have been a shrewd and sensible man, of strict morals and unbending integrity; but withal stern and inflexible in disposition, pharisaic, and a bigoted churchman. His punctuality in the performance of outward religious duties, and the regular payment of his dues, with now and then a fat sheep given to the poor, secured him among his neighbours the reputation of being a good Christian. As might be supposed, his children were trained with great severity, and educated in the strictest sect of their religion. Collect and catechism were duly committed to memory, prayers regularly read in the family, the Sabbath rigorously observed, a stiff and precise order reigned through the whole household; but it wanted the charm and life of spiritual feeling. As the children grew up to maturity, this state of things was destined to be changed by the introduction of a new and unwelcome element, which seriously disturbed the never too profound tranquillity of the old man. Mary, the youngest child, whose mind had gradually opened to the truth, although so defectively communicated, became deeply convinced of sin under the ministry of Mr. Jackson, the parish clergyman; and so painful and vivid were her views of her miserable condition, that she cried aloud for mercy in the church. Her father was deeply concerned for her, but, as he was ignorant of spiritual religion, he was utterly at a loss to understand her feelings. As a last resource he sent for the minister, but with no better result, for he too, frankly confessed that he did not understand the sorrow of which he had been the unwitting occasion. A specimen of this gentleman's ability to administer spiritual counsel and direction is recorded in the characteristic autobiography of Richard Burdsall. "Visiting Mr. Stables in his last illness Mr. Jackson asked him how he did. Mr. S. replied, 'Sir, I am a miserable sinner.' 'Do not say you are a miserable sinner,' replied the Reverend gentleman, 'for you are a good man.' Mr. S. answered, 'O, Mr. Jackson, I am a miserable sinner.' To this the parson replied, 'if you will be a miserable sinner you are like to be a miserable sinner,' and so came no more."

Mary was thus left to seek relief and comfort where she could; and having heard of the Methodists, who held a meeting every Sabbath in a house about a mile distant from Harewood, she secretly resolved to attend, if possibly, she might find the hidden peace, which she had hitherto sought in vain. Here she met with a few humble but sincere persons, who could sympathise with her state of mind; and from whom she received such instruction and encouragement, that, not long after while pleading with God in the secrecy of her chamber, she obtained 'redemption through the blood of Christ, even the forgiveness of sins.' Much to the chagrin of her father, she now became an avowed Methodist; and was subjected to the petty persecution, which usually awaits the first in a family that embraces vital godliness. On one occasion, her father locked her out of the house; and, on another, threatened to shoot her, but she remained firm to her profession; until at length, her consistent and steady deportment was rewarded by the conversion of her two brothers, John and William, and also of two of the servants. The increased displeasure of the old gentleman was signally exhibited. Afraid lest Elizabeth his eldest daughter should also become a Methodist, he resolved at once to free his house from all possibility of infection. The two servants were dismissed without ceremony; and the three delinquents banished to a farm, which he had purchased, at Kirkby Overblow, a few miles distant. These precautions were useless. The removal of her sister and brothers, together with the occasion of their banishment, so much affected Elizabeth, that in fact it contributed to the result it was intended to prevent. So foolish and vain are the thoughts of men when they attempt to arrest the operations of the Spirit of God. Isolated and freed from control, the young converts were now left to obey the dictates of conscience without further opposition. In their new home they were thrown more directly in contact with the Methodists, and especially formed acquaintance with Richard Burdsall, with whose class they at once connected themselves.

Richard Burdsall was one of those bold and distinctive characters, whose sterling piety and ardent zeal shining forth from under a rude exterior, gave such peculiar lustre to the age of early Methodism; and indicated an agency, specially raised by God, to break up the fallow ground and clear away the thorns, that the incorruptible

seed of truth might find a soil congenial to its germination and growth. His conversion, which occurred at the age of twenty, was accompanied by indubitable proofs of its reality; and instantly followed up by entire consecration to God. The path of usefulness soon opened out before him; and in spite of 'fightings without and fears within,' he pursued it with undeviating integrity to the close of a protracted life. His shrewdness and originality of thought, quaint and pointed method of expression, combined with such an intimate acquaintance with the word of God, that some said he had the scriptures at his fingers' ends, and others nicknamed him 'old chapter and verse;' and above all, his known integrity and uncompromising zeal for the glory of God, amply compensated for the want of cultivation, and rendered him as a lay preacher so exceedingly popular and useful, that he was repeatedly solicited to enter a higher sphere, and devote himself to the work of the ministry. He was twice appointed by Mr. Wesley to the York circuit, in which he was resident; and in six different instances, invited to take charge of independent congregations; but, although he so far yielded to the request of the former as to make the experiment for nine months, he voluntarily retired, under the conviction that he was called to occupy an humbler but not less useful sphere. His labours, which were extended over a considerable part of Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, were blessed by God to the salvation of thousands. By day toiling at the vice or the anvil, and by night preaching the glad tidings of the Gospel, his life was spent,

