

THE

ASSEMBLY'S MISSIONARY MAGAZINE;

OR

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THE editor of this Magazine is desirous to obtain authentic memoirs of eminent deceased clergymen, whose lives and writings have contributed to advance the cause of science and religion in this country; and if the friends of such clergymen wish to perpetuate the memory of them, by presenting their portraits to this work, they will be thankfully received and inserted.

BIOGRAPHY.

In the present number of our work, we commence the republication of "A SERIES OF THE LIVES OF THE APOSTLES AND FATHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH." This series will be taken from that admirable periodical publication, the Christian Observer; and we are confident that our readers will consider it among the most interesting articles in our Magazine.

LIFE OF ST. STEPHEN, THE FIRST MARTYR.

THE leader of that "noble army of martyrs," who followed Christ even unto death, was St. Stephen. The Sacred History gives us no particulars of his country or kindred. That he was a Jew, appears evident from the whole strain of his apology before the Sanhedrim. (Acts vii.) Some of the ancient writers number him among the seventy disciples. This seems, however, to be little more than conjecture, although his thorough acquaintance with the Jewish and Christian dispensations, and their relation to each other, and the sacred learning and great ability with which he defends the Messiahship of Christ against its most subtle opposers, would seem to favour the opinion, and to indicate that he had enjoyed the advantage of our Saviour's personal instructions. As he united to these acquirements an undaunted boldness and

overmuch, when we make religion the perpetual subject of discussion and dispute. We are righteous overmuch, when tenderness of conscience is allowed to degenerate into unnecessary scrupulosity, so that in matters wholly indifferent, we are harassed, in ascertaining the conduct to be pursued, by perplexing doubts and fears, which prey upon the mind, and destroy its peace. In a word, we are righteous overmuch, and also overwise, when we too curiously pry into the mysteries of religion, and are eager to discover what God has thought fit to conceal, labouring to understand and explain what was never meant to be comprehended, but to be believed.

These may serve as specimens of that religious extravagance, to which the wise man probably alluded, when he cautions us not to be righteous overmuch. But however needful this caution may be, that in the 17th verse, *Be not overmuch wicked*, is of far more general application. The expression does not imply that there is a certain pitch of wickedness, to which men may proceed without danger to themselves, the word overmuch being used only to keep up the correspondence of style between the two verses. On the contrary, every degree of sin is attended with danger, both to our present and eternal interests; and very often, even in this life, the judgments of God overtake the obstinate offender, so that he dies before his time. Many examples might be adduced from scripture, of persons suddenly cut off in the midst of a sinful course, and sent loaded with their guilt to appear before God. These things ought to make the irreligious tremble, as God is the same holy being, sin the same evil thing now, which it ever has been. Take then the timely warning, Let the wicked forsake his way, &c.

Ch. Ob.

AN ORIGINAL LETTER,

*From the Rev. SAMUEL DAVIES, formerly president of the college
of New-Jersey.*

DEAR SIR,

I HEARTILY thank you for your letter and the manuscripts enclosed. If I happen to be in a poetic fit, I shall probably pursue the plan of a Christmas poem, and send you the egregious production; but it is a thousand to one but I shall make many wild excursions from the track you have prescribed. I am indebted to you for two valuable thoughts your prose manuscripts suggested to me; that *time*, with respect to moral agents in a state of probation, does not consist in a succession of night and day, sitting,

walking, sleeping, eating, drinking; but in a succession of opportunities to prepare for our immortal state; and, that when persons are confirmed either in virtue or vice, *time* is at an end with respect to them, and they are ripe for eternity. O that we could pass the time of our pilgrimage below under the tenderest impression of these important truths!

Though I have not yet had your leave to tease you with my poetastry; yet I presume to impose the enclosed upon you, and that as an omen of future trouble, unless horror seize you at the dismal denunciation. The *Survey of Human Nature* appears to me a moving subject; and I am sorry I could not do it justice. The poem on Psalm lxxiii. 25, consists chiefly of thoughts borrowed from Mrs. Rowe; as your acquaintance with her writings will soon suggest to you. Indeed I cannot be her reader long, without commencing poet. The poem on *Conjugal Love* is wholly my own; not only as to invention, but intention. You may see my design in it, in the last paragraph but one. If ever I wrote any thing with tender emotion and sincerity, it was this. My thoughts were turned towards it by occasion of some pleuretic symptoms I had not long since; which, through divine goodness, are removed. The weeping tenderness of my dear other self at that time, wounded my heart with the quickest sensations. I should think myself happy to promote conjugal affection in the world; where the indifferency of neighbours, or the malignity of fiends, is too often substituted in its stead; and if this poem may be thought to have this tendency, I shall incline to publish it. It awaits its doom wholly from your determination. The other poems mentioned, you may also correct, and dispose of, as you please, only reserve them for me; for, you may be sure, I have a paternal fondness for my own dear offspring, however deformed; and, therefore, would not willingly be bereaved of them. I also enclose two copies of verses too private to be made public; which, if they prove excitements to you to join in grateful acknowledgements of our mercies and deliverances, I have my end.

