

THE
CHRISTIAN LEADERS
OF
The Last Century;
OR,
ENGLAND A HUNDRED YEARS AGO.

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"Enquire, I pray thee, of the former age, and prepare thyself to the search of
their fathers."—JOB viii. 8.

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XI.

James Hervey of Weston Favell, and his Ministry.

Born near Northampton, 1713—Educated at Lincoln College, Oxford—Intimacy with John Wesley—Ordained, 1736—Curate of Dummer, 1738; of Bideford, 1740; and of Weston Favell, 1743—Early Religious History—Correspondence with Whitefield—Studious Habit at Weston Favell—Literary Remains Analyzed—Correspondence—Humour—Private Life—Charity—Self-denial—Died, 1758—Testimony of Romaine, Venn, Cowper, Cecil, Bickersteth, and Daniel Wilson.

THERE is a striking chapter in the Book of Judges, in which Deborah and Barak sing a triumphal hymn after the defeat of the hosts of Sisera. In one part of this hymn they recount the names of the tribes who came forward most readily to do battle for the freedom of Israel. Some of the tribes are mentioned in high praise. Others are dismissed with expressions of reproach. None are so much commended as Zebulun and Naphtali. They were “a people who jeoparded their lives unto the death in the high places of the field.” But a sentence is used in the account of Zebulun, which deserves special notice: “Out of Zebulun,” it is said, “came down they that handle the pen of the writer” (Judges v. 14.)

The expression is a strange one. It cannot be denied that the meaning of it is involved in some obscurity. There is some probability in the conjecture of those who think it signifies scribes, who mustered the levies of Zebulun, and wrote down the names of those who went to war (compare Jer. lii. 25). But be the precise meaning what it may, one thing is abundantly clear. The zeal of Zebulun in God’s cause was such that, among her warriors in the day of battle, there were some who were more accustomed to wield the pen than the sword. When God’s work was to be done, the soldier and the writer stood shoulder to shoulder, and side by side.

The expression has often recurred to my mind of late, in studying the history of English religion in the 18th century. I am struck with the variety of instruments which God employed in carrying on the great revival of Christianity which then took place. I see some men who were mighty with the tongue, and bowed the hearts of assemblies by their preaching, as the trees of the wood are bowed by the wind. I see others who were mighty in government, and skilful in organizing, directing, methodizing, and administering. But, besides these, I see others who were mighty with the pen, and did work for Christ as real and lasting as any of their contemporaries. They made no public show. They did not cry, or strive, or let their voice be heard in the street. But they laboured in their way most effectually for the advancement of pure evangelical religion. They reached minds which were never brought under the influence of Whitefield, Wesley, or Romaine. They produced

results in many quarters which will never be fully known till the judgment day. Foremost, perhaps, in this class of men in the last century, was the subject of my present paper, James Hervey of Weston Favell, the author of “Theron and Aspasio.”

James Hervey was born on February 26, 1713, at Hardingstone, near Northampton. His father was rector of the neighbouring parishes of Collingtree and Weston Favell, but appears for some reason to have resided out of his parish. About his parents I can find no certain information, either as to their religious opinions or their practice. The parishes of which his father was rector are small rural places, very near the town of Northampton, on the south-eastern side. The date of his birth deserves notice on one account. It shows that he was one of the little band whom God sent into the world at a special time, to do a special work together in England. Whitefield, Wesley, Grimshaw, Berridge, Rowlands, Romaine, Venn, Walker, and Hervey, were all born in the first twenty years of the eighteenth century, between 1700 and 1720.

The facts and events of Hervey’s life are singularly few. He was educated at the Grammar School of Northampton, and remained there from the time he was seven years old till he was seventeen. Two things only are recorded about his schoolboy life. One is, that he was very skilful and dexterous in all games and recreations. The other is, that he made great progress in Latin and Greek, and would have got on even faster than he did, if his schoolmaster had allowed him. But it appears that this worthy pedagogue made it a rule never to allow any of his pupils to learn quicker than his own son! The fiction of “Do-the-boys Hall,” it may be feared, is built on a very broad foundation of facts. Obscure Yorkshire schools are not the only academies where little boys are victimized and unfairly used.

In the year 1731, Hervey was sent to Oxford, and entered at Lincoln College. The first two years of his University life appear to have been spent in idleness. Like many young men, he suffered much from the want of some wise friend to advise and direct him in his studies. In 1733, however, he became acquainted with the two Wesleys, Whitefield, Ingham, and other steady young men, and derived great benefit from their society. Under their influence and example, he began a steady course of reading, and made himself master of such books as “Derham’s Astro-Theology,” “Ray’s Wisdom of God in Creation,” and other works of a similar kind. He also commenced the study of the Hebrew language. Nor was this all. He began to follow his new companions in their efforts to attain and promote a high standard of religion. Like them, he began to live by method, received the communion every Sabbath, visited the sick and the prisoners in jail, and read to poor people. The last three years of his Oxford life were thus usefully employed, and the result was that he left the University, in 1736, with a good foundation of steady

habits of living, and with a very fair amount of knowledge and scholarship. His literary remains, indeed, supply abundant proof that, considering the times he lived in, he was a well-read and well-educated man.

No one seems to have been more useful to Hervey, at this period of his life, than John Wesley. At a later date, after doctrinal differences had separated the two men, the Rector of Weston Favell bore grateful and honourable testimony to this fact. He says, in one of his letters: "I heartily thank you, as for all other favours, so especially for teaching me Hebrew. I have cultivated this study, according to your advice. I can never forget that tender-hearted and generous Fellow of Lincoln, who condescended to take such compassionate notice of a poor undergraduate, whom almost everybody contemned, and whose soul no man cared for." Happy is that college where Fellows show kindness to undergraduates, and do not neglect them! Attentions of this kind cost little; but they are worth much, gain influence, and bear fruit after many days.

