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Miscellaneous Articles.

"FRIEND OF GOD," OR, THE EXCELLENCY OF FAITH
AND A HOLY LIFE. No. IV.

(Continued from page 109.)

In our previous discussion, we have seen that Abraham became the friend of God by faith in Christ, and that his friendship was maintained and strengthened by a life of faith and obedience. As examples of the latter, we noticed those illustrious acts, which were only occasional and extraordinary, and those graces and virtues, which were daily and habitual, and which were manifested by the faithful performance of every social duty, and more especially his duty as the head of a family. It remains for us to consider two other fruits of his faith, not less interesting or important than the preceding, viz., the habit of devout and earnest prayer, and his spiritual and heavenly frame of mind. These two things are closely related, and yet sufficiently distinct to require a separate consideration.

THE DEVOTIONAL CHARACTER OF ABRAHAM'S FAITH.

That Abraham was a devout man, is evident, from the most cursory perusal of the Holy Scriptures. And, it is no less manifest, that his devotions were not the offspring of ignorance and superstition, like the senseless worship of idolaters; but of a rational and genuine faith in God. His understanding was enlightened and convinced. Yet we must look farther than this for the source of his devotional feelings. The faith he possessed, though agreeable to reason and founded partly upon it, consisted essentially in the communication to his soul of that divine life, which, proceeding from God, carried back his affections towards

The opening and continuance of that school, as far as I was concerned, I have often viewed, with thankfulness, as a signal answer to prayer.

“In the fall of 1799, I entered the junior class in Princeton College, then under the presidency of the Rev. Dr. Samuel Stanhope Smith,—a finished gentleman and accomplished scholar, highly esteemed as a preacher and writer, and of much prominence in the judicatories of the Presbyterian Church in his day. At the time I was in College, and for some years previous, open infidelity greatly prevailed in this country, especially among young men. It was the age of infidelity in revolutionary France, the poison of which was widely diffused in this country. A majority of the students of the College were avowed infidels, and scoffers at religion; and the number of pious students, or of those who made any pretensions to religion, was very small. In this respect there has been in our colleges, and indeed in our country generally, I believe, a great change for the better.”

Historical and Biographical.

DR. ALEXANDER'S SKETCH OF DR. ROBERT SMITH.

MY DEAR SIR:—

Among some biographical papers, which my father gave to me some months before his death, I find the following sketch of the Rev. ROBERT SMITH, D.D. It was not included in the “Log College,” and I do not remember that it has been before published. If you think it worth while, you can give it a place in your Magazine.

Rev. Dr. Van Rensselaer.

Yours truly,

S. D. ALEXANDER.

ROBERT SMITH, D.D., was born in Ireland, and was descended from a Scotch family which had taken refuge in that country, and had settled in Londonderry. About the year 1730, his parents emigrated to North America, and brought their son Robert, then a child, with them. His ancestors, both by his father's and mother's side, were substantial farmers, and had for several generations been distinguished for a vein of good sense, and for prudent deportment, and what is better still, for fervent piety.

The residence of Dr. Smith's parents was on the head waters of the Brandywine, about forty miles from the city of Philadelphia, where he was brought up in the pursuits of agriculture. At the age of fifteen or sixteen, he became a subject of divine grace, under the preaching of Mr. Whitfield, who spent some time in his father's neighbourhood, on his first visit to America. As soon as young Mr. Smith had experienced the power of religion in his own soul, he felt a strong desire to become

a preacher, that he might make known the precious truths of the Gospel to his fellow-men. In this desire his pious parents readily concurred, and with their permission, he placed himself under the tuition of the Rev. SAMUEL BLAIR, who had established a useful and important seminary at Fag's Manor, in the County of Chester, Pennsylvania. Here, for several years, he pursued, first his classical, and then his theological studies, under a man, who was inferior to none in the soundness of his understanding, and the penetration of his mind; who was a profound divine, and a most solemn and impressive preacher. In Mr. Blair, Mr. Smith enjoyed, not only the advantages of an able instructor, but had continually exhibited before him, an admirable example of Christian meekness, of ministerial diligence, and of that candour, liberality, and catholicism of sentiment towards those who differed from him in opinion, without (dereliction?) of principle, which are among the most amiable features of character, that can adorn a disciple, and especially a minister of Christ. Under such instruction, and with such an example, Mr. Smith made rapid and great improvement, both in classical and theological knowledge. By Mr. Blair he was much esteemed and beloved; and in the year 1750, was licensed to preach the Gospel, and married to a younger sister of his venerated preceptor. This lady was distinguished by a sound understanding, uncommon sweetness of disposition, and sincere piety; and was an excellent assistant to him in the education of their common children. To these they both devoted much time, to cultivate in them the habits of virtue and religion, and to infuse into their minds, at the first opening of their powers, the principles of a warm and rational piety. In his absence, she always conducted the devotions of the family with a dignity which insured their respect, and with an unaffected fervour, which could not fail to touch their hearts. By this lady, Dr. Smith had seven children, two of whom died young, two embraced the profession of medicine, and three, at an early age, entered on the duties of the sacred ministry; and have since filled some of the most important stations in the literary world, as well as in the Church. By a second marriage with the widow of the Rev. W. Ramsay, he left one daughter, who at his death was very young.

