

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICE.



THE Rev. SAMUEL P. WILLIAMS was born in Wethersfield, Connecticut, Feb. 22, 1779. His family was respectable; descended from some of the most celebrated divines New England has produced. The venerable Stoddard, who preceded Jonathan Edwards at Northampton, was his great grand-father on the mother's side. William Williams, whose name is found on the controversial pages of Edwards, was his paternal great grand-father. The race may almost claim an hereditary alliance with the sacred desk.

He was early destined to a literary life. He entered Yale College in the year 1792; at the age of 13; an age too early to reap the benefits of such an institution. There is a culpable ambition in some parents to crowd a child along faster than his powers will admit. Such a scholar, finding his strength not equal to the competition with which he is surrounded, naturally surrenders himself to idleness, and too often to vice. It does not appear that young Williams was ever vicious; but he reflects on his time in College in the language of se-

vere self-condemnation. "My Collegiate life is past, and with it four years of ——. I have forever to mourn the neglect of their precious advantages. Time, expectation, money, all squandered. I resolve to redeem that which is lost."

He was graduated in 1796 ; and was for some time engaged in mercantile employments. These years passed without any special regard to religion. He was a man of too much frankness and honesty to be successful in the scramble for riches. He hated dissembling more than he loved his interest. By what particular circumstances he was first led to serious reflection, we have no means of knowing. It appears from his papers that in March 1803 he became a communicant ; and that he entered into his covenant engagements with the humility of a penitent sinner ; and the hopes of a believer in Christ.

His attention was now turned toward the study of Theology. He pursued his studies first in New Haven under the direction of Dr. Dwight ; and afterwards at Springfield, with Dr. Howard to whom he was related. He was licensed at West Springfield, April 10th, 1805 ; preached his first Sermon at Amherst the next month ; and soon received an invitation from Springfield, the place of his studies, to settle as a Colleague with his instructor.

In Springfield many of the people differed from him in their religious tenets ; and therefore this invitation must be considered as very honorable to

his abilities as a preacher. The settlement however never took place.

He was already under two invitations, from other places—Deerfield in Mass. and Mansfield in Conn. At Deerfield there was great unanimity; Mansfield was in a broken state, and, had he consulted his own ease, it seemed as if he would have chosen the former place. He decided however on going to Mansfield; in which place he was ordained January 1st, 1807. The Sermon was preached by Doctor Parsons of Amherst.

The Church and parish in Mansfield had been distracted by controversy. Their former pastor had left the Orthodox faith to embrace Unitarianism—and it was in the hope of being a healer of breaches without betraying the truth, that Mr. Williams went among them. A minority in the church were avowed Unitarians; but consented to the settlement of Mr. Williams, on receiving a pledge from the whole body, that they should retain their sentiments without being excluded from the communion. Such was the ferment in which he found the place, occasioned by these discussions, that for two years he omitted preaching on these tender points. In a man of his talents and temperament, consenting to such an omission was remarkable. It shewed that he had prudence as well as zeal; and, although on all occasions it was natural for him to utter truth, he could for a time withhold it, when the utterance would produce no beneficial effect.

But as soon as the effervescence had subsided, Mr. Williams began to think it important that no part of the Gospel, which he deemed essential, should be concealed. He therefore laboured to convince his people of the proper Deity of Christ; of his atonement; and of the new coloring and influence which all the rays of the Gospel must assume by radiating from so central a point. This instead of producing conviction, was tearing open old wounds; it was the origin of difficulties which finally ended in his separation from his people.

It will not be necessary to present in detail all the circumstances which led to his departure from Mansfield. It was not merely a theological difference; the people were negligent in affording him sufficient support. He had an increasing family; and money after his ordination had depreciated in value. His nominal salary was therefore really less than at first. He remonstrated with his people and related his difficulties; but without effect. His ministry was closed in Mansfield, September 7th, 1817; in which place he had preached nine hundred sermons.

There is a scrupulous delicacy expected and required of a Clergyman in all pecuniary transactions, by some people, who having little generosity themselves, resolve that their religious teachers shall be generous to excess. But surely it is not unworthy of those who preach, and who are animated by the most disinterested virtue, to remember that usefulness cannot be continued without life,

nor life supported without bread. In all concerns, men should in the outset understand each other; and the preacher who from real, or affected delicacy, neglects at his settlement to demand explicitness in the contract, will suffer for it in the end. If a preacher is an example to the flock, he must provide for his family.

