

Mr. George Watt

- No. 19

THE
LIFE AND SAYINGS
OF
MR. PHILIP HENRY.

THIS excellent man was born at Whitehall, Westminster, August 21, 1631. He was trained up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord by his fond parents; and they soon discovered the deep impressions of his early piety. At twelve years of age he was admitted into Westminster school; and, by the request of his mother, obtained leave from Dr. Busby to attend the morning lectures in the Abbey Church. Of the benefits he derived from these means of grace, he retained a lively and grateful sense, as appears from the following reflections made by himself many years after: "If ever any child, such as I was, between the tenth and fifteenth year of my age, enjoyed line upon line, and precept upon precept, I did. And was it in vain? I trust not altogether in vain. My soul rejoiceth and is glad at the remembrance of it. The word distilled as the dew, and dropped as the rain. I loved it, and loved the messengers of it; their very feet were beautiful to me; and oh, what a mercy was it, at a time when the poor countries were laid waste, when the noise of drums and trumpets and the clattering of arms, were heard there, and the way to Zion mourned, that then my lot should

be where I had peace and quietness, and great plenty of gospel opportunities. Bless the Lord, O my soul: as long as I live I will bless the Lord; I will praise my God while I have my being. Had it been only the restraint that it laid upon me, whereby I was kept from the common sins of other children and youth, such as cursing and swearing, sabbath-breaking, and the like, I were bound to be very thankful; but that it prevailed through grace effectually to bring me to God, how much am I indebted! and what shall I render?" Thus the dews of heaven softened his heart by degrees.

Under the eye and care of that great master, Dr. Busby, he made an uncommon proficiency in human learning. It was customary among the studious boys, for one, two, or more, to sit up the former part of the night at study, and when they went to bed, about midnight, to call others as they desired. Young Henry's request was to be called at twelve, and being awakened, he desired his candle to be lighted, which stuck to the bed's head; but he fell asleep again, and in this dangerous situation the candle fell, and burnt part of the bed and bolster ere he awoke; but through God's good providence, seasonable help came in, the fire was quenched, and he received no harm by his imprudence. This gave him occasion to say, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed."

In December, 1647, he removed to Christ-church, Oxford, in which college he went through the usual exercises, and frequently came off with great applause. Here, alas! the life of religion began to decline; but it pleased God to set his hand again the second time, and grant him a happy revival. The celebrated Dr. Owen, then Vice-Chancellor, was among the warmest of his patrons, and spoke with high commendation of his academical performances.

In 1653, he removed from Oxford to Worthenbury in Flintshire, where, four years afterwards, he

was ordained to the work of the ministry, and took the charge of souls. The sphere was too contracted for such a burning and shining light; but he had such humble thoughts of himself, and such high thoughts of his work, and the worth of souls, that he exerted as much diligence and vigour here, as if he had had the oversight of the largest parish in the country. He knew and lamented the ruin of mankind. He constantly held up to view JESUS CHRIST the only Saviour of sinners;—nor did he fail to insist much on the necessity of the holy operations of the Spirit of God in conversion and sanctification. He had not been long at Worthenbury, before he was noticed by the neighbouring ministers as likely to be a considerable man; and the people gave him the title of *Heavenly Henry*, by which he was known all the country over. He was very affable, and easy of access, and admirably patient in hearing every one's complaints, which he would answer with so much prudence and mildness, and give such *apt advice*, that many a time to consult with him was to *ask counsel at Abel*, and so to end the matter. He constantly laid by for the poor the tenth of his income, which he carefully and faithfully disposed of in the liberal things which he devised, especially in teaching poor children. In March, 1658-9, he was very much solicited to leave Worthenbury, and accept of the vicarage of Wrexham, a place that he had both a great interest in and a great kindness for; but as he could not see his call clear, he refused. The same year he had the offer of a considerable living near London, but he did not consult with flesh and blood, or seek great things for himself. Soon after the return of King Charles the Second, some persons were trying to remove him from Worthenbury on which he writes this in his Diary, as the breathing of his soul towards God:—"Lord, if it please thee, fasten me here as a nail in a sure place; if otherwise, I will take nothing ill which thou dost

