

SKETCH OF THE LIFE AND DEATH OF MARGARET IRVING, WHO DIED IN HER SEVENTH YEAR.

"Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise."

When we look upon an aged disciple of Jesus—a father or mother in Israel, it is with deep respect, bordering on reverence, for "the hoary head is a crown of glory when found in the way of righteousness," and the singleness of their eye, the strength of their faith, the brightness of their hope, and the devotion of their lives, naturally suppose a long course of discipline of heavenly training, hard struggling with nature, and happy communion with God. But when we turn to look upon a pious little child, there is more than respect or reverence—we are constrained to love, and our joy rises to a holy ecstasy, while we gratefully acknowledge "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise."

It is one of the glories of the christian religion, that an infant mind can grasp it—the heart of a child can enjoy it!

God often hides the saving mysteries of the kingdom from the wise and prudent, and reveals them unto babes—because it seems good in his own eyes.

The little girl whose brief memoir of early piety I am about to lay before our youthful readers, and whose unaffected simplicity and godly sincerity, I would strongly commend to their imitation, was one of those we sometimes meet, whose temper and course are such as strongly impress us with the conviction, that they belong to that happy and highly favoured class, whom the Good Shepherd will early remove to another and better world, where those gentle natures and loving hearts shall find a more agreeable clime, and be screened from the scorching rays of a summer's sun, and the piercing cold of the winter's blast, and "be for ever with the Lord."

Most children are thoughtless—folly is bound in their hearts, for the sports and pleasures of youth they have an insatiable thirst, but prayers, Bibles, Sabbaths and sacred lessons are felt to be a galling yoke, for which they have no relish, and from which they derive no pleasure. All this is natural, and here it is, we judge, that the carnal mind first displays its inherent dislike of what is holy, and of all that leads to God—Now if we meet with an exception—clear, strong and decided, where duty is preferred to pleasure and holy exercises to youthful sports, how are we to account for?

This strong aversion to what is good, God only can remove—and from the love of pleasure so natural to children, nothing but a clear discovery of the loveliness of Jesus can draw us away. When the Good Shepherd by his mighty spirit, says to the heart, "follow me," even the youthful mind will not stay, to confer with flesh and blood. Thus we believe it was with little Margaret.

When we find such a state of mind in a mere child, we naturally turn to think of the secondary causes and instrumentalities through which the free and sovereign grace of God had acted. Here there is nothing extraordinary, but a diligent and persevering use, and application of such means as are within the reach of all; and commend themselves to any parents' heart, in whom is the root of the matter, and which no man who loves his child, and wishes to train him for eternity, will fail to use. It just amounted to that early, careful, persevering course of religious training, as has been common for many past generations, among the families of Scotland—whose first text book was the Mothers' Catechism, the short, easy, simple question, and answers of which, when often repeated, will not only occupy a place in the memory, but be engraven upon the heart.

When little Margaret was only between three and four years of age—before she could read a word—she could answer correctly, one hundred and fifty of these simple questions! Thus her childish thoughts were occupied, her infant mind engaged, and, doubtless her heart impressed by the mighty truths with which her thought were familiar.

After she had learned to read, for which she had an astonishing faculty, she had gone through the entire New Testament three times before she was five years of age! and who can tell the precious thoughts, the heavenly aspirations—the deep and lasting impressions which the stable, the manger, the cross, and the prayers, the parables and miracles of Christ, may have made upon her young and tender heart—for "the entrance of thy word giveth light, it makes wise the simple."

Little Margaret's knowledge of the Scriptures was very extensive, she was quite familiar with its historical parts, Egypt, the Red Sea, Canaan, &c. For a child of her years she was deeply versed in a knowledge of Bible characters—Moses and his cradle of bulrushes, Aaron and his rod, Abram and his sojourn, Jacob and his mission, Isaac and his meditations, Samson and his strength, David and his psalms, Solomon and his wisdom, Elijah and Daniel and their prayers, and Job and his patience, were all familiar to her thoughts!

Clear strong evidence of her love to the Bible, was the ease and readiness with which she committed to memory, but a still stronger proof was found in the fact, that, what she learned, she seldom forgot! "Thy word have I hid in my heart" O, it is pleasing to think of a child knowing the Scriptures—when it is remembered, that through the spirit's teaching, they can make wise unto salvation.