Previous to his removal from Mansfield, Mr. Williams received invitations from some of the most respectable churches in our largest cities, to preach to them with a view to settlement;—a sufficient proof of his reputation as a preacher.

After spending two years at Northampton, where his labours were peculiarly blessed; he was invited to Newburyport, December, 1820, to preach in the pulpit then made vacant by the removal of Dr. Dana to the presidency of Dartmouth College. In this region, the peculiarly favourable impression made by his first discourses will be long remembered. He received an unanimous invitation to become pastor of the first Presbyterian church; and was installed February 8th, 1821.

During the few years that he continued among us, he left on the minds of all, the impression of possessing the character of an ardent friend to truth, a faithful minister, and an honest and independent man. His labours in the ministry were abundant; and his success though gradual was great. He paid particular attention to the young; and endeavoured to warn, reprove and rebuke with all long-suffering and doctrine. His melodious

voice, always, won the ear; his ornamental language, gratified the fancy; and his pungent doctrine reached the heart. Under his ministry many were added to the church; and many more brought to a knowledge of the truth.

Though a very active man, and having all the appearance of health and vigour, he had long been troubled with dyspepsical complaints. He had several times been taken from his labours by sickness previous to the final attack of his disease. During the last year of his ministry he was very feeble. His last public performance was to preach the thanksgiving sermon of 1826, ON THE VALUE OF LIFE. He expired December 23d of the same year; leaving a widow and a numerous family of children, the fruit of two marriages, to mourn his departure.—*ut bonis comis, ita adversus malos inju-  
vidus: ceterum ex iracundia nihil supererat.  
Secretum et silentium ejus non timeres; honestatis putabat offendere, quam odisse.*

His funeral Sermon was preached by Mr. Withington, from which the following extract may serve for his moral portrait. The text was II Cor. v, 7. The subject, *The influence of faith, in the calamities of life.*

— “ The subject has been suggested by the departure of one who was himself eminently a man of faith; and whose closing scene exhibited its supporting power. In speaking of the character of the Rev. Mr. Williams, I feel myself in very

little danger of being subject to the charge of heaping unmerited praise on the dead. The lines of his character were strongly marked; every feature of his mind was bold and prominent. It needs no discriminating pencil to draw his likeness; and in speaking of his merits, I shall be more confident, because I shall say nothing, which will not be assented to by every friend and every foe. The quality which first struck the observer, was the perfect transparency of his purposes; every word and gesture seemed to say—Here is a man, who is above all disguise. His heart was not left lurking in the folds of impenetrable concealment; but it was in his face, and on his tongue; and seemed to challenge the observer to acknowledge his merits, and estimate or oppose his imperfections. More suavity, perhaps, more flexibility, a greater disposition to assent to opposition, without the stern permission of truth and conscience, might have been agreeable to those, who look only on the surface of a character. But our departed brother did not purchase any man's friendship, at the price of dissimulation. On all occasions he threw out the truth; and left it to take its effect. He did not come with supplication and cringes, to ask permission to creep through the path of duty; but he boldly walked up to the entrance and demanded a passage.

Every minister, and every man, has his peculiar gift; and it is vain to expect to blend inconsistent qualities in the same mind. The virtues

themselves, though in theory consistent enough with one another, are not always consistent with the peculiarities of even a virtuous individual. Mr. Williams was more formed for a reprovcr than a consoler; the chamber of affliction was not, perhaps, his most shining scene. He bore his own trials with too much fortitude fully to enter into the weakness and fears of the mind, enfeebled by sickness and trembling on the verge of eternity. He was certainly not the man whom you would wish to see in any affliction which you had brought on yourself by your own infirmity; for he would not spare you. He insisted on it, that repentance must go before consolation.

“As for that sentimental religion, so prevalent in the present day, which consists in the fumes of the imagination rather than in the solid exercises of the heart; which regulates its hopes and fears by every elevation and depression of the spirits; the blind impulse; the affected sigh; the fair profession, and ostentatious humility, he held them all in utter abhorrence. He could not tolerate, for a moment, the religion, which separates the feelings of the heart from the conduct and the life. He demanded of all professed christians a piety, which proved its power by crucifying the flesh, with its affections and lusts. He seemed to be a man peculiarly calculated to brush away, with a bold hand, all the froth and foam, which too often rest on the waters of the Sanctuary; and to show to the church of God, pure religion, defecated from



every sediment, in all its transparency and simplicity and truth.

