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BIOGRAPHY.

LEGH RICHMOND.

[CONTINUED.]

CHAPTER III.

His entrance on his professional duties—Remarkable change in his views and conduct, and the incident that occasioned it—Reflection on the foregoing event.

MR. RICHMOND appears to have entered on the ministry with the desire and aim of discharging its important duties in a conscientious and consistent manner; and manifested such propriety of conduct in his moral deportment, and in the general duties of his new charge, as to procure for him the character of a highly respectable and useful young clergyman. After he had resided at Brading about two years, a most important revolution took place in his own views and sentiment which produced a striking and prominent change in the manner and matter of his preaching, as well as the general tenor and conduct of his life. The change referred to, was not a conversion from immorality to morality: for he was strictly moral in the usual acceptation of the term. Neither was it a conversion from heterodoxy to orthodoxy; but it was a conversion from orthodoxy, in name and profession, to orthodoxy, in its spirit, tendency, and influence. But before we indulge in any further remarks it is necessary to record the occurrence to which we have alluded. About two years after he had entered on his curacies, one of his college friends was on the eve of taking holy orders, to whom a near relative had sent Mr. Wilberforce's "Practical Christianity." This thoughtless candidate for the momentous charge of the Christian ministry, forwarded the book to Mr. Richmond, requesting him to give it a perusal, and to inform him what he must say respecting its contents. In compliance with this request, he began to read the book, and found himself so deeply interested in its contents, that the volume was not laid down before the perusal of it was completed. The night was spent in reading, and reflecting upon the important truths contained in this valuable and impressive work. In the course of his employment, the soul of the reader was penetrated to its inmost recesses; and the effect produced by the book of God, in innumerable instances, was in this case accomplished by means of a human composition. From that period his mind received a powerful impulse, and was no longer able to rest under its former impressions. A change was effected in his views of divine truth, as decided as it was influential. He was no longer satisfied with the creed of the speculatist—he felt a conviction of his own state as a guilty and condemned sinner, and under that conviction, he sought mercy at the cross of the Saviour. There arose in his mind a solemn consciousness that, however outwardly moral and apparently irreproachable his conduct might appear to men; yet within, there was wanting that entire surrender of the heart, that ascendancy of God in the soul, and that devotedness of life and conduct, which distinguishes morality from holiness—an assent to divine truth, from its cordial reception into the heart; and the external profession of religion, from its inward and transforming power. The impressions awakened were therefore followed by a transfer of his time, his talents and his affections, to the service of his God and Saviour, and to the spiritual welfare of the flock committed to his care. But while his mind was undergoing this inward process, it is necessary to state how laborious he was in his search after truth. The Bible became the frequent and earnest subject of his examination, prayer, and meditation. His object was *fontes haurire sacros*—to explore truth at its fountain head or, in the emphatic language of Scripture, "to draw water out of the wells of salvation."—*Isa. xii. 3.* From the study of the Bible, he proceeded to a minute examination of the writings of the Reformers, which, by a singular coincidence, came into his possession shortly after this period; and having from these various sources acquired increasing certainty

as to the correctness of his recent convictions, and stability in holding them, he found what the sincere and conscientious inquirer will always find, the Truth; and his heart being interested, he learnt truth through the heart, and believed it, because he felt it.

His own account of the effect produced on his mind by the perusal of Mr. Wilberforce's book, will excite the interest of the reader. Speaking of his son Wilberforce, he remarks:—

"He was baptized by the name of Wilberforce, in consequence of my personal friendship with that individual, whose name long has been, and ever will be, allied to all that his amiable, and truly Christian. That gentleman had already accepted the office of sponsor to one of my daughters; but the subsequent birth of this boy, afforded me the additional satisfaction of more familiarly associating his name with that of my family. But it was not a tie of ordinary friendship, nor the veneration which, in common with multitudes, I felt for the name of Wilberforce, which induced me to give that name to my child: there had, for many years past, subsisted a tie between myself and that much-loved friend, of a higher and more sacred character than any other which earth can afford. I feel it to be a debt of gratitude, which I owe to God and to man, to take this affecting opportunity of stating, that to the unsought and unexpected introduction of Mr. Wilberforce's book on 'Practical Christianity' I owe, through God's mercy, the first sacred impression which I ever received, as to the spiritual nature of the Gospel system, the vital character of personal religion, the corruption of the human heart, and the way of salvation by Jesus Christ. As a young minister, recently ordained, and just entrusted with the charge of two parishes in the Isle of Wight, I had commenced my labours too much in the spirit of the world, and founded my public instructions on the erroneous notions which prevailed among my academical and literary associates. The scriptural principles stated in the 'Practical View,' convinced me of my error: led me to the study of the Scriptures with an earnestness to which I had hitherto been a stranger; humbled my heart, and brought me to seek the love and blessing of that Saviour, who alone can afford a peace which the world cannot give. Through the study of this book, I was induced to examine the writings of the British and Foreign Reformers. I saw the coincidence of their doctrines with those of the Scriptures, and those which the word of God taught me to be essential to the welfare of myself and my flock. I know too well what has passed within my heart, for now a long period of time; not to feel and to confess, that to this incident I was indebted, originally, for those solid views of Christianity, on which I rest my hope for time and eternity. May I not, then, call the honoured author of that book my spiritual father? and if my spiritual father, therefore my best earthly friend? The wish to connect his name with my own, was natural and justifiable. It was a lasting memorial of the most important transaction of my life: it still lives amidst the tenderness of present emotions, as a signal of endearment and gratitude; and I trust its character is imperishable."