In the year 1751, the next after his licensure, Dr. Smith was ordained and installed the pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Pequea, in the County of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in which situation he continued to labour faithfully to the time of his death. He was ordained by the Presbytery of Newcastle, within the jurisdiction of which his church lay: the ordination sermon was preached by the Rev. Dr. Rodgers, then pastor of a church at St. George's, Delaware; and afterwards translated to the city of New York. At this time, Dr. Rodgers must have been a very young man; but he was highly esteemed for his pulpit talents, and was therefore appointed to this service.

In the year, 1784, Mr. Smith received from the College of New Jersey, the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity; and seldom has that degree been more judiciously conferred, for Mr. Smith was a sound and well-informed theologian, of which he gave evidence in several productions of his pen, which, though not written in a polished style, are distinguished for sound and discriminating views. The most valuable of these, were three sermons on Faith, which are as clear and judicious as most discourses on that subject. But he excelled as a preacher. His dis-

courses were instructive, evangelical, and deeply impressive. Though a man of remarkable modesty and diffidence, yet he has been heard to say, that in the pulpit he never feared the face of man. Indeed, he was so much occupied with the importance of the subjects of his ministry, that the opinions of men were forgotten, and he appeared to be absorbed in the feeling of the Divine presence and majesty. His preaching was not only solemn and fervent, but enriched with pertinent passages of Scripture; for the sacred volume appeared to be completely at his command; and from this precious source, he not only drew texts in proof of his doctrine, but happy and forcible illustrations of his subject. Though sometimes Mr. Smith was forced into controversy, yet he was in disposition and from principle, a man of peace; and was of opinion, that Christians were often much more nearly agreed in sentiment, than they appeared to be when they expressed their opinions in words. On disputed points, he was accustomed to employ, as far as possible, the very words of Scripture, as this would give less offence than expressing the same truth in other language; and he believed that no words were so calculated to affect the heart and conscience, as the very words which the Holy Ghost teacheth. His ministry was not unfruitful, but under his faithful preaching sinners were convinced and converted, and believers were built up in their most holy faith. His labours were not confined to his own charge, but were extended through a wide surrounding district, where there are people still living who remember, with gratitude to God, his faithful labours.

Shortly after his settlement at Pequea, Mr. Smith established a school, with a special view to the Gospel ministry; where the Latin, Greek, and Hebrew languages were taught. In this school, Mr. Smith was assisted by respectable and able teachers; and a large number of young men were here prepared for entering the ministry, before any college existed within the limits of the Presbyterian Church; and after the erection of the College of New Jersey, at Princeton, young men were fitted to enter that institution, of which Dr. Smith was one of the early and zealous friends, and at which all his sons, who lived to maturity, finished their academical education. In this school, it was not only an object kept constantly in view to make accurate scholars, but also to imbue the mind of the scholars with sound sentiments of religion; and Dr. Smith often had the happiness of knowing that his efforts were not ineffectual. With very few exceptions, all who were trained under his tuition, have been the serious, steady, and uniform friends of religion; and the Presbyterian Church is greatly indebted to him for the number of faithful pastors who were educated under his care, and who studied theology under his direction; and it was no small benefit to such to have so excellent a model of plain, evangelical, and impressive preaching, as was that of Dr. Smith.

In his discourses, he was able in opening the sacred treasures which are hidden in the Scriptures; but his chief excellency, was the power which he possessed of affecting the consciences of sinners by his solemn appeals, and faithful warnings; and his skill in directing souls wounded by the law, to the only Physician. Vice he ever reprov'd with fidelity, but he was careful to avoid austerity. The pleasures and the hopes of religion he recommended to believers, with that glow of warm feeling, which was prompted by his own experience. "He believed, and therefore spake."

Beloved and esteemed by all who knew him, he was held in high veneration through a large extent of country, and was looked up to as a father by the churches in Pennsylvania and the neighbouring States. In the year 1790, he was chosen the moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church; and in 1791 he was again a member, and preached before that body at the opening of its sessions, with uncommon ardour and elevation of mind. By reason of the loss of his teeth, however, his elocution was rendered so inarticulate, that his discourse was not distinctly heard by most of the audience. His ardour in performing his duty, and especially in preaching the Gospel, was never diminished to the last; and under the influence of a warm zeal he often forgot his bodily infirmities, and exerted himself beyond his strength.