In the year 1736, Hervey was ordained a minister by Dr. Potter, Bishop of Oxford, and in 1736 became curate to his father at Weston Favell. He seems to have filled this position for a very short time. In 1738, we find him Curate of Dummer, near Basingstoke, in Hampshire, a position, singularly enough, which Whitefield had also occupied about the same year. In 1740, he removed to Bideford, in North Devonshire, and remained there till August 1743. He then returned to Weston Favell, and became once more curate to his father. This was his last move. On the death of his father, in 1752; he succeeded him as Rector of Weston Favell and Collingtree, but only survived him six years. He finally died, at Weston Favell, on Christmas day 1758, of pulmonary consumption, at the comparatively early age of forty-five. Unlike most ministers, he preached the gospel amongst the people who had known him from his earliest infancy, and was buried within a very few miles from the place where he had been born. In life and death he "dwelt among his own people."

The spiritual history of Hervey presents several interesting features. I can find no evidence that he knew anything of vital religion when he was a boy or a young man. Though mercifully kept from the excess of riot and immorality into which the young frequently run, he seems to have been utterly careless and thoughtless about his soul. The beginning of a work of grace in his heart may undoubtedly be traced to his residence at Oxford, and his intercourse with Wesley and Whitefield, which he commenced at the age of twenty. Yet even then he seems to have been much in the dark for some years, and to have been comparatively ignorant of the distinctive doctrines of real Christianity. His college friends, it must be admitted, knew little more than he did. Their early struggles after light were made through a fog of mysticism and asceticism which impeded their course for years. The freeness and

simplicity of the gospel, the finished work of Christ on the cross, the real meaning of justification by faith without the deeds of the law, the folly of putting doing before believing, all these were subjects which this little band of young men at Oxford were very slow to understand. Each and all in their turns struggled through their mental difficulties, and came out on the right side. But one of the last to reach “terra firma,” and grasp the whole truth as it is in Jesus, undoubtedly was James Hervey. In fact, it was not till the year 1741, five years after he had been ordained, that he thoroughly received the whole gospel into his heart, and embraced the whole system of evangelical doctrine. Two sermons preached by Hervey at Bideford about the year 1741, in which he plainly avowed his change of sentiments, were commonly called his “Recantation” sermons.

The state of Hervey’s heart during the seven years preceding 1741 must have been one of continual conflict and inward dissatisfaction. Enlightened enough to feel the value of his soul, and to see something of the sinfulness of sin, he was still unacquainted with the way of peace. His letters written at this period, both before and after ordination, exhibit a mind full of pious thoughts, holy desires, and high aspirations, but with everything out of proportion and out of place. The writer says excellent things about the soul, and sin, and God, and the Bible, and the world, and duty, and even says much about Christ. You cannot help admiring his evident sincerity, purity of mind, and zeal to do good. But you cannot help feeling that he has not got hold of things by the right end, and does not see the whole of religion. He is like an excellent and well-formed ship without a compass and rudder. He has not yet got his feet upon the Rock. He is incessantly putting things in their wrong places. The last are too often first, and the first are too often last. He does not say things that are not true, but he does not say them in the right way, and at the same time leaves out much that ought to be said.

The unsatisfactory character of Hervey’s theology at the beginning of his ministry is well illustrated by the following anecdote. In one of the Northamptonshire parishes where he preached before 1741, there lived a ploughman who usually attended the ministry of Dr. Doddridge, and was well-informed in the doctrines of grace. Hervey being ordered by his physicians, for the benefit of his health, to follow the plough, in order to smell the fresh earth, frequently accompanied this ploughman when he was working. Knowing that he was a serious man, he said to him one morning, “What do you think is the hardest thing in religion?”—The ploughman replied; “Sir, I am a poor man, and you are a minister; I beg leave to return the question.”—Then said Mr. Hervey: “I think the hardest thing is to deny *sinful* self;” grounding his opinion on our Lord’s admonition, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself.” “I argued,” said Mr. Hervey, “upon the import and extent of the duty, showing that merely to forbear sinful actions is little, and that we

must deny admittance and entertainment to evil imaginations and quench irregular desires. In this way I shot my random bolt.”—The ploughman quietly replied: “Sir, there is another instance of self-denial to which the injunction of Christ equally extends, which is the hardest thing in religion, and that is, to deny *righteous* self. You know I do not come to hear you preach, but go every Sunday with my family to hear Dr. Doddridge at Northampton. We rise early in the morning, and have prayer before we set out, in which I find pleasure. Walking there and back I find pleasure. Under the sermon I find pleasure. When at the Lord’s Table I find pleasure. We return, read a portion of Scripture, and go to prayer in the evening, and I find pleasure. But yet, to this moment, I find it the hardest thing to deny righteous self, I mean to renounce my own strength and righteousness, and not to lean on that for holiness or rely on this for justification.” In repeating this story to a friend, Mr. Hervey observed, “I then hated the righteousness of Christ. I looked at the man with astonishment and disdain, and thought him an old fool, and wondered at what I fancied the motley mixture of piety and oddity in his notions. I have since seen clearly who was the fool; not the wise old ploughman, but the proud James Hervey. I now discern sense, solidity, and truth in his observations.”

During this period of Hervey’s life, his old Oxford friend, the famous George Whitefield, frequently corresponded with him. That mighty man of God had been brought into the full light of the gospel, and, like the Samaritan woman, burned with desire to bring all whom he knew and loved into the same glorious liberty. The following letter, while it shows Whitefield’s deep concern for his friend’s salvation, makes Hervey’s defective religious principles at this period very evident: “I long to have my dear friend come forth and preach the truth as it is in Jesus; not a righteousness or holiness of our own, whereby we make ourselves meet, but the righteousness of another, even the Lord our righteousness; upon the imputation and apprehending of which by faith we shall be made meet by his Holy Spirit to live with and enjoy God. Dear Mr. Hervey, it is an excellent thing to be convinced of the freeness and riches of God’s grace in Christ Jesus. It is sweet to know and preach that Christ justifies the ungodly, and that all good works are not so much as partly the cause, but the effect of our justification. Till convinced of these truths, you must own free will is in man, which is directly contrary to the Holy Scriptures and to the Articles of our Church. Let me advise dear Mr. Hervey, laying aside all prejudices, to read and pray over St. Paul’s Epistles to the Romans and Galatians, and then to tell me what he thinks of this doctrine. Most of our old friends are now happily enlightened. God sets his seal to such preaching in an extraordinary manner, and I am persuaded the gates of hell will never be able to prevail against it. O that dear Mr. Hervey would also join with us! O that the Lord would open his eyes to behold aright

this mystery of godliness? How would it rejoice my heart! How would it comfort his own soul! He would no longer groan under a spirit of bondage, no, he would be brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God.” This letter was dated Philadelphia, November 10, 1739.

