

LETTER OF DR. DEFT TO THE CONVENOR.

Calcutta, September 7, 1847.

MY DEAR DR. BUCHANAN.—What a fearfully recognizing year has this proved to our Church, in relation to the removal from her bosom of some of her most brilliant and shining lights! By the last month's overland I was led to refer to the loss sustained in the departure to his rest of her greatest champion at home; and now it is with the deepest sorrow that I have to refer to the loss sustained, in the departure to his rest, of one of her most respected and successful champions abroad. My beloved colleague and friend, the Rev. Mr. Macdonald, is now, alas, for us, no more!

The unexpectedness of this melancholy intelligence will, I doubt not, cause it to be felt with stunning force. It is the first breach in a mission which has now existed for eighteen years—spread over the three Indian presidencies. May the Lord, in mercy, enable us all to lay this visitation to heart, that we may be stirred up to labour with increasing and more prayerful diligence, while to us it is yet day!

On Wednesday, the 25th of last month, Mr. Macdonald came to the institution, as usual, at 10 o'clock. He was then in his ordinary health, looking well, having no complaint, and exhibiting his wonted joyousness of spirit. That morning he offered the morning prayer in the presence of hundreds of intelligent native youths. Like all his prayers, it was earnest, fervent, and spiritual. But there was a something in the tone of fervency which he presented some of his petitions that struck me at the time as unusually solemn. There was a rotation too in some of them, not common with him, particularly those in which he prayed that "the Lord would open the eyes of the young persons assembled, to see the awfulness of the sin of idleness, in which they, in common with their fathers, were involved; and of the still more aggravated sin which these young persons were incurring, by continuing to reject the Lord Jesus Christ and his freely offered salvation."

It was only in the evening of that day that he felt feverish and unwell. On the day following, (Thursday,) he did not come to the institution. But writing to me about another matter, he remarked that he felt so much better that he fully expected to be with us the next day. On Thursday evening, however, the fever, which apparently left him, returned somewhat stronger than before. On Friday, again, he felt decidedly relieved. And thus he continued better and worse for three or four days, without any apprehension whatsoever of danger being awakened.

Besides the fever, he complained of a peculiar pain in his head, which allowed him to get little or no refreshing sleep, and disabled him for any thing requiring continuous attention or thought. On Sunday the 29th, Mrs. Macdonald asked him if he would like her to read a chapter of the Bible to him, knowing full well how dearly he loved that blessed book beyond all other books in the world besides. He replied in substance, "Not at that time, as he felt confused in his mind, and unable to grapple with any subject; but that he had committed himself entirely to God, in whom he had perfect confidence that he would do all things wisely and well." Thus it was that, from the nature of his complaint, he felt unable from the first to communicate much to his friends; and his medical attendant strongly urged all friends not to tempt him, by their bedside visits to make an exertion for which he was not competent.

On Tuesday morning the 1st, he seemed to be altogether better, so much so that he arose without any assistance from his bed and walked into his study, sat down at his writing table to enjoy the morning breeze, and then partook of a cup of tea, brought to him by Mrs. Macdonald. After this, he retired to his couch. When Dr. Chapman, his medical attendant, came, he was delighted to find his patient so much improved, not in appearance only, but in the real manifestation of favourable symptoms. Finding that he looked as if inclined to sleep, the doctor recommended him to encourage the inclination, and requested Mrs. Macdonald to get the venetians shut, and keep him perfectly

quiet. Such was his state when Mr. Ewart called to see him, and brought to the institution the cheering intelligence that our esteemed friend and brother was decidedly better. This at once relieved us of anxiety, though, indeed, previous to that time, no one suggested any real apprehension of danger.

What had the appearance of a natural inclination to sleep, proved, however, in the end, to be a very different visitation. For, when the doctor again called towards noon, he at once perceived that "coma" or effusion of the brain had commenced. He instantly applied the most effective remedies, and left those to do their work—subject, of course, to the all-wise ordination of a gracious God. But about four o'clock in the afternoon, when he called back, accompanied by another eminent practitioner, Dr. Jackson, they both saw that the only remedies likely to prove of any avail had succeeded so partially as to hold out no reasonable hope of a favourable issue. In short, before they left him, they both pronounced his case, humanly speaking, utterly hopeless. Then it was that the first alarming message of danger was sent to his more intimate friends. But no friend was any more privileged to see him in a state of consciousness. From two o'clock he continued to the end absolutely unconscious, and absolutely motionless, as if he had already been a lifeless statue. The only sign of life remaining was his hard breathing—breathing which looked strange in a countenance already fixed in all the ghastly rigidity of death. And the only change any longer perceptible was the gradual softening down of his breath, until he peacefully fell asleep in Jesus, without pain, without a struggle, and without a groan. A little past midnight, or very early on Wednesday the 1st of September, the summons came from the upper sanctuary. And, doubtless, the emancipated spirit was soon hailed by the Master whom he so dearly loved, saying,—“Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

On the evening of Wednesday, the body was interred in the Scotch burying-ground, being accompanied to the grave by numbers of the really Christian people of different denominations, who admired and respected him as a truly devoted servant of God, distinguished by many rare and shining spiritual excellencies.