Yet he did not pass to the other extreme. In burning with the fire of his eloquence, the wood, the hay and the stubble of imperfect doctrine, he spared, with the wisest discrimination, the gold and the silver and the precious stones, with which it must be combined. Deeply impressed with the truth of man's depravity, and conscious that the doctrines of the cross were the only cure, he preached them without partiality and without fear. He felt that the sinner was undone, because he found in the Bible that the Saviour was divine.

Respecting his abilities—a subject of minor importance in this connexion—every discriminating judge must come to the same conclusion. His executive powers in the pulpit were of the first order. You all remember that melodious voice that fastened the ear to his theme; that beautiful language, those shining illustrations, that energy and earnestness, with which he captivated the attention, and bore down on the heart. He was an eloquent man and mighty in the scriptures. Without being a finished scholar, his mind was enriched with knowledge; without being a metaphysician, he was a powerful, practical reasoner. Though his style was occasionally obscure, (the first objection which was always made to it by the critick) he never, perhaps, preached a sermon which did not make, on an attentive hearer, the intended impression. His ser-

mons were so full, that after all the obscure parts were lost, enough remained to satisfy and improve the mind.

“The faults of his character were such as are commonly associated with the great qualities of which I have been speaking. He had great courage and decision; and something of that indiscretion to which these virtues naturally lead. Singling out his ultimate purpose, and conscious of the rectitude of his intentions, he did not always consider the inferior obstacles that stood in his way. An enemy might say he was sometimes rash; but his intimate friends knew, that his seeming rashness was ardour in the cause of religion and truth. His mind commonly rushed to its purposes; but those purposes were generally such as a good man would not be ashamed to own. If his superficial faults sometimes procured for him furious enemies; his real excellence always sealed to him the attachment of the warmest friends. He was not a man to make a neutral impression.

“His closing scene illustrated the power of faith, and the consolations of those truths, which it had been his business to preach. It fell to my lot to announce to him the probability of his speedy dissolution, and the importance of saying to his friends and family whatever he might wish to say, before reason was lost. The tidings were received with calmness and submission; and soon after he said to a friend—*I have not had during my sickness the power of regulating my thoughts as I*

could wish : it has been a confused and broken time; but I see in the gospel a broad foundation ; I trust in my Saviour alone ; the purposes of God are right, and I have no wish to alter them. On another occasion he said :—*When a man is brought into my state—into sickness and a near prospect of eternity, he needs faith, decided faith ; the mind must not be left wavering, doubtful, uncertain ; it must not only see that the gospel is true, but it must repose with living confidence on the promises of the Redeemer.* Under these impressions his spirit took its flight to its Father and God.

“ Farewell, my Brother, I will not say a long farewell—Thy last solemn message still vibrates on my ears.\* Very pleasant has thy life been to me ; we took sweet counsel together and walked to the house of God in company. Speak to me by thy death ; admonish me from thy tomb, and urge my conscience to work while the day lasts. And now, eternal Saviour, receive him to thyself—with all his virtues and all his faults ; those virtues, we trust, were the fruit of thy Spirit ; and those faults, we humbly hope, are now washed away in thine atoning blood ! ”

“ To the bereaved widow, and the mourning family, we have no other consolations to offer than those suggested by our subject. May they have

\* This alludes to a message which the speaker received from the deceased a few days before his departure. It was this :—*Enjoy what you can, do all the good you can, while life lasts ; for the days must come, as I have found from experience, when you shall say I have no pleasure in them.* His sickness was languishing and painful.

faith in God ; and let the children remember their father's counsel now that he can speak to them no more. To the church the loss is great. The faithful pastor—the counsellor—the upright man is gone ! and can warn and lead them no more. But fear not, mourning flock—the Great Shepherd reigns ; and has promised never to leave nor forsake his people. But I must speak to one class more—the sinner, who has no faith in Christ. Your reprov<sup>er</sup> is dead—he never can speak to you again. But you must meet him at the bar of God. He will rise up to bear his testimony to the faithful manner, in which he warned you to flee from the wrath to come. Has he spoken in vain ? Are you yet in your sins ? Dare you be a rebel before that coffin ? O ! remember the warnings of the lips that are now silent ; and prepare to meet him when the last trumpet shall wake the dead !”