Hervey’s excellent biographer, John Brown of Whitburn, gives the following clear account of his state of mind at this period: “It is evident that he was seeking salvation; but he sought it, as it were, by the works of the law. One of his leading errors was, that he had low, scanty, inadequate apprehensions of the love of God. From this unavoidably followed a disesteem of imputed righteousness, a conceit of personal qualifications, a spirit of legal bondage, and a tincture of Pharisaical pride. He conceived faith to be no more than a mere believing of promises if he did well, and of threatenings if he did ill. He wished for a salvation to be bestowed upon some sincere, pious, and worthy persons, and was distressed because he could not find himself of that number. To use his own words, when he felt he was deplorably deficient in duty, he would comfort himself with saying, ‘Soul, thy God only requires sincere obedience, and perhaps tomorrow may be more abundant in acts of holiness? When overcome by sin, he would call to mind his righteous deeds, and so think to commute with divine justice, and quit scores for his offences by his duties. In order to be reconciled to God, and to ease his conscience, he would promise stricter watchfulness, more alms, and renewed fastings. Overlooking entirely the active obedience of our Redeemer, he fondly imagined that through the death of Christ he might have pardon of his sins, and could by his own doings secure eternal life.”

“For some time,” continues his biographer, “letters from Whitefield were disregarded, or answered with stubborn silence; but at length, by this and other means, a saving change took place in Mr. Hervey’s mind. Says he, The two great commandments—Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself—made the first awakening impression on my heart. Amazing! thought I; are these commands of God as obligatory as the prohibition of adultery or the observation of the Sabbath! Then has my whole life been a continued act of disobedience; not a day nor an hour in which I have performed my duty! This conviction struck me as the handwriting upon the wall struck the presumptuous monarch. It pursued me, as Saul pursued the Christians, not only to my own house, but to distant cities; nor even gave up the great controversy till, under the influence of the Spirit, it brought me, weary and heavy laden, to Jesus Christ. Then God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shined into my heart, and gave me the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

After all, it would be difficult to give a more vivid and interesting account of the change which came over Hervey than that which he himself gives in a letter to his faithful friend, George Whitefield. He says: “You are pleased to

ask how the Holy Ghost convinced me of self-righteousness, and drove me out of my false rest. Indeed, sir, I cannot tell. The light was not instantaneous; it did not flash upon my soul, but arose like the dawning of the day. A little book by Jenks, upon ‘Submission to the Righteousness of God,’ was made serviceable to me. Your journals, dear sir, and sermons, especially that sweet sermon on the text, ‘What think ye of Christ?’ were a means of bringing me to the knowledge of the truth. Another piece has been also like precious eye-salve to my dim and clouded understanding—I mean Marshall’s ‘Gospel Mystery of Sanctification.’ These, blessed be He who is a light to them that sit in darkness, have in some degree convinced me of my former errors. I now begin to see I have been labouring in the fire, and wearying myself for very vanity, while I have attempted to establish my own righteousness. I trusted I knew not what, while I trusted in some imaginary good deeds of my own. These are no hiding-place from the storm; they are a refuge of lies. If I had the meekness of Moses and the patience of Job, the zeal of Paul and the love of John, I durst not advance the least plea to eternal life on this footing. As for my own beggarly performances, wretched righteousnesses, gracious Emmanuel! I am ashamed, I am grieved that I should thrust them into the plan of thy divine, thy inconceivably precious obedience! My schemes are altered. I now desire to work in my blessed Master’s service, not for life, but from life and salvation. I would study to please him in righteousness and holiness all the days of my life.”

In another letter to Whitefield, of about the same date, Hervey says: “I own, with shame and sorrow, I have been a blind leader of the blind. My tongue and my pen have perverted the good ways of the Lord, have darkened the glory of redeeming merit and sovereign grace. I have dared to invade the glories of an all-sufficient Saviour, and to pluck the crown off his head. My writings and discourses have derogated from the honour, the everlasting, incommunicable honour of Jesus. They presumed to give works a share in the redemption and recovery of a lost sinner. They have placed filthy rags on the throne of the Lamb, and by that means have debased the Saviour and exalted the sinner. But I trust the divine truth begins to dawn upon my soul. Oh, may it, like the rising sun, shine more and more till the day break in all its brightness, and the shadows flee away! Now, was I possessed of all the righteous acts that have made saints and martyrs famous in all generations, could they be transferred to me, and might I call them my own, I would renounce them all that I might win Christ.”

I make no excuse for the length at which I have dwelt on this portion of Hervey’s history. A mere worldly man may see nothing interesting in it; but a true Christian, unless I am greatly mistaken, will find it full of instruction. It is useful to mark the diversities of the operation of the Spirit. How slowly and gradually he carries on his work in some hearts, compared to the rapid

progress he makes in others! It is useful to mark the extent of his operations. How thoroughly he can turn upside down a man's theological opinions! How little we know what a young self-righteous minister may one day, by God's grace, become! Well would it be for the Christian Church if there were more ministers in her pale taught of God, and brought to sit at the feet of Christ, like James Hervey.

