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BIOGRAPHY.

SKETCH OF THE LIFE AND CHARACTER OF THE REV.
JOHN WILLIAMS.

I would express him simple, grave, sincere,
In doctrine uncorrupt; in language plain,
And plain in manner; decent, solemn, chaste,
And natural in gesture; much impress'd
Himself, as conscious of his awful charge,
And anxious mainly that the flock he feeds
May feel it too; affectionate in look,
And tender in address, as well becomes
A messenger of grace to guilty men.
Behold the picture!—Is it like!—

Cowper.

THE month of May last witnessed the sudden departure of the Rev. JOHN WILLIAMS, senior pastor of the Baptist Church in Oliver-Street, New-York. He was a man of whose character and history it might well be said, in the brief and beautiful simplicity of inspiration—“*He was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith; and much people was added unto the Lord.*” Meek, patient, and zealous, he laboured long and successfully, and, when unexpectedly removed from the sorrows and warfare of the church militant on earth, into the light and gladness of the church triumphant above, he left behind him a loved and a lamented name; and good men of all denominations mourned at his death as for a father and leader in Israel. Distinguished for quiet usefulness, he was no less remarkable for his

unpretending modesty; and such was the reserve which he always maintained on the subject of his own feelings and history, that with much difficulty were gathered the materials for the scanty notice of his life which follows.

John Williams was born in Carnarvonshire, Wales, on the 8th day of March, (old style) 1767. The name of his father was *William Roberts*, from which, according to the ancient custom still retained in some parts of the Principality, of deriving the surname of the children from the christian name of the father, he took the name of *Williams*. The farm Plasllecheiddior on which he was born, had for many generations been the homestead of the family, a race of hardy and respectable farmers. At an early age, Mr. W. was removed to the house of his maternal grandfather,

who resided at the distance of a few miles, and with whom he past the years of his boyhood. The family into which he was thus brought, as well as that of his father, were from education and habit warmly attached to the Established Church, and a regular attendance at the parish church* was one of the first lessons of his childhood. Being from his lameness unfitted for those agricultural labours which had been the pursuits of his fathers, and would else have been his choice, it was desired by his father, that he should receive a classical education which might fit him to enter the ministry of the Episcopal church. But even at this early age, was displayed that independence of character, that modest fear of becoming burdensome to others, which so strongly marked the whole course of his after life. Unwilling to remain dependant for support upon his family during the long period which might elapse ere he should, in some humble curacy, find the reward of his studies, he declined the proposal, and preferred to acquire a trade, by which his industry might meet an earlier reward. To a trade he accordingly applied himself, and

for this purpose went to reside in the county town of Carnarvon. But he had not long been employed in this pursuit, before an event occurred which changed the whole current of his thoughts, and gave a new colouring to his life. The manner in which he first was brought to attend the ministry of the Dissenters is now unknown. It was, however, under a sermon preached by David Morris, a devoted minister of the Whitfieldites, or Calvinistic Methodists, that his mind first found ease from its burdens. At this period, also, he was accustomed to say, that he derived the greatest encouragement and benefit from a Welsh translation of the "Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ," a production of that splendid, though untutored genius, John Bunyan. It was thus, that the writings of one, scarce master of the refinements of his own language, were, under God, productive of a strong effect long after the death of their author, and in a language to him entirely unknown. Little imagining that it should even reach the mountains of Wales, Bunyan, in the spirit of faith, had cast his work as "bread upon the waters,"

* The pulpit of this church, was at this period, filled by a man of singular character. At a time when the evangelical party in the church of England was as yet weak and despised, this man, from the strain of his preaching, was considered as resembling them. But to this comparative purity of sentiment, he added a shameful depravity of conduct; and the high churchmen were not more disgusted with the purity of his doctrine, than were the pious with the irregularity of his practice. In the pulpit, he was a powerful and zealous preacher; in private life, a drunkard, a gambler, and a bully. When reproved for his inconsistencies, his usual reply was, "*Do as I say, and not as I do;*" and it became a proverbial expression among his rustic parishioners; "When in the pulpit he preached so well, 'twas a pity he should ever leave it, when out of it, he lived so ill, 'twas a pity he should ever enter it." This singular being was a frequent visitor at the house of Mr. W's grandfather, and Mr. Williams often, at an early age, felt no little surprise at seeing his pastor come up to the door reeling from the sports of the cock-pit, (for cock-fighting was one of his favourite amusements,) and bearing on his face the marks of bruises received in some drunken fray. It seems hardly credible that such a man should be permitted to minister in any church; but those acquainted with Wales as that country was, not fifty years since, know full well that such depravity of conduct in a clergyman was no uncommon thing. Nearly the only singularity of the case was, that without any motives of interest he had adopted sentiments so opposite to his own conduct and so unpopular among his clerical brethren. Impurity of practice generally leads to heresy of doctrine; he was remarkable for having deserted the opinions without abandoning the practice of those abandoned and dissolute clergy who disgrace the retired curacies of the Principality.

