

and instructing the younger members of the Society. Theology again occupied a principal share of his attention—indeed it was always his favourite study, and some of his most elaborate works in this department, as his "History of the Corruptions of Christianity," and "History of Early Opinions concerning Jesus Christ," made their appearance from the Birmingham press. They were a fertile source of controversy, in which he engaged without reluctance, and also without those feelings of irritation which so commonly accompany warfare of this kind. The renewed applications of the Dissenters for relief from the penalties and disabilities of the Corporation and Test Acts afforded another topic of discussion in which Dr. Priestley, with his sentiments on civil and religious liberty, could not fail to take a part. Some of the clergy of Birmingham having warmly opposed the Dissenters' claims, Dr. Priestley published a series of "Familiar Letters to the Inhabitants of Birmingham," on this and other topics connected with religion, which were probably not less provoking to the adverse party, from the style of ironical pleasantry in which they were written. In this state of irritation, another cause of animosity was added by the different feelings concerning that great event, the French Revolution. It is scarcely necessary here to observe, that in its early periods, whilst it was hailed by the warm friends of liberty and reform in England, as a noble assertion of the natural rights of man, it was viewed with apprehension and dislike by those attached to the existing order of things. The anniversary of the capture of the Bastille, July 14th, had been kept as a festival by the friends of the cause, and its celebration was prepared at Birmingham in 1791. Dr. Priestley declined being present; but in the popular tumult which ensued, he was particularly the mark of party fury. His house, with his library, manuscripts, and apparatus, were made a prey to the flames; he was obliged to fly for his life, and with some difficulty made his way to a place of safety, while he was hunted like a proclaimed criminal. That this scene of outrage, attended with the conflagration of many other houses and places of worship, was rather favoured than controlled by some whose duty ought to have led them to active interference for the preservation of the public peace, is undoubted. The legal compensation which he obtained for this cruel injury was far short of the amount of his losses. There were, however, many admirers of his virtues and talents, who, regarding him as a sufferer for his principles, and a man deeply injured, exerted themselves to support him under this calamity. He was not long after chosen to succeed his deceased friend Dr. Price, as minister to a congregation at Hackney; and he joined to it a connection with the new Dissenting College established in that place. Resuming his usual occupations of every kind, he passed some time in comfort and tranquillity, for no man was ever blessed with a mind more disposed to view every event in life on the favourable side, or less clouded by care and anxiety. But party dissension still retained all its malignity, he found himself and his family so much molested by its assaults, that he resolved finally to quit a country so hostile to his person and principles. He chose for his retreat the United States of America, induced partly by the civil and religious liberty which so eminently prevails under their Constitution. He embarked for that country in 1794, and took up at his residence at the town of Northumberland, in Pennsylvania, which he was induced to visit on account of a settlement in that part of the state projected by his son and some other gentlemen, but which did not take place. It was a considerable labour in this remote situation to get about him a well-furnished library and a chemical laboratory, but this he at length effected. Having declined a chemical professorship in Pennsylvania, and having in no public duty, he was able to devote his whole time to his accustomed pursuits; and the world was soon informed of his proceedings as an experimental philosopher and as a writer. Theology continued to be the subject nearest to his heart, and his sense of its importance increased with his years. Political animosity pursued him in some degree to the Western world, and during the administration of Mr. Adams he was regarded by the American Government with suspicion and dislike. That of Mr. Jefferson, however, was friendly to him, and he outlived all disquietude on this head. The death of his youngest son, and also of his excellent wife, together with other domestic calamities, were severe trials of his fortitude; but his temper and principles carried him through without any diminution of his habitual serenity and pious resignation. A severe illness which he suffered in Philadelphia laid the foundation of a debility of his digestive organs, which gradually brought on a state of

ly weakness, which terminated in his death, on the 6th February, 1804, in the 71st year of his age.