The last seventeen years of Hervey's life were spent in comparative retirement at Weston Favell. "My house," he writes to a friend, "is quite retired. It faces the garden and the field, so that we hear none of the tumultuous din of the world, and see nothing but the wonderful and charming works of the Creator. Oh, that I may be enabled to improve this advantageous solitude!" Willing as he doubtless was to go forth into public and do the work of an evangelist, like his beloved friend Whitefield, his delicate health made it quite impossible. From his youth up he had shown a decided tendency to pulmonary consumption. He had neither voice nor physical strength to preach in the open air, address large congregations, and arrest the attention of multitudes, like many of his contemporaries. He saw this clearly, and wisely submitted to God's appointment. Those whom he could not reach with his voice, he resolved to approach by his pen. From his isolated study in his Northamptonshire parish he sent forth arrows which were sharp in the hearts of the King's enemies. In a word, he became a diligent writer on behalf of the gospel from the time of his conversion till he was laid in his grave. Ill health, no doubt, often stopped his labour, and laid him aside. But, though faint, he was always pursuing. Delicate and weak as he always was, his pen was very seldom idle, and he was always doing "what he could." The work to which he devoted himself required a large measure of faith and patience. He laboured on uncheered by admiring crowds, and unaided by the animal excitement which often carries forward the wearied preacher. But while health and strength lasted he never ceased to labour, and seldom laboured in vain. Hundreds were reached by Hervey's writings, who would never have condescended to listen to Whitefield's voice.

The very retirement of Weston Favell was not without its advantages. It gave the worthy rector unbroken leisure for writing. He could sit down in his study without fear of being disturbed by the endless petty interruptions which disturb the dweller in large towns, and make the continuous flow of thought almost impossible. Above all, it gave him plenty of time for reading and storing his mind. It has been well said that "reading maketh a full man," and no one can look through Hervey's literary remains without seeing abundant evidence that he was a great reader. With Greek and Roman classical writers he was familiar from his youth. The following theological writers are said to have been among his special favourites: Chrysostom, Gerhard, Alting, Owen, Manton, Goodwin, Reynolds, Hall, Beveridge, Bunyan, Hopkins, Howe, Bates, Flavel, Caryl, Poole, Charnock, Traill, Turretine, Witsius,

Vitringa, Hurron, Leighton, Polhill, Gill, Brine, Guyse, Boston, Rawlins, Coles, Jenks, Marshall, Erskine, Milton, Young, and Watts. The names of these authors speak for themselves. The man who was familiar with their works was likely to be full of matter, and when he wrote for the press he had a fair right to claim a patient hearing. The ways of God's providence are mysterious and truly instructive. If Hervey had not been kept at home by ill health, he would probably never have had time for much reading. If he had not had time to be a reader, he would never have written what he did.

The English Puritans appear to have been special favourites with Hervey. Again and again, in his biography, we find him speaking of them in terms of the highest commendation. For instance, he says in one place, "Be not ashamed of the name Puritan. The Puritans were the soundest preachers, and, I believe, the truest followers of Christ in their day." Again "For my part I esteem the Puritans as some of the most zealous Christians that ever appeared in our land." Again: "The Puritans, one and all of them, glory in the righteousness of their great Mediator; they extol his imputed righteousness in almost every page, and pour contempt on all other works compared with their Lord's. For my part I know no set of writers in the world so remarkable for this doctrine and diction. It quite distinguishes them from the generality of our modern treatises." I make no apology for these quotations. They throw broad, clear light on Hervey's theological opinions. Nothing brings out a man's distinctive religious views so thoroughly as his choice of books. Tell me what divines a minister loves to read, and I will soon tell you to what school of theology he belongs.

The principal literary works which Hervey published in his life-time, were two volumes of "Meditations and Contemplations," and three volumes of "Dialogues and Letters" between two fictitious persons, whom he named "Theron and Aspasio." The "Meditations" are soliloquies and thoughts arising out of such subjects as the tombs, a flower-garden, creation, night, and the starry heavens. The "Dialogues" touch on many points of theology, but especially upon the great doctrine of justification by faith in the imputed righteousness of Christ. If life had been continued, Hervey intended to have added a fourth volume of "Dialogues," of which the subject was to have been Christian holiness. But his early death cut short the design, and he was only able to tell his friends that they must regard his favourite book, Marshall on Sanctification, as his deputy and representative. His words were,—"I do, by these presents, depute Marshall to supply my lack of service. Marshall expresses my thoughts, prosecutes my schemes, and not only pursues the same end, but proceeds in the same way. I shall therefore rejoice in the prospect of having the 'Gospel Mystery of Sanctification' stand as a fourth volume to 'Theron and Aspasio.'"

Both the works above mentioned attained an extraordinary degree of popularity from the moment they were published, and procured for the author a world-wide reputation. They formed, in fact, the whole foundation of his fame. Thousands and tens of thousands of Christians have never known anything of Hervey except as “the author of Theron and Aspasio.” His first work, the *Meditations*, ran through twenty editions in a very short time, and was translated into the Dutch language! Theron and Aspasio met with acceptance all over England and Scotland, and obliged even worldly critics to take notice of it. All these are plain facts which admit of no controversy. They are facts which arouse in our minds a little curiosity. We naturally want to know what kind of religious writing was popular in England in the 18th century.

The first thought that will probably start up within us as we read Hervey’s *Meditations and Dialogues*, will be unmixed surprise and amazement. The style is so peculiar, that we marvel how our forefathers could possibly have liked it. From first to last the author writes in such a florid, high flown, luxuriant, bombastic, stilted fashion, that he almost takes your breath away. You can hardly believe that he is in earnest, and that the whole thing is not an assumed mannerism and affectation. The long words, the grandiose mode of expressing thoughts, the starched and painted dress of the sentences—all, all is so utterly unlike the writing of the present century, that the reader stands dumbfounded, and hardly knows whether he ought to laugh or to cry. In the whole range of popular English books, I do not hesitate to say that I do not know a style of writing less to be admired than the style of “Theron and Aspasio.” One cannot help inwardly feeling, What a strange standard of public taste must have prevailed, when such writing as this was deliberately published and universally admired!