with me." In his preaching he adapted his method and style to the capacities of his hearers. He did not shoot the arrow of his word over their heads in high notions, and the flourishes of affected rhetoric; or under their feet by blunt and coarse expressions: but to their hearts in close and lively applications. His delivery was very graceful and agreeable—his doctrine *distilled as the dew, and dropped as the soaking rain*, and came with a charming, pleasing power. It is affecting to hear a person that lived a life of communion with God, as he did, complaining sometimes of great straitness in prayer. "No life at all in the duty; many wanderings; if my prayers were written, *and my vain thoughts interlined*, what incoherent nonsense would there be! I am ashamed, Lord, I am ashamed; O pity and pardon!"

In 1660 he married the only daughter of Mr. Daniel Matthews, of Broadoak, in Flintshire. By this marriage, Providence brought into his hand a competent estate, which was not only a comfortable support to him when he was ejected from his living, and when many faithful ministers of Christ were reduced to great poverty and straits; but it enabled him likewise, as he had opportunity, to preach the Gospel freely, which he did to his dying day, and also to give to the relief of the needy: herein he sowed plentifully to a very large proportion of his income. God gave him six children; and Matthew, afterwards the famous commentator, was the second son.

He was prophet, priest, and king too, in his own house, ruling in the fear of God, and not suffering sin upon any under his roof. He had once a man servant that was overtaken in drink abroad; for which, the next morning, at family-worship, he solemnly reprov'd, admonish'd, and pray'd for him with a spirit of meekness, and soon after parted with him. But many of his servants, through divine influence accompanying his endeavours, re

ceived good impressions upon their souls, which they retained ever after, and blessed God with all their hearts that ever they came under his roof. Few went from his service till they were married; and some, after they had buried their yokefellows, returned to it again, saying, *Master, it is good to be here.*

In October, 1661, he was ejected from Worthenbury for his non-conformity, and preached his farewell sermon to a sorrowful audience, from Phil. i. 27. After this, for a number of years, he suffered many things from reproaches, fines, and imprisonments; but the Lord was with him. He saw the revolution in 1668, and rejoiced in the liberty it restored to himself and others.

Though Mr. Henry's constitution was tender, yet by the blessing of God upon his great temperance, care of his diet, and moderate exercise by walking in the air, he for many years enjoyed a good measure of *health*; which he used to call, *The sugar that sweetens all temporal mercies.* But in his latter years, travelling was very troublesome to him, and he would say, as Mr. Dodd used to do, that when he thought, like Sampson, to shake himself as at other times, he found his *hair was cut.*

On Tuesday, June 23, 1696, he suffered great extremity of pain for many hours together. His patience was wonderful. Towards ten or eleven o'clock that night, his pulse and sight began to fail. He took an affectionate farewell of his dear yokefellow, with a thousand thanks for all her love, and care, and tenderness, and left a blessing for all his dear children that were absent. He said to his son (afterwards the famous Matthew Henry) who was sitting by him;—"Son, the Lord bless you, and grant that you may do worthily in your generation, and be more serviceable to the church of God than I have been." One of the last words he said, when he found himself ready to depart, was "*O death, where is thy*"——— with that, his speech

faltered, and within a few minutes, after about sixteen hours' violent pain, he breathed out his soul into the hands of Jesus, whom he had faithfully served in the work of the ministry about forty-three years. He departed Wednesday, June 24, 1696, in the 65th year of his age. He had preached with his usual vivacity on the Lord's day preceding.... the surprise of the stroke put the people into a perfect astonishment.....and many said, the Lord removed him so suddenly, because he would not deny the many prayers that would have been put up for his recovery, had it been known that he was in danger. Such was the man, and his communications may be judged of by the following

FRAGMENTS,

which are gathered up that nothing may be lost :

1. When he had completed the thirtieth year of his life, he noted this in his Diary : " So old, and no older, Alexander was, when he had conquered the great world ; but I have not yet subdued the little world, *myself*."

2. He guided himself in the turns of his life by that good rule, to follow Providence, and not force it.

3. He preached funeral sermons for all—rich or poor, old or young, even little children ; for he looked upon it as an opportunity of doing good : he called it, setting in the plough of the word, when Providence had softened and prepared the ground.

