

# THE CHRISTIAN SENTINEL.

I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved.—HAB. II. 1.

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THREE RIVERS, FRIDAY, 15th APRIL, 1831.

[Vol. I.—No. 53.]

## BISHOP RAVENSCROFT'S CONVERSION.

[From his Memoir.]

"IT was in the year 1810 that it pleased God to set my mind at work, and gradually to bring me to doubt the dark security of my unawakened state. But I am not conscious of any peculiar incident or circumstance, that first led me to considerations of the kind.

"As I was the manager of my own estate, which comprised a set of mills, as well as a plantation, about two miles distant from each other, I was of course much alone, at least in that kind of solitude which gives the mind opportunity to commune with itself. It was in my rides from one to the other, and while superintending the labours of my people, that a train of thought, to which I was previously altogether unaccustomed, began to occupy my attention, and though dismissed once and again, would still return, and with every return would interest me more and more. That the train of thought thus suggested, concerned my condition as an accountable creature, will be readily imagined, as also that on a review I found it bad enough. This it was no difficult thing for me to feel and to admit, nor as yet did there appear much difficulty in reforming what I could not justify.

"An impatient and passionate temper, with a most sinful and hateful habit of profane swearing, in which I was a great proficient, were my most open and besetting sins. They, however, I considered as under my own control, and as such, set forthwith about amending them, but without any reliance unto God for help, or without much if any impression that it was at all needful. In this endeavor at reformation, which it pleased God thus to permit me to make, I went on prosperously for a season, and began to pride myself in that self command I seemed to possess. But my own weakness was yet to be showed me, and when temptation again assailed me, all my boasted self command was but a rush against the wall. I surrendered to passion, and from passion to blasphemy. When I came to reflect upon this, then it was that, for the first time in my life, I was sensible of something like concern—some consciousness of wrong beyond what was apparent. But without waiting to examine farther, I hastily concluded to exert myself more heartily, and yet to command myself thoroughly.

"During these my endeavors, however, the Scriptures were more and more the object of my attention, and from them I began gradually to discover (what I was very loath to admit) the true state and condition of human nature. What little I had lately come to know of myself, however, and all that I knew of the world, seemed to rise up as strong proofs that the doctrine of our natural depravity was true. Willing, however, to escape from it, I resorted to the subterfuge of too many among us—that what we find in the Scriptures is figuratively expressed, and is, therefore not to be taken in the strictness of the letter. But my own experience was to be the expositor of the word. Again and again were my self-righteous endeavors foiled and defeated, much as at the first: and humbled and confounded, I became alarmed at what must be the issue—if I was thus to remain the sport of passions I could not command, the prey of sin I could not conquer. Something like prayer would flow from my lips, but it was the prayer of a heart that yet knew not aright, its own plague. One more effort was to be made, and with great circumspection did I watch over myself for some weeks. Still did I continue, however, my search in and meditation upon the Scriptures: and here it was that I found the benefit of my early acquaintance with them. I had not to look afar off for their doctrines, they were familiar to my memory from a child; I had known them thus far, though now it was

that their living proof was to be experienced. The whole, I believe, was to be made to depend, on my acquiescence in the turning point of all religion—that we are lost and undone, spiritually dead and helpless in ourselves—and so I found it.

"Again and dreadfully did I fall from my own steadfastness—temptation like a mighty man that shouldest by reason of wine, swept my strength before it, carried away my resolutions as Sampson did the gates of Gaza. I returned to the house convinced of my own helplessness, of my native depravity, and that to spiritual things I was incompetent. I now found of a truth that in me dwelt no good thing. I threw myself upon my bed in my private room—I wept—I prayed. Then was shown unto me my folly in trusting to an arm of flesh. Then did it please the Lord to point out my bewildered view to him who is the LORD our righteousness. Then was I enabled in another strength to commit myself unto his way. From that moment my besetting sin of profane swearing was overcome, and to this moment has troubled me no more. But much was yet to be done, which the same gracious friend of poor sinners continued to supply; and to lead me step by step, to proclaim his saving name, and declare his mighty power openly to the world.

"In making an outward profession of religion, I acted as multitudes, alas, do, without considering that any thing depended on my being a member of the Church of Christ, or that any difficulty existed as to what was and what was not truly such. In choosing between the different denominations into which the Christian world is split up, I considered nothing more to be necessary than agreement in points of faith and practical religion, with such a system of discipline as was calculated to promote the peace and edification of the Society. This I thought I found in a parcel of Christians called *Republican Methodists*; and influenced in no small degree by personal friendship for one of their preachers Mr. John Robinson, of Charlotte county, my wife and myself took membership with them. At this time, however, they had no Church organized within reach of my dwelling, only a monthly appointment for preaching at one of the old Churches, eight miles distant.

"It was not very long, however, before this want was supplied in the gathering together a sufficient number to constitute a Church according to their rule, in which I was appointed a lay elder, and laboured for the benefit of the members by meeting them on the vacant Sundays, and reading to them such printed discourses as I thought calculated to instruct and impress them; and these meetings were well attended, considering the prevalent delusion on the subject of preaching, and the wide and deep objection to prepared sermons.

"When I had been engaged in this way about three years, increasing in knowledge myself, as I endeavored to impart it to others, I gradually began to be exercised on the subject of the ministry, and to entertain the frequently returning thought, that I might be more useful to my fellow sinners than as I then was, and that I owed it to God. To this step, however, there appeared objections insurmountable, from my worldly condition, and from my want of public qualifications. Yet I could not conceal from myself, that if the men with whom I occasionally associated, and those of whom I had obtained any acquaintance as ministers of religion, were qualified to fill the station, I was behind none, and superior to most of them, in acquired knowledge, if not in Christian attainments. My objections were, therefore, chiefly from my personal interests, and personal accommodation, cloaked under the want of necessary qualifications for a public speaker, and some ob-