As some particulars of the dissolution of this eminent professor and defender of rational views of Christianity, who met death in the full possession of his mental faculties, can scarcely fail to possess interest to those who are animated by the same faith and hope, I make no apology for introducing here a minute account of it, from that portion of his memoirs written by his son:—

"From about the beginning of November 1803, to the middle of January 1804, his complaint grew more serious. He considered his life as very precarious, and used to tell the physician, who attended him, that if he would but patch him up for six months longer, he should be perfectly satisfied, as he should, in that time, be able to complete printing his works. The swelling of his feet, an alarming symptom of general debility, began about this time. He took the precaution of transcribing one day in long hand, what he had composed the day before in short hand, that he might by that means leave the work complete as far as it went, should he not live to complete the whole. During this period he composed in a day his second reply to Dr. Linn.

"About this time he ceased performing Divine Service, which he said he had never before known himself incapable of performing, notwithstanding he had been a preacher so many years. He likewise now suffered me to rake his fire, rub his feet with a flesh-brush, and occasionally help him to bed. In the morning likewise he had his fire made for him, which he always used to do himself and generally before any of the family was stirring. The first alarming symptom of approaching dissolution was his being unable to speak to me upon my entering his room, on Tuesday morning, the 31st of January. In his diary I find he stated his situation, as follows:—'All all day—not able to speak for nearly three hours.'

"On Wednesday, February 1st, he writes, 'I was at times much better in the morning: capable of some business: continued better all day.' He spoke this morning as strong as usual, and took in the course of the day a good deal of nourishment with pleasure. He said that he felt a return of strength, and with it there was a duty to perform. He read a good deal in 'Newcombe's translation of the New Testament,' and 'Stevens' History of the War.' In the afternoon he gave me some directions how to proceed with the printing his work in case he should die. On Thursday the 2d, he wrote thus for the last time in his diary: 'Much worse, incapable of business: Mr. Kennedy came to receive instructions about printing, in case of my death.' He sat up, however, a great part of the day, was cheerful and gave Mr. Cooper (his son-in-law) and myself some directions, with the same composure as though he had only been about to leave home for a short time. On Friday he was much better. He sat up a good part of the day reading 'Newcombe,' 'Dr. Disney's translation of the Psalms,' and some chapters in the 'Greek Testament,' which was his daily practice. He corrected a proof-sheet of the 'Notes on Isaiah.' When he went to bed he was not so well: he had an idea he should not live another day. At prayer-time he wished to have the children kneel by his bed-side, saying it gave him great pleasure to see the little things kneel; and thinking he possibly might not see them again, he gave them his blessing. On Saturday, the 4th, he expressed his gratitude in being permitted to die quietly in his family, without pain, with every convenience and comfort he could wish for. He dwelt upon the peculiarly happy situation in which it had pleased the Divine Being to place him in life, and the advantage he had enjoyed in the acquaintance and friendship of some of the best and wisest men in the age in which he lived, and the satisfaction he derived from having led a useful as well as a happy life. On Sunday he was much weaker, and only sat up in an armed chair while his bed was made. He desired me to read to him the eleventh chapter of John. I was going on to read to the end of the chapter, but he stopped me at the 45th verse. He dwelt for some time on the advantage he had derived from reading the Scriptures daily, and advised me to do the same, saying, that it would prove to me as it had done to him, a source of the purest pleasure. Upon Mr. ——— coming into his room, he said, 'You see, Sir, I am still living.' Mr. ——— observed that he would always live. 'Yes,' said he, 'I believe I shall; and we shall all meet again in another and a better world.' He said this with great animation, laying hold on Mr. ———'s hand in both his. Before prayers, he desired me to reach him three publications, about which he would give me some directions next morning. This weakness