"I know Mr. Richmond's mind and heart were experiencing the remarkable change that has been recorded, it is necessary to state, that the regularity and decorum with which he was previously discharging his duties, far exceeded those of many other ministers. If then, notwithstanding these exertions, he was still conscientious how much he fell short of the standard of ministerial faithfulness and zeal, and the requirements of personal holiness: may we not ask, what ought to be the convictions of those who evince a far less degree of earnestness, where the claims are precisely the same, and the obligations to fulfil them are equally binding? If he felt the need within, of a more operative principle of divine grace, as the only genuine source of inward and external holiness: what must be their state, who, with greater deficiencies, experience no conflict of the mind, no secret

misgivings of the conscience! If, in his ardent inquiry after truth, he meditated over the sacred page, and explored the voluminous writings of the Reformers; who is their responsibility who rest in a system, without an endeavour to ascertain its correctness; who give to the world the hours sacred to prayer and study; or who appropriate their time too exclusively to objects which, however praiseworthy in themselves, are not sufficiently identified with their profession. Calculated to promote their advancement in grace and holiness?

The principal error in Mr. Richmond's former views, consisted in this, viz., that they were deficient in the grand characteristic features of the Gospel.—Not that he disbelieved a single doctrine which the Gospel inculcates; but his conceptions were far from being definite, clear, and comprehensive. They wanted the elevation and spirituality of the Christian system. They were founded more on the standard of morality, than on that of the Gospel; and therefore were defective as it respects the *motive* and *end* of all human actions, the two essential properties that constitute an action acceptable in the sight of a holy God. A Heathen may be moral, a Christian must be more; for though true religion will always comprise morality, yet morality may exist without religion. There was a confusion also in his notion of faith and works, and of the respective offices and design of the law and of the Gospel. The Saviour was not sufficiently exalted, nor the sinner humbled; and there was wanting the baptism of "the Holy Ghost and of fire."—*Matt. iii. 11.* His sermons, partaking of course of the same character, were distinguished indeed by solidity of remarks, force of expression, strong appeals to the conscience, and a real and commendable zeal for the interests of morality; but they went no further. As regarded the great end of the Christian ministry—the conversion of immortal souls—they were powerless; for moral sermons can produce nothing but moral effects: and it is the Gospel alone that is "mighty through God to the pulling down of the strong holds of sin; and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."—*2 Cor. x. 4, 5.*

DIVINITY.

REV. DANIEL WILSON, A. M.

TEXT, Galatians v. 16—23.—This I say then. Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh, &c.

The great feature of the Christian character, which the Reverend Preacher brought under the attention of his hearers, from this important passage of Scripture, was that of Christian holiness, the fruit of God's Spirit operating upon and influencing the heart of man. It was a subject he observed, peculiarly appropriate to the *Festival of Ascension*, which the Church has so recently solemnized—for the gift of the Spirit the ascending Saviour promised to his disciples; and appropriated also to the *Charity* for which he pled; for it is the graces of the Spirit that we desire to be the instruments of planting and rearing in the hearts of these children.

The Preacher described and treated of—first, the *works of sin* which the Christian is to deny; secondly, the *fruits of holiness* which he is to produce; thirdly, the *grace of God* by which he is enabled to produce them.

First—the Christian fulfils not the lust of the flesh; once he walked over as others, who are without Christ, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind: but now, being truly converted to God he denies the lusts of the flesh. He denies—first, the grosser vices, such as adultery and fornication; vices which the heathens thought so lightly of, and which prevail, alas! to an awful extent in countries professedly Christian.—Secondly, he denies the *dispositions* from which they spring: uncleanness, lasciviousness. Vice cherished in the heart is soon reduced to practice. This he resolutely denies, He casts from him the *incentives* to vice, vicious books, &c. He fleeth from the places in