4. To check the forwardness of young men, he used to relate, that once at a meeting of ministers, a question of moment was to be discussed among them : upon the proposal of it, a confident young man shoots his bolt presently :—" *Truly*," saith he, "*I hold it so*."—" *You hold, Sir*," saith a grave minister ; "*it becomes you to hold your peace*."

5. To encourage himself and others in works of charity, he would say, He is no fool who parts

with that which he cannot keep when he is sure to be recompensed by that which he cannot lose.

6. Alluding to the controversies of those times, he said, It is not so much the difference of opinion that doth us the mischief, as the mismanagement of that difference.

7. Once at a meeting of ministers, being desired to subscribe a certificate, concerning one whom he had not sufficient acquaintance with, he refused, giving this reason, That he preferred the peace of his conscience before the friendship of all the men in the world.

8. In 1658, Lady Puleston died. "She was," said he, "the best friend I had on earth; but my Friend in heaven is still where he was, and he will never leave me, nor forsake me."

9. Those, who would have comfort in the change of their condition, must see to it, that they bring none of the guilt of their single state into the married state. The presence of Christ at a wedding will turn the water into wine; and he will come, if he be invited by prayer.

10. He would often say, We are that *really* which we are *relatively*. It is not so much what we are at church, as what we are in our families.

11. Those do well that pray morning and evening in their families; those do better that pray, and read the Scriptures; but those do best of all that pray, and read, and sing Psalms; and Christians should covet earnestly the best gifts.

12. He would often beg of God to fit us for the next providence, whatever that might be; and he was unwilling (unless the necessity were urgent) that any should go from his house in a morning before family worship, reminding his friends, that prayer and provender never hinder a journey.

13. It is a prayer he often put up in his family, that they might have grace to behave as a minister and a minister's wife, and a minister's children, and

a minister's servants, should behave ; that the ministry might in nothing be blamed.

14. We cannot expect too little from man, or too much from God.

15. He was very forward to *lend* money freely to any of his poor neighbours that had occasion, and would sometimes say, that in many cases there was more charity in lending than in giving, because it obliged the borrower both to honesty and industry.

16. Have communion with few—be familiar with one—deal justly with all—speak evil of none.

17. We are apt to make the *circumstances* of religious services more the matter of our discourse than the *substance* of them.

18. The ark is a guest that always pays well for its entertainment ; and when Christ had borrowed Peter's boat, to preach a sermon out of it, he presently repaid him for the loan with a great draught of fishes.

19. He gave it as a rule never to speak of any one's faults to others, till we have first spoken of them to the offender himself.

20. There is a mean, if we could hit it, between *fool-hardiness* and *faint-heartedness*.

21. He looked upon the public reading of the Scriptures in religious assemblies to be an ordinance of God. The bare reading of the word he used to compare to the throwing of a net into the water ; but the expounding of it is like the spreading out of that net, which makes it more likely to catch fish.

22. For every twenty years of our lives we enjoy above a thousand Sabbaths, which must be all accounted for in the day of reckoning.

23. He would commonly say to his children with reference to their choice in marriage—" Please God, and please yourselves, and you will never displease me."

24. When some of his friends persuaded him to spare himself, he would say " It is time enough to

rest when I am in the grave; what were candles made for but to burn?"

25. A little before his sickness and death, one asked him "how he did?" He answered, "I find the chips fly off apace, the tree will be down shortly." And he was often used to say, "It is a serious thing to die, and to die is a work of itself."

26. Every creature is *that* to us, and only that which God makes it to be—duty is ours, events are God's—the soul is the man, and therefore, that is always best for us which is best for our souls—the Devil cozens us of all our time, by cozening us of the present time—all grace grows as love to the word of God grows—God who is the first and best should have the first and best—a part in Christ is a good part—all is well that ends everlastingly well—time and the things of time are nothing, compared with eternity and the things of eternity.

27. He sometimes said, "I am too much a Catholic, to be a *Roman Catholic*."

28. He would not bear that any should be evil-spoken of in his hearing, but reminded those who reflected upon people behind their backs, of that law, Lev. xix. 14. "Thou shalt not curse the deaf."