I informed you in my last, that I had given but little heed to the importunity of some of my friends to publish some of my poems; but since that, they have told me, that if I should consent to send the copy to the press, they would bear the trouble and expense: and this, with their other arguments, has at length determined me to comply. My principle design is, the religious entertainment of ordinary capacities; for, however willing I am, I despair of ever pleasing the nice and judicious. Bad poetry, to myself, is the most fulsome, nauseous stuff in the world; though

I can make a shift to bear with indifferent prose; and could I put off the relation of an author, and assume that of an impartial reader, it is likely I should doom my productions to perpetual oblivion. But, it is some kind of happiness that the generality of mankind have a coarser taste; and that what is sublime exceeds their capacities. I shall, therefore, send you the collection of poems before they are published, for the following purposes: To correct those blunders that are corrigible, without altering the whole poem; to pick and cull such as you think worthy of a public view; (for some I believe will not deserve it; or, if they should, would too much swell the volume;) and to direct to profitable additions. I shall endeavour to send them by parcels, successively, before the General Court, when I expect to be in town, that I may then hear your remarks, and consult about them. And I request you to mix the critic with the friend.

What affords me the greatest discouragement, attended with painful reflections, in such cases, is the ambitious and selfish spirit I find working in me, and intermixing itself with all my most refined and disinterested aims. Fame, for which some professedly write, is a strong, though a resisted temptation to me; and I often conclude, my attempts will never be crowned with remarkable success, till the divine glory be more sincerely my aim, and I be willing to decrease, that Jesus may increase. It is easy to reason down this vile lust of fame; but, Oh! it is hard to extirpate it from the heart. There is a paper in Dr. Watts's miscellaneous thoughts on this subject, which characterizes me, in this respect, as exactly as any thing I have seen; and a poem of his, entitled *Sincere Praise*, is often the language of my heart.

—— “Pride, that busy sin,
 Spoils all that I perform;
 Curst pride, that creeps securely in,
 And swells a little worm.

The very songs I frame
 Are faithless to thy cause;
 And steal the honours of thy name
 To build their own applause!”

What surprises me most is, that the self-elating passion should be so strong, when my inability happily obliges me to despair of gratifying it. This, among a thousand other things, affords me the mortifying conviction, that I am a fallen creature; and, at best, but slowly recovering from the ruins of the universal apos-

tacy. Never will my soul be happy, till I can fully adopt that surprising description of a christian temper in Romans xiv. 7, 8.

I met with the following lines in a piece called the Callipædia, which pleased me exceedingly; where the soul is compared to the Deity; the head to his seat; the senses, and animal spirits to his ministering angels; reflection to his self-complacence, &c.

“ Man’s head resembles Jove’s imperial seat,
 In which enthron’d, he sways the heav’nly state,
 And with assembled Gods consults of fate:
 The winged envoys all in shining crouds
 Attend his throne, and watch his awful nods;
 Catch his commands, and through the liquid air
 To the low world the sacred errand bear:
 Just so the head of man contains within
 The intellect, with rays of light divine:
 The senses stand around; the spirits roam
 To seize and bring the fleeting objects home.

“ Reflection is the last, and greatest bliss;
 When turning inward with inverted eyes,
 The soul itself, and all its charms, surveys;
 The deep impressions of celestial grace
 And image of the Godhead: no alloy
 Of flesh its sprightly beauties can destroy,
 Nor death, nor fate can snatch the lasting joy.
 Thro’ every limb the active spirit flows,
 Diffusing life and vigour as it goes,
 But is itself unmixt, and free from dross.
 Thus, while great Jove the whirling engine guides,
 And o’er the times and rolling year presides;
 Still as he turns the rapid wheels of chance,
 Himself immortal and unchang’d remains,
 And when the empty scene of nature cloys,
Sinks in the Godhead, and himself enjoys.

Our sincere affections wait on you and your’s. It is the happy prerogative of benevolence in the most impotent circumstances, to form unbounded wishes for the felicity of its object; and friendship can make frequent aërial migrations to the distant residence of a friend, when it can do no more.

I am, dear sir,

Your’s very affectionately,

SAMUEL DAVIES.

March 2d, 1750—51.