However, first impressions are not always correct. We must not hastily condemn Hervey’s writings as worthless, because their style is not to our mind. A little calm consideration will probably show us that there is far more to be said for them than at first sight appears. A second look at the rector of Weston Favell’s writings will very likely modify our verdict about them. To those who are disposed to think lightly of Hervey’s writings I venture to submit the following considerations.

For one thing, we must in common fairness remember the times in which Hervey wrote. The middle of the 18th century was an era in English literature, when no writing would go down with the public that was not somewhat stilted, classical, long-worded, and stiff. The short, plain, cut-and-thrust style of the present day would have been condemned as indicative of a vulgar, uneducated mind. Poor Hervey wrote in days when moral essays were framed on the model of the *Spectator*, the *Tatler*, and the *Rambler*, and fictions were written like “Sir Charles Grandison” and “Clarissa Harlow.” If he

wanted to get the ear of the public, he had no alternative but to write according to the public taste. Let us grant that his style of English composition is far too ornate and florid; but let us not forget to lay the blame at the right door. His faults were the faults of his day. If he had written Theron and Aspasio in a plain unadorned style, it is probable that the book would have fallen unnoticed to the ground.

For another thing, we must do Hervey the justice to remember, that under all the gaudy ornamentation of his compositions his Master's business is never forgotten. The more we read his books the more we must admit, that although he may offend our tastes, he is always most faithful to Christ's truth. It is impossible not to admire the vein of piety which runs through every page, and the ability with which he defends doctrines which the heart of man naturally detests. The only wonder is that books containing so much scriptural truth should ever have become so extensively popular. Even Whitefield did not expect so much acceptance for them. "I foretell the fate of these volumes," he said in a letter; "nothing but your scenery can screen you. Self will never consent to die, though slain in so genteel a manner, without showing some resentment against the artful murderer." In fact, I always feel that God gave a special blessing to Hervey's writings on account of his eminent faithfulness to the gospel in evil times. I look at them with reverence and respect as weapons which did good service in their day, though the fashion of them may not suit my taste. To use the author's own words, they were an "attempt to dress the good old truths of the Reformation in such drapery of language as to allure people of all conditions." God was pleased to honour the effort in its day, and we need not be ashamed to honour it also.

No well-informed Christian will be surprised to hear that Hervey's writings did not please everybody. Of course they were far too Scriptural to escape the enmity of the children of this world. But this unhappily was not all the enmity that the author of "Theron and Aspasio" had to endure. His clear and sharply cut statements about justification gave great offence to Christians of the Arminian school of theology. John Wesley openly assaulted his views of imputed righteousness. Sandeman, a Scotch Independent, fiercely attacked his views of faith. In short, the amiable rector of Weston Favell had to learn, like many other good men, that the most beautiful writing will not command universal acceptance. The way of accurate Scriptural divinity is a way which many will always call "heresy," and speak against.

I will not weary my readers by entering into the details of Hervey's controversial campaigns. Without pretending to endorse every sentence that he wrote, I feel no doubt that on the whole he was right, and his adversaries wrong. Cudworth, Ryland, and others, ably defended him. The only remark that I make is, that Hervey's spirit and temper, under the assaults made upon him, were beyond all praise. Never was there a divine so utterly free from

“odium theologicum.” Well would it have been for the credit of the Church of Christ, if the controversialists of the last century had all been as meek, and gentle, and amiable, and kind-tempered as the author of “Theron and Aspasio.”

The *letters* which Hervey wrote, on a great variety of subjects, are exceedingly good, and will repay an attentive perusal. Sitting in his quiet country parsonage, he had time to think over all that he wrote; and his correspondence, like his contemporary Venn’s, is one of the best part of his literary remains. Those who read his letters will find their style, as a general rule, very different from that of “Theron and Aspasio.” The writer seems to come down from his high horse, and to deal familiarly and easily with men. The following letter to a dying young lady is a beautiful specimen of his epistolary style, and is so good all through that my readers will probably not blame me if I give it to them whole and entire. A facsimile of it faces the title-page of my copy of Brown’s life of Hervey, and is a perfect specimen of small, delicate, finished, copper-plate handwriting:

“DEAR MISS SARAH,—So you are going to leave us, and will be at your eternal home before us! I heartily wish you an easy, a comfortable, and a lightsome journey. Fear not. He that died for you on the cross will be with you when you walk through the valley of the shadow of death. (Ps. xxiii. 4.)

“People that travel often sing by the way, to render their journey more pleasant. Let me furnish you with a song most exactly and charmingly suited to your purpose: ‘*Who shall lay anything to my charge? It is God that justifieth me. Who is he that condemneth me? It is Christ that died; yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for me.*’ Shall the law lay anything to my charge? That has been fully satisfied by the obedience and death of my divine Lord. Shall sin condemn me? That has all been fully borne, all been abolished, by the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. Shall Satan accuse me? What will that avail when the Judge himself justifies me, the Judge himself pronounces me righteous! (See Rom. viii. 33, 34; Gal. iii. 13; 1 Pet. ii. 24; Daniel ix. 24; John i. 29.)

“But shall I be pronounced righteous who have been and am a poor sinner? Hear what the Holy Ghost saith: ‘*Christ loved the Church and gave himself for it, that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing.*’ What reason have they to be afraid or ashamed who have neither spot nor wrinkle, nor any blemish? And such will be the appearance of those who are washed in Christ’s blood, and clothed in Christ’s righteousness. They will be presented faultless and with exceeding joy before the throne. (See Eph. v. 25, 27; Jude 24.)

“But what shall I do for my kind companions and dear friends? You will exchange them for better, far better. You will go to Mount Zion, to the city

of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You will go to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the first-born which are written in heaven, and to the spirits of just men made perfect. You will go to God, your reconciled God, the Judge of all, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things for you than your heart can wish or your thoughts imagine. (See Heb. xii. 22–24.)