"'Twixt the mount and multitude
Doing and receiving good"

until, within a fortnight of his death, at the advanced age of eighty-eight, he delivered his last discourse, and died shouting "Victory, Victory," through the blood of the Lamb.

At the period of our narrative Mr. B. resided at Kearby, about a mile from the Kirkby farm, where he soon became a frequent and welcome visitor; and by his counsels and example, contributed much to confirm the faith and piety of its inmates. The two brothers became useful local preachers, and remained faithful unto death; and with Mary commenced an intimacy, which, notwithstanding

considerable difference of age and circumstances, was ultimately consummated in marriage. The story of the courtship is amusing and characteristic. Mary was fair to look upon, and having moreover the prospect of a handsome fortune, commanded many admirers. One day when several of these aspirants for her hand were present, Mr. B. stepped in, and, perceiving how matters were going, quietly slipped behind her and whispered, 'I mean to have thee myself'. This abrupt avowal had the desired effect. The blooming damsel preferred the widower with four children, though twice her own age, to younger but not more worthy suitors; a decision she never had occasion to regret.

The engagement thus strangely brought to a crisis, was not entered into without much serious forethought and prayer. The path of Providence was distinctly indicated, and there remained but one obstacle in the way of the proposed union, and that was to secure the consent of Mr. Stables; which, to quote Mr. Burdsall's own words, "to me appeared like asking him for his life'. I was however providentially helped out of this difficulty; for as I was returning from preaching one morning, I met him in a narrow lane at some distance from his own house. When he saw me, he turned round as though he would not meet me. The lane being strait, he took hold of my mare and said, 'What are you a riding preacher now'? I answered, 'To be sure I am, for you see I am upon my mare'. He then said, 'Are my sons right, think you, when they can go to a public house and drink with people and pay nothing'? I replied, 'You are not to give credit to what the world says of us Methodists, or of your sons. I believe your sons fear the Lord, and are wishful to do what is right'. He said, 'Well, he that endureth to the end the same shall be saved'. I replied, 'That is God's word, but it will not suit every one'. He then wished to know whom it would not suit. I answered, 'It will not suit the unregenerate, for were I to tell sinners, that if they endured to the end in their sins they should be saved, I should lie; for they cannot be saved if they do: neither will it suit the self-righteous, for the word of God says, 'Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven'. What I said, seemed to carry conviction to his mind. He said, 'They say you are a good preacher, I shall come and hear you'. 'I should be glad to see you', replied I,

'but I fear your master will not let you come'. We then proceeded towards his house in friendly conversation, and when we were just going to part he said, 'They say you are going to marry my daughter.' I answered, 'I doubt they grieve you with, it.' He said, 'Nay, not at all, for my daughter shall marry whom she likes.' 'You speak very honourably,' said I, 'if you only stand to your word.' To this he replied, 'I will, she shall marry whom she likes.' I said to him, 'I will make you this promise, that I will not marry your daughter for the sake of her fortune, for I do not believe you will give me any with her. If I can be assured that it is of the Lord, I will marry her though you turn her into the street destitute; and, without this persuasion, I would not marry her though you were to give her your whole estate to do so: therefore do not blame me.' He said, 'I cannot,' and we parted." Notwithstanding this plain conversation, Mr. Stables was highly displeased with the match, and offered to give his daughter an additional portion on condition that she would not prosecute it; adding, "If you do, I'll give you sixpence a-week, and you may go about singing Methodist songs."