29. When some zealous people would have him preach against top-knots, and other vanities in apparel, he would say, "That was none of his business; if he could but persuade people to Christ, the pride, vanity, and excess of those things, would fall, of course;" yet he had a dislike to vanity and gaiety of dress, and allowed it not in those that he had influence upon. His rule was, that in such things we must neither be *owls* nor *apes*—affect neither singularity nor modishness.

30. In answer to those who turned it to his reproach, "that his meeting-place had been a barn;" "No new thing," he would say, "to turn a thrashing-floor into a temple."

31. He that hath a blind conscience which sees nothing, a dead conscience which feels nothing, and

a dumb conscience which says nothing, is in as miserable a condition as a man can be in, on this side hell.

32. He used to recommend to his friends these four Scripture arguments against sin, to be ready in an hour of temptation :

Is this thy kindness to thy friend ?
It will be bitterness in the end.
The vows of God upon me lie :
Should such a man as I am fly ?

See 2 Sam. xvi. 17. 2 Sam, ii. 26. Psalm lvi. 12. Nehem. vi. 11.

33. Preaching on that prayer of Christ for his disciples, John xvii. 21. *That they all may be one* ; which, no doubt, is an answered prayer, for the Father heard him always, he showed, “ that notwithstanding the many sad divisions that are in the church, yet all the saints, as far as they are sanctified, are one—one in relation ; one flock, one family, one building, one body, one bread ; one in image and likeness ; of one inclination and disposition ; one in their aims and prayers ; one in friendship, in interest, and inheritance ; nay, they are one in judgment and opinion ; though in some things they differ, yet those things in which they are agreed are many more, and much more considerable than those things in which they differ. They are all of a mind concerning *sin*, that it is the worst thing in the world—concerning *Christ*, that he is all in all—concerning the *favour of God*, that it is better than life—concerning the *world*, that it is vanity—concerning the *word of God*, that it is very precious.”

34. When he spoke of contentment, he used to say, “ When the mind and the condition meet, there’s contentment. Now, in order to that, either the condition must be brought up to the mind, and that is not only unreasonable, but impossible—for

as the condition riseth, the mind riseth with it; or else the mind must be brought down to the condition, and this is both possible and reasonable." And he observed, "No condition of life will of itself make a man content, without the grace of God! For we find *Haman* discontented in the court, *Ahab* discontented on the throne, *Adam* discontented in Paradise; nay (and higher we cannot go) the *angels* that fell were discontented in heaven itself."

35. He noted in his Diary this saying of a godly man, a hearer of his, as that which affected him;—"I find it easier to go six miles to hear a sermon, than to spend one quarter of an hour in meditating upon it, and praying over it in secret, as I should, when I come home."

36. When two of his children lay dangerously ill, after he had been earnestly praying for them, he wrote thus:—"If the Lord will be pleased to grant me my request this time concerning my children, I will not say as the beggars at our doors are wont to do;—'I'll never ask any thing of him again;' but on the contrary, he shall hear oftener from me than ever; and I will love God the better as long as I live."

37. On Gen. xxxiii. 5. *They are the children which God hath graciously given thy servant*, he observed, "In what a pious, gracious manner, Jacob speaks! He had spoken good sense, if he had only said, *They are my children*; but then he had not spoken like Jacob, like one that had lately seen the face of God. There is a kind of language, the air of which speaks it the language of Canaan; Christians should speak like Christians."

38. When the families of his children were in health and peace, he wrote thus to them;—"Remember that the wheel is always in motion, and the spoke that is uppermost will be under; and therefore mix trembling always with your joy."

39. He rejoiced much in the visits of his children,

and his usual saying at parting was, "This is not the world we are to be together in, and 'tis well it is not: but there is such a world before us." And his usual prayer was, "That our next meeting might be either in heaven or further on in our way towards it."

40. In his last will, this is the prayer which he puts up for his children:—"That the Lord would build them up in holiness, and continue them still in brotherly love, as a bundle of arrows which cannot be broken."

Behold the man of righteousness!

His sev'ral steps attend:

True pleasure runs through all his ways,

And peaceful is his end.



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