A third instrumentality by which this lamb of the flock was instructed, and guided, first to the great Shepherd, and then to the great sheepfold above, was the Shorter Catechism! That epitome of christian doctrine, which under God has been the means of bringing thousands of youthful hearts to the knowledge of the truth, she knew thoroughly—for before she was six years of age, she would answer with a calmness and a precision and dignity (not even failing to observe the points,) which plainly intimated her knowledge of, and love for its doctrine. There can be little doubt that Scotland was for many generations much indebted, for the knowledge, morality, and piety of its families, to the Shorter Catechism—and we judge that the most effectual check which could be put to the growing ignorance and vice of that country, now would be the restoration of the Catechism to the common and Sabbath schools.

The Sabbath school was another means which the blessed Saviour owned in the instruction and edification of this child of grace. Here her lessons were well said—she required no assistance, felt no confusion, but would repeat her task with an ease well becoming those of riper years. For nearly two years, during which she attended the school, I never knew her give a half learned lesson! Parents and teachers would confer an un-peakable benefit on the young, were they always to refuse a half-learned lesson.

In company with others, she had nearly committed to memory, the entire gospel of John, and in the agonies of her dying bed, she gave pleasing proof she had not forgot it.

Another matter which doubtless strengthened her religious impressions, was the regularity with which family religion was observed by her pious grandfather, and the rigid sanctity with which the Sabbath was observed.

Nor must I fail to notice a long season of severe affliction with which the family was visited. For months together the home of little Margaret was like an hospital. Here lay her pious grandmother pining for breath—yet long-

ing for glory; for she knew in whom she had believed, and that grandma, her loved and prayed for little Margaret, as she did for all her offspring. Such prayers could not be in vain. I shall not forget very soon the edification and comfort I received in visiting that excellent christian woman. Her end was peace!

Three children and two adults were all sick at the same time. But if it was a house of mourning, it was a so a house of prayer. Three deaths succeeded in a few weeks. A brief space followed and Margaret was left a "Motherless barn." And now Margaret like a morning flower—displaying her sweets, and, reading her silken beams to the rising sun, careless of heat, and fearless of cold, passed a brief season, when—

"Nipped by the wind's untimely blast,
Paro'd by the sun's directer ray,
The momentary glorious waste,
The short-lived beauty dies away."

The last illness, and death-bed scene of this pious child, I am sure will be read with deep interest, by old and young.

A short time before she was taken ill, the collection for the Buxton Mission was made in the church she was in the habit of attending. Her father told her the nature and object of the Mission, when she promptly replied—"well, father, I have fifteen pence, and I will give it to assist the African Mission." She did so, and doubtless He that approved the widow's offering of two mites, would also approve the active benevolence of this child who gave all that she had.

On the first night of her illness she felt very restless and could not sleep, but her thoughts were of Jesus and heaven.

She asked her father to sing, when he said what shall I sing my dear! mentioning the names of some songs. Her countenance glowed with most unusual ardour, and she replied with animation, "O no, father, I don't like such songs as those!" her thoughts and heart found nothing congenial there, but she was pleased and soothed for the time with—

"Hush my dear, lie still and slumber,
Holy angels guard thy bed."

On another occasion, some young persons present, proposed the reading of a novel for the entertainment of the dying child—horror seemed to seize her mind, she became greatly agitated—and strongly protested—administering such a truly solemn and just rebuke, as we trust will not soon be forgotten!

She was asked if ever she had had any painful sense, or convictions of sin, her answer was, "O yes," and what did it lead you to do? her ready reply was, "to pray!"

Her illness was a complication of diseases, attended with violent inflammation, great difficulty in breathing, and much pain—the painful spasms were very sudden, and awfully severe, as appeared from her frequent shrieks and startling frame, but no agony she endured—not even the sudden spasms—led her to manifest any degree of penitance or impatience. Sometimes when the violence of pain, for a short space would subside—she would fall into a gentle slumber—but in her sleep her lips were seen to move, and the language of the Lord's prayer was distinctly uttered. Her father had often explained to her, that it mattered not what the language is, we use in prayer, shortly after she had a spasm, when with vehemence she exclaimed "God be merciful to me a sinner."

On slightly recovering she was heard calmly and earnestly to pray, that God might spare her life, but even this prayer was offered with resignation, for she added,— "but if not prepare me for another world"

On this she was asked if she would like to live, and for what reason? "To love father