By previous arrangement, Mr. Mackail improved the solemn visitation to the Free Church congregation, on the forenoon of Sabbath last; while on the evening of the same day, I endeavoured to do the same. On both occasions, very many of other denominations attended, manifesting the deepest interest and sympathy. At the close of the evening service, the sacred rite of baptism was administered to four new converts from heathenism. That, in the providence of God, the call for the performance of such a service should have arisen without our forcing or seeking it, at the close of a funeral sermon on behalf of one whose very last public act was the offering up of fervent prayer for the conversion of the heathen, was felt by all to be a singular manifestation of the wisdom and goodness and grace of our heavenly Father. Who can tell whether the coming forward of these young men on Thursday, the very day after the offering up of that solemn prayer, may not have been in answer to it? For this we do know and believe, that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." And it would be singularly significant of the sovereignty of divine grace, to contemplate and cherish the idea that the last prayer of a righteous man was rendered more available, instrumentally, to the conversion of souls, than the most active labours of many previous months or even years. Oh that it may prove so in the case of our own central institution, in which the precious seed of life has for years been so abundantly sown, while the spiritual harvest of conversion hitherto reaped has been so comparatively scanty! But we sow in faith and hope; and, therefore, in the full assurance that not a little of that now may be sown in tears shall one day be reaped with joy. This was pre-eminently the assurance of our beloved fellow-labourer, who has

now "ceased from his labours," while his "works do follow him," even unto the sanctuary above, as the fruits and evidences of his faithfulness as a servant of the Most High. On the Wednesday on which he died (the 1st), the crowds of pupils assembled as usual. At ten o'clock, by previous understanding with my colleagues, I went to the institution simply to explain what had happened, and afterwards dismiss them till Monday, the 6th, partly as a mark of respect to the departed, and partly to allow time for our feelings to assuage. But the whisper had already gone abroad; so that instead of the merry shouts of healthful juveniles that were wont to assail mine ears, there was a silence as dead as if I had been entering an Egyptian catacomb. After prayer, all retired to their respective class-rooms, without a whisper being anywhere heard—all seemed under the influence of some all-pervading, over-awing, mysterious, undefinable impression—the teachers, monitors, and students of our college department, all of whom had, at one time or other, been under the instruction, in divine things, of our lamented brother—the design being, that the teachers should afterwards withdraw to their respective class-rooms and explain the substance of what might be said to the junior pupils. When endeavouring to remind them of the precious truths and faithful admonitions addressed to them by him who had now gone to his rest, and how all these would rise up, at the day of judgment, to acquit him of the blood of their souls, but to condemn them, if they should continue to neglect the great salvation; it was easy to see that, momentarily at least, all were deeply affected, and many giving vent to their feelings in tears. And who can tell what spiritual life may yet emanate from this temporal death! Much of the good seed that has been sown has, doubtless, here as elsewhere, fallen by the wayside, and the fowls of the air have picked it away; or among thorns, and it has been choked; or on stony places, and after shooting up, has been hopelessly scorched and withered; while only a small proportion has fallen on really good and prolific soil, bringing forth, some thirty, some sixty, and some an hundred fold. But we have not the shadow of a doubt that some has fallen on soil which is yet destined to become really good, through the almighty agency of the Spirit of all grace, though hitherto it has lain buried under the surface in a state of dormancy and inactivity—the soil itself being so trampled and beaten down under the incessant tread of worldliness and carnality in their varied forms, that the entombed seed cannot germinate, the principle of life cannot disengage or develop itself. But who can tell whether the present hurricane of feeling that has passed over many a soul in which the precious seed of life has been deposited, may not, under the agency of the Divine Spirit, prove the very means of shaking, and stirring, and loosening the indurated soil, that the dews of Heaven's grace, and the sunshine of Heaven's love, may enter in, with all their refreshing and vivifying influences, and so cause the seed to germinate, sprout up, and eventually bear glorious fruit for immortality? Who can tell whether, in this way, the very striking and remarkable words which, ten years ago, he was led to employ in his "Statement of Reasons for Accepting a Call to go to India as a Missionary," may not be emphatically verified? "If death were to seize me to-morrow, or the ocean to close over me, ere I reach a heathen shore, still would I die in the conviction that I had done my Lord's will in accepting this call; and that He could cause that which was dead to bring to nought that which was living. By the death of one man he could break up the empire of ten; and by the last crash of life accomplish more than by a warfare of years three score and ten." Amen. Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly in thy resurrection power! And while we are lying down, stunned and prostrate beneath this crushing stroke, well-nigh buried in tears and sorrows, yet striving to realize the patriarch's heroic faith, saying "Though thou slay me, yet will I trust in thee;" and the more than heroic submission of Him who was the patriarch's Lord, "Even so Father, for so it seemeth good in thy sight;"—O do thou who "lived and was dead, and art alive for evermore,