The last public act of his life was that of attending a meeting of the Trustees of New Jersey College, at a distance of a hundred miles from home. At this time his bodily health was much reduced, and the effect of this fatiguing journey was to exhaust and debilitate him exceedingly. When he had nearly reached his home, he found it necessary to call at the house of a friend to obtain a little rest and refreshment. He met the family with his wonted benignity and affection, and requested the opportunity of retiring for a short time to a private chamber; and there in a few moments, without a struggle or a groan, "he calmly and sweetly breathed out his soul;" and the same smile with which he entered his friend's house, seemed to be imprinted on his countenance after death. He died in the 63d year of his age. He left no memorials or journals to aid his biographer in exhibiting the rich experience which he had of the grace of God.

Humility was the habitual temper of his mind; and while his face shone brightly to others, like Moses, "he wist not that his face shone." He seemed to be unconscious of the eminence of his own piety. One thing which the writer distinctly recollects in the character of this good man, was his sweetness of temper, which mingled with his most ardent zeal, and his kind and indulgent condescension to the young. Of this last habit, the impression is deep in the memory of the writer, because in his youth he spent several days in the house of Dr. Smith, where he was a stranger in a strange land, an invalid, and peculiarly subject to dejection of spirits. He cannot, therefore, readily forget the affectionate tenderness with which he was treated by this venerable man; and this was but a few weeks before his departure out of life.

He was a faithful attendant on the judicatories of the Church, where he acted with a truly conscientious and pacific spirit. He devoted much time also to the destitute regions and vacant churches within his reach. He was a most laborious man. He slept little, rose early, and after spending some hours in devotion and study, he was found labouring in his school, or going from house to house among his people, comforting the afflicted, and exhorting and warning the people, as their characters required. Part of the day was also spent with his theological students, whom he delighted to instruct and animate. But the pulpit was his throne. Here he was in his element, and preaching was as his meat and drink. One who knew him well has said, "When apparently exhausted, the evening devotions of the family exhilarated and refreshed him again. Devotion and the service of the Redeemer appeared to be to him *the elixir of life*. When he was weak, it evidently repaired his strength; when he

was exhausted, it restored his spirits. The character of his devotion was at once fervent and rational, humble and serene. It mingled the deepest sense of human imperfection with the confidence of faith; the humblest penitence with the cheerfulness of hope. Never through the course of a long ministry, was he withheld by sickness from entering the pulpit on the Sabbath, except once; and then, though under the influence of fever, he sent for his neighbours, and the leading members of his church, and being placed in an easy chair, he spoke to them of the duties and the comforts of true religion."

The same person gives it as his opinion, "that Dr. Smith was among the ablest theologians, the profoundest casuists, and the most convincing and successful preachers of the age. He died as he lived, beloved and revered of all who had the happiness intimately to know him, and his memory will long be precious in the American churches."

Before the death of Dr. Smith, a great change had taken place in the spiritual and prosperous state of the churches in the Newcastle Presbytery. In the time of Whitfield, and the Blairs and Tennents, the great revival which spread over North America was powerful in this region; but after awhile a sad declension took place, and coldness and deadness for a long time prevailed. Moreover, by emigration to the West and South, many churches were left in a feeble state, for those who came in to supply the places of the emigrants were commonly of another persuasion, and added no strength to the congregations. On these accounts Pequea, which had for many years been the seat of lively piety, was reduced in 1791 to a small and feeble congregation, in which only a few of the relicts of the former numerous assemblies were to be seen. And for many years before Dr. Smith's decease, few were added to the communion of the church; not as many as would make up for the losses by death and emigration. This state of things he greatly lamented; and when his son John, with several other eminent ministers from Virginia, stopped at Pequea on their way to the General Assembly, as they had just come from the midst of an extensive revival at home, and were warm with religious fervour, he manifested the deepest solicitude that their labours might be attended with a peculiar blessing. He seemed on this occasion to be much excited, and to manifest a longing desire for a shower of Divine influence, that he might again witness such scenes as had now long passed away. On Monday, after the communion which had been celebrated, this aged minister was much encouraged by the fact that one man appeared to be cut to the heart, and came to his house, earnestly inquiring, "what he must do to be saved." But no general awakening took place, and that congregation remains in a comparatively feeble state until this day.

But though Dr. Smith in his latter days had no great comfort in his church, yet he enjoyed the unspeakable happiness of seeing his sons in the highest stations in the Presbyterian Church, and one of them, the Rev. JOHN B. SMITH, was made the instrument of saving benefit to many souls in Prince Edward, Va., where he resided, and in all the surrounding regions. He was also the first President of Union College, N. Y. And his eldest son, the Rev. SAMUEL S. SMITH, after founding Hampden Sidney College, in Virginia, returned to take charge of the College of New Jersey; first as Vice-President, and after Dr. Witherspoon's death, as President of the College.

A. A.