and after many days it was "found again," and became food and nourishment to one whom God had designed for much usefulness. It may well be supposed, that Mr. W. always retained for the works of this author a grateful partiality. He had about completed the nineteenth year of his age when he united with the Independent Church in the neighbourhood, which was under the care of the Rev. Dr. Lewis, a man who, perhaps, stood at the head of his denomination in Wales, distinguished alike for solid judgment and profound scholarship. Under his patronage, not long after his union with the church, Mr. W. began his pulpit ministrations. Beloved for the gentleness of his manners and the pure ardour of his piety, he was considered as exhibiting the promise of great future usefulness. Possessed of the affection and esteem of his pastor and fellow members, he was no doubt happy; but truth was to him yet dearer than earthly friendships. His Bible was now his library. He studied it intently and candidly; and ere long, doubts began to insinuate themselves of the propriety of infant sprinkling. Without, however, revealing to his pastor the workings of his mind, he one day inquired of Dr. Lewis the meaning of the passage, "Buried with him in baptism." The reply, which, as coming from a man of intellect and learning, sunk deep into the mind of the youthful christian was, "I really think the Baptists have, in the interpretation of that text, the advantage over us." His doubts could not long be concealed, and Dr. Lewis laboured long and earnestly, but in vain, by conversation and the loan of Pædobaptist writings, to remove the scruples which he had unwittingly encouraged. Their friendly discussions were frequently prolonged long af-

ter midnight; but the modest conclusion with which Williams generally summed up the amicable debate, was, "Had I, Doctor, your talents and your learning, I could make more of my side of the question than you can make of yours."

Mr. W. had received from heaven a modest independence both in thought and action, which never permitted him to evade his duty; and he was endued, alike, with strength of intellect to perceive, and decision of character to follow the truth, lead him where it might. The Pædobaptist authors which Mr. Lewis lent in abundance for his perusal, were read and tested by the bible. They failed to convince him; and study, reflection, and prayer, brought him at the age of twenty-one, to the baptismal waters; and he became by immersion a member of the Horeb Baptist church at Garn. The discussion which had terminated in his separation from the church of Dr. Lewis, never weakened the esteem which each felt for the other; and to the close of his life, Mr. W. continued to speak of his former pastor with a warmth of affection which time could not quench and distance could not lessen. Mr. W. had not long been united with the Horeb church before he became their minister. They knew his worth, and he reigned in their hearts. It was said of his people, that when a stranger occasionally ministered among them, they never were satisfied; and great as the attraction of novelty must ever be, none could with them be compared to their stated preacher. Before being fixed over this little flock, he had been advised by some of his friends to enter the Bristol Baptist Academy. In after life, he often lamented his refusal, but the reasons of it do honour to his memory. His early ministrations had produced a pain in his breast, which he regarded

as the forerunner of approaching consumption. Believing that the years which remained to him were but few, he was unwilling to waste a moment in preparation, and accordingly threw himself in the strength of faith, with all his imperfections of education upon him, into the work of the gospel ministry. With a perseverance the most devoted, and a patience the most untiring, he travelled and laboured in season and out of season. It was, perhaps, the very energy with which he laboured, as in the expectation of death, that was the means of prolonging his life. The Horeb church was composed of several branches, which though forming but one body met at different places of worship. Mr. Williams travelled extensively through North and South Wales, and collected funds for the building of two meeting houses for his affectionate people. What their number at his coming among them was, we are unable to ascertain; but from Rippon's Baptist Register, we find that in October, 1794, the members amounted to 140. By means of these journeyings, he became generally known and respected throughout Wales. He was a friend and fellow traveller of the celebrated and apostolic Christmas Evans, with whom he continued an occasional correspondence to the close of life.

It may appear strange that he could willingly leave a flock of whose affections he was so entirely possessed, and who earnestly opposed his intentions; but his motives were deserving of the highest praise. The tide of emigration was at this period fast pouring from the shores of Britain into these yet infant States. Many of the mountaineers of Wales, oppressed by the grinding weight of publick distress, and perhaps not uninfluenced by the revolutionary principles, the seeds of which were

then sown throughout Europe, were abandoning their ancient homes for the comforts of what had been painted to them as a foreign paradise. Many of them were entirely unacquainted with the English language. A hope of being useful to these scattered sheep, a desire that to their settlement on a foreign shore they should carry with them the gospel of their fathers in the language of their fathers; this hope and this desire, together with other motives, which, were they published, would throw a strong light on the modest reserve and independence of his character, brought him as an emigrant to these United States. He tore himself from a fond and a mourning people, and following what he believed the call of God, came forth from the land of his fathers like Abraham, knowing not whither he went. His knowledge of the English language was but small indeed; and although when a boy he had been instructed in the grammar of it, his teacher was himself too ignorant to afford much assistance to his pupil. On the 25th, of July, 1795, he landed at New York, bearing warm recommendations from his church and friends in Wales, and among others, from his former pastor, the Rev. Dr. Lewis. A younger brother accompanied Mr. W. Within a fortnight after their arrival in the country, this brother died most suddenly at Schuyler's Mines, near Newark, New Jersey. Mr. Williams, who was then at New York, was informed of the distressing event, and immediately set out travelling on foot to the place. The exertion of the journey, added to the suddenness of the blow, produced a violent fever, in which the mind was scarcely less agitated than the body. He had left his native soil, his family, and his friends, to find in a foreign land, and among a people of strange language, a

grave for the companion of his voyage, a beloved brother. He began to doubt if he had not rashly ventured where God had not called him; and this consideration seemed to raise his feelings, which were naturally acute, to a pitch of intense agony. It was but the prelude and the promise of after usefulness; it was in a manner the parting blow of the adversary—the struggle in, and by which, his heavenly Father was girding and exercising him for his appointed task. In his distress he prayed that one, though but one soul, might be granted to him in America as the fruit of his ministry and the proof of his calling; and when he arose from the bed of sickness, he arose, if possible, more anxiously earnest than ever, in the work of his heart. He had intended to have settled in some neighbourhood inhabited by Welsh emigrants, and in his mother language to have continued his ministerial labours; and with this view, his attention had been directed to Beulah, in Pennsylvania, and Steuben in New York. In Welsh he delivered his first sermon in America. It was preached in the meeting house then occupied by the Rev. John Stanford, in Fair street.