On their marriage, which took place shortly after, Mr. and Mrs. Burdsall removed to York. The offended father, true to his word, sent his daughter forth literally destitute; not even permitting her to take her personal apparel. It was not until twelve months had elapsed, that any further communication took place. The interview is thus related by Mr. Burdsall in his own quaint style. "I happened to be passing near his house as he was going from it; on my calling to him, he asked what I wanted with him. I said, 'I want to know what place you mean me to have in heaven?' He smiled, and asked, 'Do you mean to go there?' 'I hope so,' said I. He then asked me why I had married his daughter. I told him, because I loved her and thought she would make me a good wife. I added, 'You know, sir, that I told you before I married her, that I would not marry her for the sake of her fortune; neither have I, I do not expect any, the Lord blesses us without any, and he will still continue to bless us.' He acknowledged the truth of what I said, and we parted." The fire of wrath was still smouldering in the heart of the old man, and awakened in the mind of Mrs. Burdsall feelings of painful anxiety, especially, as it was apparent, that life was ebbing fast to its close. Mr. B. therefore, a short time after, addressed a kind but faithful letter to

him on the great subject of salvation, and concluded with these remarkable and expressive words, "I have no other reason for writing to you, that I know of, than this, that the sun is going down." This produced no immediate effect, only, whenever they met, Mr. Stables would say, "You write parables to me." The allusion however so appositely and wisely put, like an arrow directed to the mark, had fastened upon his conscience, and was secretly undermining the strength of long and obstinately-cherished resentment. The marksman was skilful, but still better, a man of "fervent effectual prayer." "As a Prince he had power with God and with men, and prevailed," for "when a man's ways please the Lord He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." So it turned out. Mr. Burdsall says, "One time, as I was returning home from preaching at a distant place in a very wet cold and hungry state, and as night was coming on, having to pass his residence, I thought I would call and see if he would receive me. I knocked at the door, and he himself opened it. Seeing me he called his eldest daughter and said, 'Here is thy brother, come and take his horse.' I alighted and went in. He then accosted me as he had done once before, asking, 'What are you a riding preacher now?' I answered, 'To be sure I am; for I have ridden from York to Seacroft, and from thence to your house.' 'Well,' said he, 'I know you live well.' I replied, 'We do; but I have not lived so well to day as I might have done; for I feel rather hungry.' He smiled, and bid his daughter put on the tea kettle. We then entered into conversation, in which he said, 'You write parables to me, for you told me the sun was going down.' I answered, 'I did so, and my reason for it was, I knew I had stirred up your wrath in marrying your daughter against your mind, and was fearful lest the sun should go down upon it.' He burst into a flood of tears, and was so melted down, that for three hours, I was prompted both by his feelings and my own to speak of the love of Christ to poor sinners. * * * This was a night to be remembered as my reconciliation with Mr. Stables was at this time effected." The understanding thus happily brought about was never after interrupted; and Mr. Stables practically evinced the sincerity of his feelings by securing to his daughter an annuity for life. In his last illness, which occurred a few years later, Mr. Burdsall, by his own request, frequently visited him, and ministered to his spiritual wants. He died in peace on the 13th of June, 1787.

The first fruits of the union of Richard Burdsall and Mary Stables, was Mary, the subject of the present memoir—the step-sister of the Rev. John Burdsall, who still survives. She was born at York, without Bootham bar, June 19th, 1782. The house which no longer exists, stood just under the shadow of the old gateway, nearly opposite the modern crescent, known as St. Leonard's Place.

The foregoing facts, which to some may appear superfluous, are here introduced not merely with the view of making the reader acquainted with the antecedents of my honoured mother; but the much higher object of illustrating the sovereign mercy of God, and tracing the growth of the religious element in the family. Many a page deeply interesting and instructive might be written which would unfold the grace of God in the history of particular families, flowing as a stream of light from generation to generation, or diffusing itself in the collateral branches; here swelling as "broad rivers and streams," and there narrowed down to a single channel. The causes of such alternations might be profitably investigated, and recorded. The inquiry into one's ancestry would thus answer a nobler purpose than the gratification of human vanity, or the recovery of an alienated inheritance; it would exhibit the influence of the past upon the present, afford important lessons of encouragement or admonition, and discover our claim perhaps, to something better than gold or silver "for the good man" even though he is poor, "leaveth an inheritance to his children's children." How far the moral character as well as the physical constitution of a parent may affect the happiness and control the destiny of his children, is a question, which may be incapable of an exact and satisfactory solution; but the general fact, notwithstanding some strange exceptions, (which however may not be altogether incapable of explanation,) is sufficiently established, that examples of singular excellence, or notorious profligacy may usually be traced to seeds sown in a former generation. They are not therefore to be altogether regarded in the light of isolated phenomena, but as the result of causes, which may be more or less accurately determined. At all events, God reveals himself as "a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate him, and SHEWING MERCY UNTO THOUSANDS OF THEM THAT LOVE HIM AND KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS."