

them, were no more, no better, than what the grace of God made them, they took all occasions to own it themselves; and it is as certain, there is the same overflowing fulness of grace in Christ that ever there was, *grace for grace*, and the same way of deriving from it; as the *olive-tree is not withered*, so the *golden pipes* (Zech. iv. 12.) are not stopped up. We have therefore reason to hope, that the same God who put an earnest care into their hearts, will put the same into the hearts of those who are entered into their labours; and that grace which was sufficient for them, to carry them through the services and sufferings of their generation, will be sufficient for us too, who have the same work to do, and the same temptations and difficulties to grapple with; and will enable us at length to finish our course, as they did, with joy.

It was a petition which (as I am told) Mr. Stretton frequently put up to God in his prayers with his family, "Lord, grant that we may be useful while we are here, and that we may not be wanted when we are gone." God did make him useful while he was here, many ways useful, useful to the last; and continued long in his usefulness. A great gap is made

in our hedge by his death; but may we hope that many others shall be spirited to do the same work with the same earnest care, that in a little time we may be able to say, that in answer to the other part of his petition, *he is not wanted*? If God has mercy in store for your city, for the land of our nativity, he will raise up such men of serious piety, and catholic charity, who shall lay out themselves to do good in the world: I trust he has raised up some such; and that the mystical gloss which one of the rabbins puts upon those words, (1 Sam. iii. 3, 4.) *Ere the lamp of God went out, the Lord called Samuel*, has its accomplishment; "That is," says he, "ere God makes the lamp of one prophet to set he kindles another." God grant it may be so at this day in our land, and it would be a token of good to us, that God would not depart from us. Nay, if it be true, as certainly it is, that while the earth remains Christ will have a church in it, we may be sure that as one generation of such passes away, another generation, somewhere or other, shall come, to support the interests of pure and undefiled religion, that thus the name of Christ may endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven.

A CONCISE ACCOUNT

OF THE

LIFE OF THE REV. MR. RICHARD STRETTON.

HE was the son of Mr. William Stretton, of great Cleybrook, near Lutterworth, in Leicestershire, where he was born; but was descended from the Strettons of Stretton, in that county.

He was born about the year 1632, but the exact time of his birth could not be recovered for this reason; his father being a puritan, and the minister of his parish such a one as he could not with satisfaction bring his child to be baptized by, he procured one Mr. Moor to baptize him, who was a puritan minister in the neighbourhood; and so he was not registered in the church book.

He often spoke of it as an instance of God's goodness to him, that he enabled his father, though he had many children, to bring him up a scholar.

He had his academical education at New College in Oxford, and was chaplain of the college, as the noted Bishop Gunning had been some time before.

He commenced Master of Arts, July 9, 1658, (*præstitit exercitiis per statuta requisitis—having performed the requisite exercises*.) as appears by a testimonial under the hand of the university register.

In the beginning of that year, having passed through not only his time, but his studies, in the university, he went to be assistant to Dr. Cheynel at Petworth in Sussex, a great living.

Soon after his settlement there he was publicly and solemnly ordained, and "set apart to the office of a preaching presbyter," (so the testimonial of his ordination runs) "and the work of the ministry, with fasting, prayer, and the imposition of the hands of six presbyters, in the parish church of Arundel, Oct. 26, 1658. He having given sufficient testimony of his competent age, of his unblamable life and conversation, of his diligence and proficiency in his studies, and of his fair and direct calling to the fore-mentioned place; and they upon examination finding him to be duly qualified and gifted for that holy office and employment."

He continued at Petworth till Michaelmas, 1660, when Dr. Cheynel was put out to make room for Dr. King, Bishop of Chichester. Mr. Stretton however staid and preached there till November, (as Dr. Calamy's account is,) having two friends, viz.

Captain Taylor and Mr. Bernard, who were very great with the Bishop, and prevented his sending down any other. The Bishop by them offered Mr. Stretton an hundred pounds per annum, and the choice of any prebend he had that was vacant, if he would be his curate at Petworth; but Mr. Stretton not being satisfied to conform, declined it; and upon the Bishop's sending another down to the place, he quitted it.

Coming to London, quite at a loss how to dispose of himself, Mr. James Nalton providentially met him in the street; and having been spoken to by the Lord Fairfax to recommend a chaplain to him, he presently brought Mr. Stretton to him; and upon his recommendation, my Lord accepted of him, and took him down with him to his seat in Yorkshire, and soon found himself and his family very happy in having such a skilful faithful helper in the things of God.

While he was chaplain to my Lord Fairfax, he married Deborah, daughter of Mr. Robert Moreton, that excellent, pious, useful man, who was some time minister at Church Lawford, near Coventry and sister to Dr. Richard Moreton, who was turned out at Kinver in Staffordshire, and afterwards was a very eminent physician in London, and one of the college. By her he had a child or two born while he was in my Lord's family; and great respect was shown him by the whole family.