The Baptist church in Oliver, (at that time Fayette) Street, was then composed of about 30 members, of whom, however, only 20 could be found, who met in a small unfinished wooden building, about thirty feet square, without galleries, and seated with benches instead of pews. This church permitted him and his countrymen occasionally to use their place of worship for service in their own language. They also encouraged Mr. W. to attempt the acquisition of the English language, a request with which after some hesitation he complied, and began to preach in English for one part of the Sabbath, on the other part

still continuing the use of the Welsh. Through every disadvantage, the English brethren saw a deep and fervent piety and a native vigour of mind which greatly delighted them. They had made several attempts to procure a supply, but were unable to find one in all respects suitable. They now began to fix their hopes upon the young stranger, and at length, after a trial of nine months, Mr. Williams became, on their unanimous request, their pastor on the 28th of August, 1798. In the summer of this year, the yellow fever commenced one of its most dreadful attacks upon the city of New York. Mr. W. among others, was early seized with the contagion, and his life was despaired of. But the decisive conduct of his physician, who, in the course of a few hours, drew from him an unusual quantity of blood, proved under God the means of his recovery, and he again appeared with new zeal among the people of his charge. Encouraged by the attention which he excited, in January following the little church substituted pews for benches. But they grew, and the place soon became too strait, and in 1800, the meeting house was enlarged to 60 by 43 feet, and galleries were added. In the course of years this place also became insufficient; and in little more than twenty years after his first settlement, Mr. W. saw raised the third meeting house, the present edifice, a large stone building, 64 by 94 feet.

Great as was this success, it is not to be supposed that he was without his sorrows: They met him at his very entrance. Some even among the officers of this little church had drunk into the spirit of Antinomianism, and by habitual intemperance provoked exclusion from the privileges of church membership. The feeble

band were also distressed from without by their disputes with another small church in the city; a dispute trifling in its origin, but which mutual recrimination had heightened into a contest, that it required the most persevering exercise of Mr. Williams' conciliatory offices to terminate. It was by his meekness and patience, long and assiduously employed, that harmony was at length restored.

But in the midst of his sorrows, he had also pleasures of the most exalted kind. He saw a small and divided body gradually growing into strength and harmony, and a pious and zealous people gathering around him. God raised up for him active friends, and brought into the church men like minded with himself. In a few months after his settlement, he baptized Thomas Hewett. In Oct. 1799, John Cauldwell with his wife was added on a letter of dismission; and in a similar manner were received in June, 1801, Mr. and Mrs. Withington. The names of these revered and lamented men are mentioned because they now rest from their labours. They seem to have been raised with their pastor, and they, with many others, continued to cheer his heart and strengthen his hands until the year 1822, when all three in quick succession descended into the grave.

In November, 1801, Mr. W. was united in marriage to her who is now his lamenting widow, an event which contributed greatly to the happiness of his after life.

During an earlier part of his ministry, the salary received from his people was insufficient even to pay his board; he however derived assistance from the trifling funds which he brought with him from Wales. But he was not, to borrow an expression of his own, one of the "disciples of the loaves." He laboured zealously, because

he laboured disinterestedly. His preaching was not the stinted consideration for a narrow salary. His exertions were labours of love, and they brought with them in the success and triumph of the gospel, in the added numbers of his church, and in the visible increase of peace, of love, and of zeal, their own "exceeding great reward." It was not in him to faint or to murmur at the scantiness of his support, nor yet did he regard it as an excuse for contracting debts which he might be unable to discharge. With pecuniary difficulties he struggled in silence, thankful to see in the growing prosperity of his charge, that the blessing of Heaven if not of earth was with and upon him. The number of members continued steadily to increase, and most walked worthy of their profession. His high recommendations from Wales, together with his own conduct, gained him new accessions of friends among all denominations. He had not looked for applause, he had not laboured for it; but the reputation of being a wise and devoted minister continually followed him. By gradual increase the church enlarged its numbers, till it counts at the present moment more than 540 members within its fellowship. During his connexion with them, Mr. W. baptized about 440 members, exclusive of others baptized on Long Island and in other parts of the State. In the early part of the year 1823, the Rev. Spencer H. Cone, of Alexandria, (D. C.) was associated with Mr. Williams in the pastoral office.

He had about this period from various causes began to decline, and the feebleness of his body seemed to obscure the energies of his mind. In the course of one memorable year, (1822) three of the men who had walked with him all his journey through, who had shared his sorrows and doubled

his joys, were removed as in a band to their everlasting home. Their departure left on his mind an impression which could never be erased. Others still remained, not their inferiors in love to his person, or in zeal for the church; but those who were gone had been with him from the first; he knew them thoroughly, had proved them often, and they had never failed him. His labours were still continued among his flock, but decay was making silent and irreparable attacks upon his once vigorous constitution. He did not complain, but his appearance betrayed his internal afflictions. The influenza which prevailed during the winter, seized upon and greatly enfeebled him. But although evidently weakened and often prevented from preaching, he never gave up the hope of ultimate restoration to health and of a happy renewal of his labours. He seemed unwilling to entertain the idea that his present sickness was smoothing his path to the grave. Such thoughts his friends had, indeed, of late begun gladly to discountenance, and for the last two or three weeks immediately preceding his departure, he seemed gathering new strength, and it was fondly hoped that summer would complete his recovery. On Friday and Saturday he had walked out, on the former of these days to a considerable distance. The Saturday night was, however, past without rest, and when he arose on the morning of the Sabbath he seemed haggard and broken, his eye was dim, and his breathing obstructed. But neither his family nor himself apprehended any immediate danger, as he had often been to appearance much worse; and although his physician was sent for, it was without any expectation of the blow that was so soon and so suddenly to fall. He came down to breakfast as usual, and afterwards

returned up stairs to his study. He there spent some time in conversation with Mr. Williams, a young Baptist minister from Vermont who was then at his house, and in reading a volume of President Edwards. It was his Treatise on the Affections, with him a favourite work. He remarked, with a faint smile, to one who stood by, that he was spending the morning of the Sabbath in a manner to which he had not been accustomed. In former years, he observed, he had at this hour been employed in preparing for the labours of the day; now he was enjoying the labours of others, referring to the volume which he still grasped with a trembling hand. Little thought he, and little expected those around him, that the Sabbath he was this day to begin, was indeed *far different* from those he had been accustomed to spend. Unseen was breaking on him the dawn of a Sabbath around whose brightness the shades of evening never gather, for God himself is its eternal sun! To Mrs. Williams, who came into the room shortly after, he said that often as he had read this work of Edwards, he saw in it new beauties at every perusal. "He speaks," continued he, "so sweetly of Jesus." The Rev. Alfred Bennet, of Homer, (N. Y.) had in the meanwhile called to pay a friendly visit. After a little conversation, in which Mr. W. seemed not inclined to suppose that there was any danger as to the event of his sickness, he complained of having past the preceding night without sleep, and, requesting Mr. B. to enjoy himself with a book, walked into an adjoining bed-room. He lay down, but soon became uneasy, and expressed a wish to rise. He was assisted by Mrs. W. so to do, and setting up in his chair, past as in a moment away. When Mr. B. was called in from the next room, pulsation had ceased.

Without warning, without fear, and without pain, he had, in an instant, burst the fetters of the flesh, flung aside the habiliments of mortality, and past at once from the darkness of earth into the full blaze of the New Jerusalem. Ere he had even thought of entering the valley of the shadow of death, he was wafted dryshod over the swellings of Jordan, and found himself standing a disembodied and purified spirit before the gates of the city of God. If it be possible that death should resemble translation, certainly his departure bore that resemblance. Without groan or struggle he ceased to breathe. The change to him was the more ineffably glorious from its unspeakable suddenness. He had not been disposed to believe that this sickness was unto death, yet was he, in the fullest and best sense, prepared for his end. The wise, as well as the foolish virgins slumbered and slept; with them, indeed, he slumbered, but with them, also, even at the midnight hour, his lamp was trimmed and his loins were girt, as those that wait for the coming of the Master. His was an habitual preparation, a preparation of the heart, though not of the eye. His dissolution was not betokened and preceded by those glimmerings of glory which often shed so rich a lustre on the death-bed of the faithful. It had no slow gradations from darkness to light,—no day breakings of joyful anticipation,—no dawns of increasing rapture growing brighter and brighter unto the perfect day; but like the change of one who lies down in the shades of evening and wakes in the noon day blaze, all was suddenness of ecstasy. He had not, as from the summit of Pisgah, been transported with clear views of the “land far off, and the king in his beauty;” and although he always, by the eye

of an habitual faith, contemplated the land of promise as lying at the end of his journey, he saw it but as through a glass darkly, nor knew that he was already on the borders of his inheritance.

It had been in some degree his wish to pass suddenly away. He had prayed that his life might not be lengthened beyond his usefulness. The prayer was heard. His labours were finished. Ever ready to give in a joyful account of his stewardship, the voice of the Master on a sudden reached his ear and pierced his heart. And ere the sun, which had shone so brightly into his sick chamber, had reached its zenith, his spirit had soared beyond “the flaming bounds of space” into regions of bliss, where imagination faints to follow him.

There was a beautiful adaptation in many of the accompanying circumstances of his death. The time—the morning of the day of the Lord,—the place,—a room which had often witnessed the secret and fervent prayer,—the morning sun, streaming down its golden brilliancy,—the resplendent serenity of the sky,—the stillness of the hour, ere dissipation and riot were yet abroad in the streets of the great city,—all, in their peace, their brightness, and their purity, seemed to unite in shedding a glow of holy triumph upon the last moment of the departing saint. Moment we say—for it was but a moment; and a hand too gentle to be felt had loosed the silver chord and broken the golden bowl; and he, that scarce an hour before, had spoken of uniting in the worship of the congregation, ceased to be a dweller upon earth. The promise which the dying Withington had made, to be the first to greet his pastor welcome home, was no doubt fulfilled.

Fancy may perhaps be forgiven if she finds in the volume which

employed his last thoughts on earth, a happy adaptation to the circumstances of his death. The sentence on which his eye would seem to have cast its last look, (Edwards' Works, Vol. 4, p. 201.) was one of the many in which Edwards is employed in heaping proof upon proof, and with all his characteristic strength of collected argument, making "demonstration doubly sure," in shewing that it is possible to have strong and deep feelings of the excellency of the character of God, and yet be wanting in the temper of true christianity. Directly opposite was the situation of his mind. He had, in a large measure, the genius and spirit of true Christianity, although, at the moment, he probably felt no remarkable elevation of feeling. He proved what he read, and rose, in confirmation of the truth, to that Heaven, where the "affections" never wander.

On the 22d of May, 1825, at about 20 minutes before 10, A. M. he entered into his rest. On the following Tuesday, his remains were interred from the meeting house in Oliver street, after an affecting funeral discourse, pronounced by one who had travelled with him, in the christian and ministerial path, many days, the venerable John Stanford. "The rest of the labouring man" of God "is sweet," formed the basis of the discourse.

The memory of the just is blessed. Few men equalled John Williams in the consistency of his christian character as a whole. We frequently see some one individual excellence carried out into glorious exercise at the expense and to the neglect of other virtues; but in his character, all the traits of true christianity seemed to unite their beauty, without giving to any one feature an unseemly prominence. His zeal was ardent, but united with the greatest prudence. That pru-

dence, instead of degenerating into craftiness, was accompanied by the most perfect simplicity; simplicity was tempered by meekness, yet his meekness had, for its basis, strong decision of character, and unbending firmness of principle. He never insulted charity by offering to sacrifice on her altar the truth "as it is in Jesus," and yet he never hoped to advance the cause of truth by bringing to her defence bigotry and intolerance. He loved the image of the Saviour wherever he found it, and it was not the barrier of his own sect, or the badge of another, that could prevent him from acknowledging his union in spirit with those whom the same Redeemer had purchased with the same blood. As a minister of the gospel, he lived the gospel. Charitable to the poor of his flock, profuse of his labours, and constant in his visits, it was his meat and his drink to do the will of his heavenly Father, in shewing mercy and kindness to the afflicted and the desolate. He carried the consolations of the gospel into the meanest hovels, and never shrunk from entering the deepest cellar, or the filthiest den, in which misery and grief had enshrouded themselves. It is believed, that in this employ it was, that he imbibed the contagion of that fever which had so nearly proved fatal; and when, during the last winter of his life, he was confined by the weather to his house, his most feeling lamentations were, that he was prevented from seeing the poor and the afflicted of the flock. In hospitality, he always endeavoured to maintain the character of a primitive bishop, and the brethren from every part of the country were ever cheerfully welcomed to his table and his dwelling. In the meetings of the church, he is described as presiding with a moderation and calmness that never deserted him. His opinion

was not given until all had spoken; it was modest and brief, and moulded with the kindest deference for contending opinions, and therefore it was generally decisive. No man sought authority less. Never an action of his life assumed the character of "lording it over God's heritage." The peace of the church gave peace and comfort to him; when they were agitated he was distressed, and many a sleepless night testified the anxiety which preyed in secret upon his spirit, when contention and bitterness had sprung up among the household of faith. It was to this pacific, gentle, and forbearing spirit, that he was indebted for much of his usefulness and much of his influence. His advice was the more regarded, because it was known to come from a mind unbiassed by passion. He never lent himself to a party, and all parties honoured him. In the pulpit, he was not invested with that eloquence which delights while it dazzles a polite audience. His language was not at all times "furbelowed and flounced" with grammatical nicety, and his gestures wanted the gracefulness of practised oratory. But circumstances like these were overlooked in one who never seemed to enter the pulpit but under a view of the vastness and solemnity of his charge. His spirit was in the work. His exhortations and admonitions were earnest, simple, and frequent. He had about him, that fervour of feeling which is the very soul of true eloquence, and although he never ceased to feel the disadvantage of preaching a language acquired late in life, his devoted zeal, his willingness to be as nothing in the hands of Him "who is the fulness of all things," set him above the fear and beyond the reach of puny criticism. Provided he was but understood, he seemed careless of the garb and

style in which he came forth, "a dying man to dying men." The event showed, that he had chosen the right path. He who confounds the wisdom of the wise of this world, made him an acceptable and useful minister of that gospel, which was first preached by fishermen and tent makers. The careless simplicity of his style, proved to the man of observation, that his spirit was set upon the substance of his ministry, and like "the brave negligence of antiquity," delighted, because it shewed a mind intent on higher thoughts than the pointing of a maxim, or the rounding of a sentence.

The foregoing observations, let it be remembered, are applied to the *manner*, not to the *matter* of his discourses. Let it not be supposed, that his sermons were the unstudied effusions of indolence and ignorance. He was in truth, a close student, given to much reading, well versed in theology, both practical, doctrinal, and polemic. He had attentively studied the most valuable divines of England and America, both controversialists and commentators. Of the latter, his favourite was Henry, and his pulpit exercises in their simplicity and earnestness, and their numerous and beautiful allusions to familiar occurrences, seem to have been partly formed on the model of that admirable writer. He made no pretensions to learning, but of theological learning he was certainly possessed in a high degree; and the size of a library, gradually acquired, witnessed his fondness for books. The truth is, that he devoted much labour and study to his pulpit ministrations, and at his death, he left behind him more than two thousand manuscript skeletons of sermons.

His studies were mingled with prayer. In prayer, he steeped the seed of the word, which with

prayer he scattered. Prayer was his grand weapon; but there were certain times, in which, rising as it were beyond himself, he seemed to wield it with more than human strength. Those who have kneeled for any length of time around his family altar, cannot but remember with what peculiar unction and earnestness he came among them to the duty of family prayer, on the evening preceding the Sabbath. Always fluent and vehement in his petitions, on Saturday night, his spirit seemed to glow with warmer feelings, and in his preparations for the exercises of the coming day, his lips seemed to have been touched as with a live coal from off the altar. It was, in general, late before he descended from his study into the room where the family was assembled. His countenance, his air, and conversation, all bore marks of his having enjoyed communion unutterable, "that the world knoweth not of." There was a burning urgency, an emphasis of humility in every petition that trembled on his lips, and his words came seemingly too slow and too weak to give utterance to his feelings.

"When one, that holds communion with the skies,

"Has fill'd his urn where these pure waters rise,

"And once more mingles with us meaner things,

"Tis e'en as if an angel shook his wings;

"Immortal fragrance fills the circuit wide."

On the evening of the Sabbath also, when the labours of the day were closed, he seemed to enjoy unusual happiness. In the services of the morning, he would often complain of constraint; but with the number of his exercises, (for he generally preached three times a day,) his freedom and zeal seemed to increase, "*One Sabbath nearer the end,*" was his usual exclamation before retiring on that evening to rest, and he always seemed to speak it with the tone of a labourer delighted in the employ that fatigued him, looking forward with pleasure,

but without impatience, to the rest of the weary and the home of the way-worn.

The strength of his mind has been underrated by those far his inferiors in intellect. He had received from heaven a strong natural understanding. He had much of what Locke has somewhere styled, "*large, sound, round about sense.*" In early life, he had, from principles which we cannot but honor, even while we lament their application, declined availing himself of the advantages of a classical education. A man of less good sense would have affected to despise the critical learning he was conscious of wanting, but such was not John Williams. He spoke often of neglected opportunities, and spoke always with the deepest regret; while, to the last of his life, he was a supporter and promoter of Education Societies for the instruction of pious young men for the ministry. His own case was a strong instance of the truth, that the Head of the church often gives to intellect and piety the success and graces which he denies to mere human learning; but he was never encouraged by success to act upon the principle of making himself a blockhead, in the hope that God would make him an apostle. He sought learning eagerly and constantly, and by diligent study, acquired a mass of general information, far from common. In the structure of his discourses, he exhibited great judgment. His divisions were few and natural, yet his sermons were always copious. The allegorizing taste, which finds every doctrine in every text, he disliked too heartily to imitate. The grand feature of his mental as well as of his moral character, was simplicity. He was less anxious for what was novel, than for what was true. He sought rather the useful than the pleasing. He did not

profess to hold forth the truth as the result of a train of elaborate reasoning, but he stated the doctrine with the simplicity of one perfectly convinced of its truth, proved it briefly, pressed it warmly, and left the rest to Heaven. In his ministry, his temper, perhaps, led him to dwell rather on the beauties of the gospel, than on the terrors of the law; to hover rather around the milder graces of Zion, than amid the darkness and thunders of Sinai; but he delivered few sermons, perhaps none, in which the ungodly were not pointedly addressed. In the discussion of a controverted point in the social circle, his good sense was exhibited in the same unpretending manner. It accorded neither with his habits nor his wishes to discuss the argument at length. Some well put question, some pithy maxim, when others had ceased to speak, expressed at once his wisdom and modesty. He might perhaps, have been unable, from the defects of his early education, to give a regular account of the series and connexion of the steps by which he arrived at an opinion; but good sense in general led him to the right and true one. It was enough, that he reached the port, without recollecting each tack and bearing of the voyage.

His sentiments, on what has been called the modern question, and on most others, perhaps on all debateable points, agreed with those maintained by Fuller. Edwards, Owen, and Fuller, might be called his triumvirate in doctrinal theology. He had studied all, deeply and repeatedly. A favourite class of writings with him, was the works of the Puritans and Nonconformists of England. From the more familiar beauties of Henry and Bunyan, up to the sublimity and grandeur of Owen and Charnock, he had attentively perused the most distinguished works produced by that venerable race of

confessors, "men of whom the world was not worthy."

Of his own acquirements, he thought most humbly. A sermon delivered before the New York Missionary Society, at a time when that body was composed of various denominations, was, with the exception of a few Association Letters, his first and last effort as an author. Of Missionary and Bible Societies, it is almost needless to say, he was a firm supporter from the first moment of his acquaintance with them, to the last of his life.

As a man, a relative, and a friend, to know was to love him. The unaffected benignity of his manners, his sincerity, and his kindness, gained him friends; and probably, no one who had once been his friend, was ever entirely alienated from him. Indeed, the manner in which he carried the temper of christianity into the duties of every day life, gave an uniform beauty to his character which was irresistibly pleasing. With acute natural feelings he combined great fortitude. Christianity taught the one to flow out in continual outgoings of love towards mankind, and heightened the exercise of the other, into the most uncomplaining, childlike resignation. His ministerial path had been strewed with many mercies, but it had had also its thorns and its roughness. He spoke often and feelingly of the one, scarcely ever of the latter. In the walks of publick and the shades of private life, he exhibited the same spirit of dependance and faith. He was always, in all places, and through every change, and at every period, the same mild, meek, and patient christian. He had, in a great degree, what may be called oneness of character. Above disguise and free from change, jealousy never clouded the warmth of his friendship, passion never obscured the wisdom

of his judgment. Not that this uniformity of character was owing to a stagnation of intellect and feeling, to a cold and heartless nature. Few excelled him in warmth of relative and religious feeling. But the zeal which ever marked him was enduring and equable. Its movements were not the occasional ebullitions of heated passions, or the effect of strong external excitement, the bubblings of a summer brook, noisy and evanescent; but they were the gentle and the continued overflowings of a living spring of charity, ever fed by the love of God "shed abroad within his heart." It came down, not like a violent storm sweeping away all before it, and levelling the weed and the flower in one common ruin; but it was a calm and steady shower, fertilizing as it fell, and witnessed in its effects by the beauty and freshness of the scenery it watered. He possessed, in a great degree, perseverance of character, not the obstinacy which disgusts, or the sternness which awes, but a settled adherence to a plan cautiously and deliberately formed. It was never his unhappiness to feel that restless vacillation, that constant change of object, motive, and pursuit, which ruins all influence and all happiness. He did not venture rashly on every splendid speculation that presented itself; but when he had once embarked with serious and prayerful deliberation, it was not a slight tempest or a passing cloud that could drive him back. This temper may, in some cases, have assumed the appearance of obstinacy, but it was the stubbornness of an upright mind too strong to bend, too well rooted to be shaken.

Such a character could not but command respect, even from those who thought differently. Men, proud of their infidelity, have done homage to his transparent sincerity; and scoffers, who have

delighted themselves with ridiculing the religion of others as hypocrisy, have been known to eulogize him. Their eulogy was not bought by unmanly concessions and cowardly disguise. He spoke earnestly and feelingly on the subject of religion, it mattered not where or before whom; but there was no attempt at display, and they who hated his principles, were awed by the evident purity of his motives. His gravity was as free from all tincture of moroseness, as was his mildness from all levity. The gentleness of his temper seemed to beam from his countenance, and words of kindness distilled from his lips. In the church and in the world, he was eminently a man of peace. He sacrificed feeling, convenience, interest, and every thing but principle, to this darling object of affection. And among the frailties, which must ever attach themselves to humanity, it was perhaps the leading one in his character, that he yielded too tamely to the will of others.

Humility seemed inwrought into the very texture of his mind. He displayed it, not in loud and nauseating professions of self abasement, but in a reluctance to speak of his own feelings and his own doings; in a willingness to be the least in greatness and the last in honours. This was not assumed, because it was displayed more in deeds than in words. When he would occasionally mention himself, he always spoke with the deepest lowliness; but it was a subject on which he did not often touch, on which he seemed unwilling to waste a thought. He scarcely mentioned even the success in his ministry which had delighted his heart. To all the varied duties of the pastoral office, he seemed anxious to apply the precept first spoken of almsgiving, "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth." Dur-

ing the whole course of his ministry, it is not remembered, that he ever used, in a discourse from the pulpit, the pronoun "I," (as applied to himself,) or that his sermons ever contained, with the exception that follows, any open allusion however pardonable, to the events of his own life, or the workings of his own heart. Was it that he was deficient in the feeling of what he taught, or had he no stores from personal observation from which to draw? The contrary was eminently the fact; his sermons were most rich in christian experience. But he feared all appearance of preaching himself rather than his Master.

One feature was ever the prominent character in the fore-ground of every sermon. He held up the Saviour, and was himself concealed in the shade.

On his recovery from the yellow fever in 1798, he chose, for his subject, on appearing again among his people, the 8th and 9th verses of Psalm CXVI. The same text formed the basis of his discourse on the afternoon of Sunday, March 20th, the last sermon which he delivered before he went up to that church where ministrations and ordinances are at an end. Its selection, in the latter instance, shewed that he considered himself, in some measure, restored to health. The issue proved, that the thoughts of the Lord were high above his thoughts.

A life like his, however barren in incident, cannot but be most fertile in instruction. Is there a youth depressed in spirit at comparing his own advantages and attainments with the high standards around him, let him look to the success with which God crowned a faithful, self-taught labourer; and, blushing for his own despondency, let him thank God, and take courage. Eloquence and secular learning are not indispensable; and the spirit of faith, and

prayer, and love, that animated John Williams, is more rarely found, and when found, is worth far more than all the unsanctified learning that all the volumes of an University can give. Forbidden to shine in the walks of science, let him, who laments the ignorance of his youth, be content to share the obscurity together with the usefulness of those holy, devout and humble men,

"Who comfort those, that wait,
 "To hear plain truth at Judah's hallowed gate:
 "Their language simple, as their manners meek,
 "No shining ornaments have they to seek;
 "No labour they, nor time, nor talents waste,
 "In sorting flowers to suit a fickle taste;
 "But while they speak the wisdom of the skies,
 "Which art can only darken and disguise,
 "Th' abundant harvest, recompense divine,
 "Repays their work."

But let such a man remember too, how assiduously the subject of this memoir toiled to supply the want he so deeply regretted, and let him never be guilty of despising knowledge. Is there one, who, on the contrary, hopes by fancied eloquence to gain and secure the love and respect of his people? To him let this humble biography speak, 'The most touching and powerful of all eloquence, is the eloquence of a holy, harmless life, and even that may fail.'