“Perhaps your spirits are weak. Therefore I will not tire you. The Lord Jesus make these sweet texts a cordial to your soul. I hope to follow you ere long, to find you in the mansions of peace and joy, and to join with you in singing praise, everlasting praise, to him who hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood. (Rev. i. 5.)

“Into his hands, his ever merciful and most compassionate hands, I commend your spirit.—Your truly affectionate friend,

“J. HERVEY.

“WESTON, April 26, 1755.”

I make no comment on this letter; it needs none. There are not many such letters written in these days of universal hurry, under the influences of railway travelling, electric telegraphs, and penny post. The faculty of writing such letters is fast dying out of the world. But my readers will probably agree with me that the man who could write to his friends in this fashion was no common correspondent

The published *sermons* of James Hervey are very few in number. It is much to be regretted that we have no more of them. The few published are so extremely good, both as to matter and composition, that one feels sorry he did not give the world a hundred more of the same sort. Of course, he could never be a popular preacher. His weak health, feeble voice, and delicate constitution, made this impossible. He often lamented his inability to serve his people better in the pulpit, comparing himself to a soldier wounded, bleeding, and disabled, and only not slain. He would frequently say, “My preaching is not like sending an arrow from a bow, for which some strength of arm is necessary, but like pulling the trigger of a gun ready charged, which the feeblest finger can do.” This remark was most true. No doubt, his want of a striking action and delivery robbed his sermons of effectiveness. But they were always full of excellent stuff, excellently put together.

The reader of Hervey’s *Sermons* will discover at once that they are written in a style very unlike that of “Theron and Aspasio.” He will find comparatively little of that luxuriancy and ornamentation to which I have already alluded. He will see, to his surprise, a mode of address eminently simple, perspicuous, pointed, and direct, though never degenerating into rant and vulgarity. The rector of Weston Favell had evidently most just and wise views of the wants of a mixed country congregation. He knew that, next to

proclaiming sound doctrine, a minister's first aim should be to be understood. When, therefore, he got up into his Northamptonshire pulpit, he deliberately left behind his flowers and feathers, his paint and his gilding, his fine words and long sentences, his classical allusions and elaborate arguments. Usefulness was the one thing that he desired to obtain, and to obtain it he was not ashamed to speak very plain English to plain men. The following paragraphs from a sermon preached by him in 1757, on "The Means of Safety," from Hebrews xi. 28, will probably be read with interest, as conveying a fair idea of his style of preaching:—

"Let me give a word of direction. Fly to Christ, alarmed sinners! Come under the covert of his blood. Appropriate the blessed Jesus; look unto him, and his merits are your own. Thus sprinkle his blood: sprinkle it upon your lintel and doorposts; upon all you are, upon all you have, and all you do; upon your consciences, that they may be purged; upon your souls, that they may be sanctified; upon your works, that they may be accepted. Say, every one of you, I am a poor, guilty, helpless creature; but in Jesus Christ, who is full of grace and truth, I have righteousness and strength. I am a poor, polluted, loathsome creature; but Jesus Christ, who is the image of the invisible God and the brightness of his Father's glory, has loved me and washed me from my filthiness in his own blood. I am by nature a perverse, depraved creature, and by evil practices a lost, damnable sinner; but Jesus Christ who made the world, Jesus Christ whom heaven and earth adore, Jesus Christ himself came from the mansions of bliss on purpose to save me, to give himself for me. And how can I perish who have such a ransom?

"Should you say, Have I a warrant for such a trust? I reply, You have the best of warrants, our Lord's express permission, 'Whosoever will let him take the water of life freely.' It is not said, this or that person only, but *whosoever*, including you and me, excluding no individual man or woman. It is not said, whosoever is worthy, but whosoever is *willing*. Wilt thou be made whole? was our Lord's question to the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda. Wilt thou, all terms and conditions apart, inherit grace and glory? is his most benevolent address to sinful men in all ages.

"You have our Lord's most gracious invitation; 'Come unto me.' And whom does he call? The righteous? No. The excellent? Quite the reverse. He calls sinners, miserable sinners, even the most miserable of sinners. Those who are weary and heavy-laden, overwhelmed with iniquities, bowed down to the brink of hell, and ready to think, 'There is no hope.' Yet them he encourages, them he invites; to them he declares, 'I will give you rest,' rest in the enjoyment of peace with God, and peace in your own consciences. Observe and admire the riches of your Redeemer's grace. He says not, Ye are vile, wretched, polluted by sin, and enslaved to the devil, therefore keep at a distance; but therefore come. Come, and be cleansed by my blood; come, and

be made free by my Spirit. He says not, Furnish yourselves with this or that or the other recommending accomplishment; but only come. Come just as you are, poor, undone, guilty creatures. Yea, come to me for pardon and recovery; to me, who have given myself, my life, my all for your ransom.

“Should you still question whether these inestimable blessings are free for you? Remember, brethren, they are free for sinners. Is this your character? Then they are as free for your acceptance as for any person in the world. To us eternal life is given—not to us who had deserved it by our goodness, but us who had forfeited it by our sins. To you is preached the forgiveness of sins—not to you whose transgressions are inconsiderable, but you whose iniquities are more in number than the hairs of your head. Even to you who are the lost and perishing sinner of Adam’s family, is the word of this salvation sent. And by God’s commission we publish it, that as sinners you may receive it, that receiving it you may commence believing, and that believing you may have life through his name.

“Come then, fellow-sinners, believe the record of heaven. Set to your seal that God is true. Honour his word, which cannot lie. Honour his grace, which is absolutely free. Honour his dear Son, who has obtained eternal redemption for such unworthy creatures as you and I.

I have only two remarks to make on the above extract before I pass on. If any reader of Hervey’s works has imbibed the idea that he could only write English after the model of “Theron and Aspasio,” I advise him to alter his estimate of the good man’s powers. The rector of Weston Favell could be plain enough to suit the humblest intellect, when he pleased. If any one thinks that the English pulpit of the present day is greatly in advance of the last century, I venture to think that he has something yet to learn. My own deliberate opinion is, that it would be a great blessing to this country, if we had more of such direct preaching as some parishes in Northamptonshire in the 18th century.