He continued there till my Lord Fairfax died, and preached his funeral sermon, which is in manuscript in many hands; as is also a sermon preached while he was there, on occasion of the marriage of a relation of my Lord's.

My Lord was so wonderfully pleased with his great piety and prudence, and excellent behaviour in his family, that at his marriage he settled a very considerable annuity upon him for his and his wife's life; which was a great support to him all his days. Thus God raised up friends for those who in the way of their duty cast themselves upon his providence.

The respect which was put upon him while he was in my Lord Fairfax's family, gave him an opportunity of being acquainted with most of the considerable families in those parts. Judge Rokeby, who was made one of the blessings and ornaments of the bench at the revolution, was his intimate friend.

Many eminent divines of the church of England he had likewise an intimacy with; particularly Dr. Tillotson, afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury, who was born in Yorkshire. Mr. Stretton, while he was chaplain to my Lord Fairfax, being called upon some business to London, Dr. Tillotson would have no denial, but he must preach for him at St. Lawrence's church, as a country minister; but it coming out some how or other that he was a nonconformist, the Doctor had a private reprimand for it from the

Bishop of London. It appears by divers letters to him, found among his papers, that he had many invitations of that kind in the country; and a very friendly correspondence he kept up with many conforming divines, who reposed a great confidence in him, and testified great respect toward him.

Upon the death of the Lord Fairfax, he removed to Leeds, and settled there with a congregation of dissenters, to whom his ministry was highly acceptable; and there he continued six or seven years.

While he was there he buried three sons in a little time; two of them of the small-pox, and in a few days one of another. It was an affliction that went very near him; and so strong was his natural affection, that it was exercise for all the wisdom and grace he had, to bear up under it. There is found among his papers a letter of condolence and consolation written to him upon that occasion by the Earl of Clare, father to the late Duke of Newcastle, who was then abroad in his travels, dated at Paris, June 16, 1677. There appears in it much of serious piety, and a particular friendship that noble Lord had for Mr. Stretton.

In the year 1677, he removed to London, and several dissenters who were at that time either deprived of their ministers, or otherwise unsettled, sat down under his ministry, and he continued with them to his death.

In 1679, he published a paper called, "The Protestant Conformist," or, "A Plea for Moderation," contained in a letter from one conforming minister to another, and his answer to it. It had no name to it, but it met with great acceptance. It was occasioned by a letter from his dear friend Mr. John Thoresby of Leeds, which was likewise printed with it; so I am informed, as likewise of many other things concerning Mr. Stretton, by his son Mr. Ralph Thoresby, now of Leeds, that learned antiquary, and Fellow of the Royal Society; who has already obliged the world with the additions to Cambden's Britannia for Yorkshire, and from whom is expected the Antiquities of Leeds; who was a true lover of Mr. Stretton, and was much respected by him.

At the time when the persecution was hot against dissenters, (in 1683,) he was the first of ten ministers who were taken up as living in a corporation, and had the Oxford oath tendered them; "That it is unlawful, upon any pretence whatsoever, to take up arms against the King; which was first contradicted and broken through, and then repealed at the revolution. He had not been at his own house for ten weeks, but the very next morning after his return to it, (so very vigilant were their spies and informers,) by five of the clock in the morning he was seized by the then city-marshal, who secured his papers, and would not suffer him to seal up what he made choice of out of them; and immediately carried him and

them before the king and council. Some present would have his papers looked over, to see if they could find any treason in them, but the king did not encourage it, saying, he believed there was no treason there. As at another time, when a sorry fellow, one Fox, offered to swear that Mr. Stretton, with my Lord Clare, was in the plot then charged upon the dissenters, the king laughed at the information, as altogether improbable and inconsistent with itself.

But though he was dismissed from the council-board, he was proceeded against upon the Five-mile Act. That night the marshal took his word for his appearance next morning, when according to his promise he surrendered himself, and was brought before the Lord Mayor, who carried it with great respect and civility to him, importunately desiring him once and again to withdraw for a little time, and consider whether he could not take the enjoined oaths, which he hoped he might, and so escape the penalty of the law. Mr. Stretton told his Lordship, that he would not give the court the trouble of waiting for his answer, for he could not expect to get satisfaction in that case, in so short a time as a regard to that court would only suffer him to take, when he had been many years seeking after it, and could not obtain it. However, my Lord Mayor persisted in his advice, and in compliance with his Lordship's kind desire, he withdrew for some time; but when he returned, told his Lordship he could not do it; which his Lordship said he was sorry for, for then there was no remedy, but he must follow the direction of the law; and sent him to Newgate, where he continued a prisoner six full months. In which time he had a son died, who, in his sickness, earnestly desired to see his father, as the father no doubt did to see the child, but all the interest he could make would not procure him that liberty. During his stay in Newgate, Mr. Smith the ordinary showed him great respect, and called him up more than once into the chapel to assist him in preparing the condemned criminals for their death.