Is there one who fears to mingle too familiarly with the flock under his charge, lest intimacy wear off that dignity which should attach itself to the minister of the gospel, to him would we say, 'Few men visited more faithfully, fulfilling to the very letter, the apostolic practice, "preaching from house to house," than did John Williams; and few more thoroughly gained and more devotedly preserved the affections of his congregation, than did he. We almost fancy, that we yet see him, at an early hour, setting out on his route of pastoral visitation, or, at a late hour, returning from it, exhausted with fatigue; and we gaze upon the picture, till we almost forget that he is, where the flock are exempt from sickness

and the shepherd from fatigue. Is there one whose imagination has dwelt upon the sublimer speculations, the more romantic and shadowy views of the christian pastorship, till he has become weary of the common and every day employments of a minister—till his mind has grown disgusted with the tedious rounds of sermons and visits, which he must travel from January to December;—until, in fine, he begins to grasp at something better and larger and more adapted to his talents? Let him know that the path of humility is the path to usefulness; and that it will require all his wisdom to tread it without deviation. John Williams had no splendid generalizations to talk of, and to labour about, and to find in their failure an excuse for the neglect of humbler duties. He had no new and grand views of human nature to propose, no novel methods and machinations for subduing the world, that were to sweep away at once, the stubborn enmity of the human heart, and effect what the eloquence and wisdom of Paul were too weak to accomplish. On the contrary, he knew that man was ever the same—that the enmity of the human heart was ever the same; and that the remedy for that enmity was at all times but one. Instead of looking to some new system of theology, or some original plan of sermonizing, he looked to Heaven and trod the beaten path, the path that had been worn by the feet of apostles and martyrs, the path of humble faith. That path led him to a high stand in the church of God. He had gone unto his task, anxious to do a little good as in a corner, and blushed to find, by the praises he received, that he had been doing more than his louder neighbours. He knew that there was One, without whom he could do nothing, with whom he could do all things. To that One

he prayed; in His name stood up; in His name went forth; with His name began; and with His name ended. It was the Alpha and the Omega of his thoughts, his words, his prayers, and his labours. In the might of this single-eyed faith he laboured and returned, bearing his sheaves, rejoicing and trampling on every obstacle.

In this imperfect and feeble sketch of a most excellent character, we would not, that description should swell into panegyric. Were the lamented subject of it now on earth, nothing to him would be more displeasing. His graces and gifts were but the faint reflection of light from above. He was but an instrument in a mightier hand; by that hand he was at first moulded, and by the same hand afterward employed to build up the church of Christ. His virtues are held up not to be praised, but that their exhibition may awaken others to emulation, that they, "beholding his good works, may glorify his Father which is in heaven," and become "followers of" him who "through faith and patience," is now "inheriting the promises." A life so modest, would be ill adorned by indiscreet encomium. Were it for us to choose, and, unconsulted, to give an unasked opinion, the monument, that is to mark his grave, as well as every other object intended to perpetuate his memory, should, in its unornamented simplicity, be like him whose name it bears, and its only inscription should be

**"JOHN WILLIAMS,
A MAN OF GOD.**

Born 8th of March, (O. S.) 1767.

Died 22d of May, 1825."

Let who will, claim a higher eulogy!

To the private christian, no less than to him who fills the sacred desk, the life of Mr. W. may teach the wisdom of that

Providence, which shrouds its paths in darkness. The eye that saw him a cripple peasant boy on the mountains of Wales, would not easily have detected in him the seeds of future greatness, the stamina of intellectual and moral strength. But the eye that marks the sparrow's fall, and guides the wanderings of every mote of dust that dances in the sun-beam, saw otherwise. God had marked and chosen him for a leader of his Israel. The eye of an unseen, and as yet unacknowledged, Providence, was on his early path. Its care shielded him from danger, and fixed the course in which his character should be formed. The hand of his heavenly Father meted out to him the afflictions that should exercise, and the consolations that should support him. That hand brought him, at an early age, into the ways of his commandments, and led him in safety and peace in all his journey-

ings through his native land, "by a way that he knew not;" it finally conducted him over the waste of waters to a foreign shore, and there fixed him, against his own expectations, as a city set on a hill, a burning and a shining light. That light is not yet quenched, still his example speaks. His words are yet ringing in our ears, and the fruits of his labours are yet before our eyes. We cannot but remember him with lamentation for ourselves, with rejoicing for him. The tears that will find their way at the recollection of his loss, are brightened by the thought of what he has been on earth, of what he is now in heaven.

Thrice happy they who sleep in God,
Securely wafted o'er the flood

To Canaan's peaceful shore:
Whose lives were as a daily death,
Who walk'd with God and liv'd by faith,
And now shall die no more.

Such, gracious Lord, we wish to be,
Such was our pastor now with Thee.

Tristram.

N. York, July 4, 1825.

W.

ON CREEDS AND SUBSCRIPTIONS.

Messrs. Editors,

You will, I am persuaded, confer a favour on many of your readers, by inserting in your Magazine an Essay on Creeds and Subscriptions, by the Rev. Andrew Fuller. It is in the last volume of his invaluable works, which, allow me to say, ought to have a place in the library of every gospel minister.

S.

It has been very common among a certain class of writers, to exclaim against creeds and systems in religion, as inconsistent with christian liberty and the rights of conscience: but surely they must be understood as objecting to those creeds only, which they dislike, and not to creeds in general; for no doubt, unless they be worse than the worst of beings, they have a creed of their own. The man who has no creed, has no belief; which is the same thing as being an unbeliever: and he whose belief is not formed into a system, has only a few

loose, unconnected thoughts, without entering into the harmony and glory of the gospel. Every well informed and consistent believer, therefore, must have a creed, a system which he supposes to contain the leading principles of divine revelation.

It may be pleaded that the objection does not lie so much against our having creeds or systems, as against our imposing them on others, as the condition of christian fellowship. If, indeed, a subscription to articles of faith were required without examination, or enforced by civil penal-