The *private life* of Hervey was in thorough harmony with his writing and preaching. It is the universal testimony of all who knew him, that he was an eminently holy man. Even the clergy of the neighbourhood, who disliked his theology, and had no sympathy with his ways and opinions, could find no fault in his daily walk. In fact, they used to call him “Saint James.” He never married, and by reason of ill health seldom left home, and was confined to the house. But in-doors or out-of-doors, he was always full of his Master’s business, always redeeming the time, always reading, writing, or speaking about Christ, and always behaving like a man who had recently come from his Lord’s presence to say something, and was soon going back again.

His *humility* was eminent. He never considered himself as James Hervey, the celebrated writer, but as a poor guilty sinner, equally indebted to divine grace with the lowest day-labourer in his parish. To two malefactors

condemned to be hanged, he said: “You have just the same foundation for hope as I must have when I shall depart this life. When I shall be summoned to the great tribunal, what will be my plea, and what my dependence? Nothing but Christ. I am a poor unworthy sinner; but worthy is the Lamb that was slain. This is my only hope, and this is as free for you as it is for your friend and fellow-sinner James Hervey.” On publishing his famous Fast-day Sermons, he observes: “May the Lord Jesus himself, who was crucified in weakness, vouchsafe to work by weakness, or, in other words, by James Hervey!”—When near his death he wrote to a friend: “I beseech Mr. — to unite his supplication with yours, for I am fearful lest I should disgrace the gospel in my languishing moments. Pray for me, the weakest of ministers and the weakest of Christians.”

His *charity and self-denial* were most eminent. He literally gave away almost all that he had, and lived on a mere fraction of his income. In his giving he was always discreet “I am God’s steward,” he said, “for his poor, and I must husband the little pittance I have to bestow on them, and make it go as far as possible.” But when money was likely to be particularly serviceable, as in the case of long sickness or sudden losses, he would give away five, ten, or fifteen guineas at a time, taking care it should not be known from whom the money came. His income was never large, and it might be wondered how he managed to spare such sums for charitable uses. But he saved up nothing, and gave away all the profits arising from his books—which were sometimes large sums—in doing good. In fact, this was his bank for the poor. “I have devoted this fund,” he said, “to God. I will, on no account, apply it to any worldly uses. I write, not for profit or fame, but to serve the cause of God; and, as he has blessed my attempt, I think myself bound to relieve the distresses of my fellow-creatures with the profit that comes from that quarter.” He carried out this principle to the very last. Even after his death, he was found to have ordered all profits arising from any future sale of his books to be constantly applied to charitable uses.

But space would fail me if I were to dwell particularly on all the leading features of Hervey’s private character. The picture is far too large to go into the frame of a short memoir like this. His spirit of Catholic love to all God’s people of every denomination—his delight in the society and conversation of godly people—his faithfulness in reproving sin—his singular love to Christ, and delight in his finished work and atonement—his devotional diligence—his veneration for the Scriptures—his meekness, gentleness, and tenderness of spirit—all these are points on which much might be written, and much will be found in the pages of his biography. So far as I can judge, he appears to have been a man of as eminently saintly character as any that this country can point to, and one worthy to be ranked by the side of Bradford, Baxter, and George Herbert. Few evangelical men, at any rate, in the 18th

century, can be named, who seem to have had so few enemies, and to have lost so few friends. None, certainly, were so universally lamented.

The closing scene of James Hervey's life was curiously beautiful. He died, as he had lived for seventeen years, in the full faith and peace of Christ's gospel. His life had long been a continual struggle with disease; and when his last illness came upon him, it found him thoroughly prepared. Invalids have one great advantage over strong people, at any rate—a sudden accession of pains and ailments does not startle them, and they are seldom taken by surprise. The holy rector of Weston Favell had looked death in the face so long that he was no stranger to him; and when he went down into the cold waters of the great river, he walked calmly, quietly, and undisturbed. Those glorious evangelical doctrines which he had proclaimed and defended as truths while he lived, he found to be strong consolations when he died.

His last attack of illness began in October 1758, and carried him off on Christmas day. Disease of the lungs, with all its distressing accompaniments, was the agent employed to take down his earthly tabernacle; and he seems to have gone through even more than the ordinary suffering which such disease entails. But nothing shook the dying sufferer's faith. He had his days of conflict and inward struggle, like most of Christ's faithful soldiers; but he always came out more than conqueror, through Him that loved him. An abundant entrance into rest was ministered to him. He entered harbour at last, not like a shipwrecked sailor clinging to a broken plank, but like a stately ship, with all her sails expanded, and wafted forward by a prosperous gale.

The dying sayings of eminent saints, when God permits them to say much, are always instructive. It was eminently the case with James Hervey. Like dying Jacob, he was enabled to speak to all around him, and to testify his deep sense of the value of Christ's great salvation. Like Christiana, in "Pilgrim's Progress," he was enabled to speak comfortably to those who stood near him, and followed him to the riverside. To his doctor he wrote, at an early period of his last illness: "I now spend almost all my whole time in reading, and praying over the Bible. Indeed, you cannot conceive how the springs of life in me are relaxed, and relaxing. 'What thou doest, do quickly,' is a proper admonition for me as I approach dissolution. My dear friend, attend to the one thing needful. I have no heart to take any medicine; all but Christ is to me unprofitable. Blessed be God for pardon and salvation through his blood! Let me prescribe this for my dear friend. My cough is very troublesome; I can get little rest; but my never-failing remedy is the love of Christ."