would not permit him to do at that time. At prayers he had all the children brought to his bed-side as before. After prayers, they wished him a good night, and were leaving the room. He desired them to stay, spoke to them each separately. He desired them all to continue to love each other, and said, 'I am going to sleep as well as you: for death is only a good, long, sound sleep in the grave, and we shall all meet again.' He congratulated us on the disposition of our children; said it was a satisfaction to see them likely to turn out well, and continued for some time to express his confidence in a happy immortality, and in a future state, which would afford us an ample field for the exertion of our faculties. On Monday morning the 6th of February he desired me and Mr. Cooper to bring him the pamphlets we had looked out the evening before. He then dictated as clearly and distinctly as ever he had done in his life, the additions and alterations he wished to have made in each. Mr. Cooper took down the substance of what he said, which, when he had done, I read to him. He said Mr. Cooper had put it in his own language: he wished it to be put in his. I took a pen and ink to his bed-side. He then repeated over again, nearly word for word, what he had before said; and when I had read it over to him, he said, 'That is right: I have now done.' About half an hour after, he desired, in a faint voice, that we would move him from the bed on which he lay, to a cot, that he might lie with his lower limbs horizontal and his head upright. He died in about ten minutes after we had moved him, but breathed his last so easy, that neither myself nor my wife, who were both sitting close to him, perceive it at the time."

At the conclusion of Dr. Priestley's Autobiography, written whilst at Birmingham, he gives some interesting particulars of himself, which, hoping they may not be found too tedious, are here introduced:—

"Besides the fundamental blessings of a religious and liberal education, I have particular reason to be thankful for a happy temperament of body and mind. I have never found myself less disposed or less qualified, for mental exertions of any kind at one time of the day more than another; but all seasons have been equal to me, early or late, before dinner or after, &c.

"To a fundamentally good constitution of body and the being who gave it, I owe an even cheerfulness of temper, which has had but few interruptions. This I inherit from my father, who had uniformly better spirits than any man that I ever knew, and by this means was as happy towards the close of life, when reduced to poverty and dependent upon others, as in his best days, and who, I am confident, would not have been unhappy, as I have frequently heard him say, in a workhouse.

"Though my readers will easily suppose that in the course of a life so full of vicissitude as mine has been, many things must have occurred to mortify and discompose me, nothing has ever depressed my mind beyond a very short period. My spirits have never failed to recover their natural level; and I have frequently observed, and at first with some surprise, that the most perfect satisfaction I have ever felt has been a day or two after an event that afflicted me the most, and without any change having taken place in the state of things. Having found this to be the case after many of my troubles, the persuasion that it would be so after a new cause of uneasiness, has never failed to lessen the effect of its first impression, and together with my firm belief of every thing being ordered for the best, has contributed to that degree of composure which I have enjoyed through life, so that I have always considered myself as one of the happiest of men.

"As I have not failed to attend to the phenomena of my own mind, as well as to those of other parts of nature, I have not been insensible of some great defects, as well as some advantages, attending its constitution; having from an early period been subject to a most humbling failure of recollection, so that I have sometimes lost all ideas of both persons and things, that I have been conversant with. I have so completely forgotten what I have myself published, that in reading my own writings, what I find in them often appears perfectly new to me, and I have more than once made experiments, the results of which had been published by me.

"As great excellencies are often balanced by great, though not apparent defects, so great and apparent defects are often accompanied by great, though not apparent excellencies. Thus my defect in point of recollection, which may be owing to a want of sufficient coherence in the association of ideas formerly impressed, may arise from a mental constitution more favourable to new associations; so that what I have lost with respect to memory, may have been compensated by what is called invention, or new and original combinations of ideas. This is a subject that deserves attention, as well as every thing else that relates to the affections of the mind.

"It has been a great advantage to me, that I have never been under the necessity of retiring from company in order to compose any thing. Being fond of domestic life, I got a habit of writing on any subject by the parlor fire, with my wife and children about me, and occasionally talking to them, without experiencing any inconvenience from such interruptions. Nothing but reading, or speaking, without interruption, has been any obstruction to me. For I could not

help attending (as some can) when others spoke in my hearing. These are useful habits, which studious persons in general might acquire, if they would; and many persons greatly distress themselves, and others, by the idea that they can do nothing except in perfect solitude or silence.