After the expiration of his six months imprisonment he continued still in the city, and preached privately in one place or other among those of his congregation; and never missed any Lord's day, unless now and then it happened that he met with disappointment in the place he was to preach at. And he repeated in his family largely at night, which he sometimes admitted two or three of his friends to the benefit of.

When king James granted liberty by proclamation to protestant dissenters, he made use of it; but he never did or would join in any address of thanks for it, lest he should seem to give countenance to the king assuming a power above the law, and was instrumental to prevent several addresses.

After the glorious revolution, when the dissenters

enjoyed their liberties and opportunities again, he applied himself with fresh vigour to his work, and with an abundant satisfaction in the clearness of his call to it, as appears by a single sheet which he then published in the year 1689, which he called, "The Case of the Protestant Dissenters, represented and argued:" which he told a near relation of his, not long before he died, that he was the author of. The whole paper is of such weight, that Dr. Calamy thought fit to insert it at large in his abridgment of Mr. Baxter's Life, page 638 to page 648.

And as he was industrious to justify the dissenters in their practice, so he was to promote every thing that was good among them. It is observed, before, in the sermon, that he took care to direct the removals of the morning-lecture, so as might answer the intention of it: a very useful exercise, which has been kept up for the most part near seventy years, and is now, wherever it comes, for ought I see, well attended.

He was likewise active in accommodating some unhappy differences of opinion that were among them, so as to prevent the mischievous consequences of them. The prudent and pious endeavours which he and others used for that good end, then had, and thanks be to God, still have, a happy effect.

He laid out himself very much to promote works of charity; it was his meat and drink in that way to be doing good. He spared no pains in going about in the city, and writing letters into the country, to promote good works. He was a principal man in setting up and keeping up a fund for the help of poor ministers and congregations in the country, who had not many like-minded, (though blessed be God some there are,) who naturally cared for their state. He made it his business to find out the hands who were able to give, and fit to receive, and to bring them together. Those who were intrusted with the distribution of charities, applied themselves very much to him to recommend to them proper objects of charity, which he did with great prudence and fidelity; and then no wonder if those who needed help applied themselves to him likewise.

He was active to introduce useful books into the world, and to encourage the publishing of them, as Dr. Manton's Works, to the fifth volume, to which he prefixed a preface, and a very ingenious, handsome one it is. And also took a deal of pains to furnish libraries in Scotland, and in the private academies in England, with old books; and to supply young students, who were poor, with such books as were proper for them: a great deal of money he laid out himself, out of the little he had, and a great deal more he procured from others, for this good purpose. He knew what books were useful, and how to buy them at the best hand, and by his activity herein, many valuable pieces that otherwise would still have lain buried in dust and cobwebs, have been

sent into hands that are daily making good use of them.

His pious zeal herein extended itself beyond the seas, as appears by the abstract of a letter which is found among his papers, from that great and good man, Monsieur Frank, Professor at Hall in Saxony, wherein he acknowledges to have received the Polyglot Bible from Mr. Stretton, as a present to their library there, and returns his most hearty thanks to so good a benefactor.

He was very forward to encourage youths that he saw or heard to be ingenious and well disposed, and to assist them in their education for the ministry: he kept up a correspondence for this purpose with the universities of Scotland, and was instrumental in sending many thither, and procuring assistance there for some who needed it.

He buried his dear wife in the year 1695, and by her he had left only one son living, who has been many years useful in the ministry.

About the year 1707, the infirmities of age grew upon him, occasioned by a bad fall he had as he was returning to his house, after preaching on a public fast-day, in which exercise he had exceeded his strength; yet he continued doing good to the last, and the spirit was as willing as ever, even when the flesh was weak, and not only weak, but much pained. When he could scarce set one foot before another,

yet he would attend the lecture at Salters Hall, and the meeting for charitable contributions, very sedulously, though at a great distance from his house; and but a little before he died, when he was so weak and ill that he could scarce mind any thing else, yet he stirred up himself to give advice and direction in an affair of charity, wherein his assistance had been much depended upon.

He kept up his public work, though he struggled with much difficulty in it, till within ten weeks of his death; and often took notice of it with thankfulness to God, that though for some time before he was confined to his house all the week, yet till May 4, 1712, he had strength on the Lord's day to go to his meeting-place and preach once, and administer the Lord's supper every month.

In his last illness, he expressed a cheerful resignation of himself to the will of God, an entire dependence upon the grace of Christ, and a believing, comfortable expectation of the glory to be revealed.

Some of his sayings in his weakness have been mentioned in the foregoing sermon, and need not to be repeated.

He finished his course, and fell asleep in the Lord, on Thursday, July 3, 1712, and was buried the Monday following in the burying-place in Bunhill-fields. *There the weary are at rest.*