On the 15th of December—the month that he died—he spoke very strongly to his curate, Mr. Maddock, about the assurance of faith, and the great love of God in Christ. "Oh!" said he, "how much has Christ done for me, and how little have I done for so loving a Saviour! If I preached even once a week it was but a burden to me. I have not visited the people of my

parish as I ought to have done, and thus preached from house to house. I have not taken every opportunity of speaking for Christ. Do not think I am afraid to die. I assure you I am not. I know what my Saviour has done for me. I want to be gone. But I wonder and lament to think of the love of Christ in doing so much for me, and how little I have done for him!”

On the 25th of December—the day that he died—his loving friend and physician, Dr. Stonehouse, came to see him about three hours before he expired. Hervey seized the opportunity, spoke strongly and affectionately to him about his soul’s concerns, and entreated him not to be overcharged with the cares of this life. Seeing his great weakness and prostration, the doctor begged him to spare himself. “No, doctor,” replied the dying man, with ardour, “no! You tell me I have but a few minutes to live; let me spend them in adoring our great Redeemer.” He then repeated the words, “Though my heart and my flesh fail, God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever;” and also dwelt, in a delightful manner, on St. Paul’s words, “All things are yours; whether life, or things present, or things to come.” “Here,” he exclaimed, “here is the treasury of a Christian! Death is reckoned among this inventory; and a noble treasure it is. How thankful I am for death, as it is the passage through which I go to the Lord and Giver of eternal life, and as it frees me from all the misery which you see me now endure, and which I am willing to endure as long as God thinks fit! I know that he will by-and-by, in his own good time, dismiss me from the body. These light afflictions are but for a moment, and then comes an eternal weight of glory. Oh, welcome, welcome death! Thou mayst well be reckoned among the treasures of the Christian! To live is Christ, and to die is gain!” After this he lay for a considerable time without seeming to breathe, and his friends thought he was gone. But he revived a little, and, being raised in his chair, said:—“Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy most holy and comfortable words; for mine eyes have seen thy most holy and comfortable salvation! Here, doctor, is my cordial. What are all the cordials given to support the dying, in comparison of that which arises from the promises of salvation by Christ? This, this supports me!”

He said little after this, and was rapidly drawing near his end. About three o’clock in the afternoon he said: “The conflict is over; now all is done.” After that time he scarcely spoke anything intelligible, except the words, “Precious salvation!” At last, about four o’clock, without a sigh or a groan, he shut his eyes and departed, on Christmas-day 1758, in the forty-fifth year of his age. Never, perhaps, was there a more triumphant illustration of the saying of a great spiritual champion of the 18th century,—“The world may not like our methodists and evangelical people, but the world cannot deny that they die well!”

I leave James Hervey here, having traced his history from his cradle to his grave. He was a man of whom the world was not worthy, and one to whom even the Church of God has never given his due measure of honour. I am well aware that he was not perfect. I do not pretend to say that I can subscribe *entirely* to everything he wrote, either about the nature of faith or about assurance; but whatever his faults and defects, I do believe that he was one of the holiest and best ministers in England at this period, and that he did a work in his time which will be seen to have borne good fruit in the last great day.

I know well that Hervey was only a writer, and nothing but a writer. I know well that the value of his works has almost passed away. Like our old wooden three-deckers, they did good service in their time, but are now comparatively obsolete and laid aside. But I believe the day will never come when the Church will not require pens as well as tongues, able writers as well as able preachers; and I venture to think it would be well for the Church of our day, if we had a few more hard students and careful writers of the stamp of James Hervey. I therefore boldly claim for him a high place among the spiritual heroes of the 18th century. Let us admire Whitefield and Wesley; but let us not grudge Hervey his crown. He deserves to be had in remembrance.

I now conclude this sketch with a few testimonies to Hervey's merits, which, to say the least, demand serious attention. The witnesses are all men of mark, and men who had many opportunities of weighing the merits of preachers and writers. Let us hear what they thought of the subject before us, the rector of Weston Favell.

My first witness shall be William Romaine. He says: "I never saw one who came up so near to the Scripture character of a Christian, as Mr. Hervey. God enriched him with great gifts and great graces. He had a fine understanding and a great memory. He was very well skilled in Hebrew, and an excellent critic in Greek.—There was great experience of heart-love upon his tongue. He used to speak of the love of the adorable Redeemer like one who had seen him face to face in the fulness of his glory. As to his writings, I leave them to speak for themselves. They stand in no need of my praises."

My next witness shall be Henry Venn. He says: "Mr. Hervey was the most extraordinary man I ever saw in my life, as much beyond most of the excellent as the swan for whiteness and stately figure is beyond the common fowl. His Meditations and Contemplations deserve your most sincere regard. You may look upon them as you would upon Aaron's rod, by which such wonders were wrought. These Thoughts have been the means of giving sight to the blind, life to souls dead in trespasses and sins, and winning the young, the gay, and the rich, to see greater charms in a crucified Saviour than in all that dazzles vain minds."

My next witness shall be Cowper the poet. He says: "Perhaps I may be partial to Hervey; but I think him one of the most Scriptural writers in the world."

My next witness shall be Richard Cecil. He says: "Let us do the world justice. It has seldom found considerate, gentle, but earnest, heavenly, and enlightened teachers. When it has found such, truth has received a very general attention. Such a man was Hervey, and his works have met their reward."

My next witness shall be the late Edward Bickersteth. He says: "Few books have been so useful as Hervey's 'Theron and Aspasio;' though like every human writing, it is not free from error. But, with a few exceptions, the clear statements of divine truth in the book, and the Christian addresses of the author, full of kindness and affection, gentleness and sweetness of spirit, draw out your best feelings, and win you over to evangelical principles."

My last witness shall be Daniel Wilson, Bishop of Calcutta. He says in his Journal, July 24, 1846: "I have been reading tranquilly and pleasantly a volume of Hervey's Letters, full of that thorough devotedness of heart, deadness to all earthly things, and longings after grace and holiness, which characterized the leaders of the revival in our church.—Oh! that the spirit of Hervey might pervade our younger clergy and myself. To walk with God is the only spring of happiness and usefulness."

Testimonies like these deserve serious attention. My firm belief is, that they are well deserved.