"In reflecting on my past life, I have often thought of two sayings of Jacob. When he had lost one of his sons, and thought of other things that were afflictions to him, he said, 'all these things are against me,' at the same time that they were in reality making for him. So the impediment in my speech, and the difficulties of my situation at Needham, I now see as much cause to be thankful for, as for the most brilliant scenes in my life.

"Yet, frequently as I have changed my situation, and always for the better, I can truly say that I never wished for any change on my own account. I should have been contented even at Needham, if I could have been unmolested, and had bare necessaries. This freedom from anxiety was remarkable in my father, and therefore is in a manner hereditary to me; but it has been much increased by reflection; having frequently observed, especially with respect to Christian ministers, how often it has contributed to embitter their lives, without being of any use to them. Some attention to the improvement of a man's circumstances is, no doubt, right, because no man can tell what occasion he may have for money, especially if he have children, and therefore I do not recommend my example to others. But I am thankful to that good Providence which always took more care of me than ever I took of myself.

"As the dislike which I have drawn upon myself by my writings, whether that of the Calvinistic party, in or out of the church of England, those who rank with rational Dissenters, (but who have been exceedingly offended at my carrying my inquiries farther than they wished any person to do) or whether they be unbelievers, I am thankful that it gives less disturbance to me than it does to themselves; and that their dislike is much more than compensated by the cordial esteem and approbation of my conduct by a few, whose minds are congenial to my own, and especially that the number of such persons increases."

Mention has already been made of Dr. Priestley's amiability of character, and this is particularly conspicuous in his deportment under the ill-treatment to which he was subjected. Before leaving England for America, he addressed an appeal to the people of England, in which he recounts some of the annoyances and persecutions to which he had been subjected. It is written in an admirable spirit, without breathing one word of reproach against his persecutors. Time, however, will not permit of giving more than two or three brief extracts from it:—

"It might have been thought that, having written so much in defence of revelation, and of Christianity in general, more perhaps than all the clergy of the church of England now living; this defence of a common cause would have been received as some atonement for my demerits in writing against civil establishments of Christianity, and particular doctrines. But had I been an open enemy of all religion, the animosity against me could not have been greater than it is. Neither Mr. Hume nor Mr. Gibbon, was a thousandth part so obnoxious to the clergy as I am; so little respect have my enemies for Christianity itself, compared with what they have for their emoluments from it.

"As to my supposed hostility to the principles of the civil constitution of this country, there has been no pretence whatever for charging me with any thing of the kind.

"Every publication which bears my name, is in favour of our present form of government. But if I had not thought so highly of it, and had seen reason for preferring a more republican form, and had openly advanced that opinion; I do not know that the proposing to free discussion a system of government different from that of England, even to Englishmen, is any crime, according to the existing laws of this country.

"I trust that conscious innocence will support me under whatever prejudiced and violent men may do to me, as well as any of me. But I see no occasion to expose myself to danger, without any prospect of doing good, or to continue any longer in a country in which I am so unjustly become the object of general dislike, and not retire to another, where I have reason to think I shall be better received. And I trust that the same good Providence which has attended me hitherto, and made me happy in my present situation, and all my former ones, will attend and bless me in what may still be before me. In all the events, the will of God be done.

"I cannot refrain from repeating again, that I leave my native country with real regret, never expecting to find any where else society so suited to my disposition and habits, such friends as I have here (whose attachment has been more than a balance to all the abuse I have met with from others) and especially to replace one particular Christian friend, in whose absence I shall, for some time at least, find all the world a blank. Still less can I expect to resume my favourite pursuits, with any thing like the advantages I enjoy here. In leaving this country, I also abandon a source of maintenance, which I can but ill bear to lose. I can however, truly say, that I leave it without any resentment, or ill-will. On the contrary, I sincerely wish my countrymen all happiness; and when the time for reflection (which my absence may accelerate) shall come, they will, I am confident, do me more justice. They will be convinced that every suspicion they have been led to entertain, to my disadvantage, has been ill founded, and that I have even some claim to their gratitude and esteem."