THE

CHRISTIAN LEADERS

OF

The Last Century;

OR,

ENGLAND A HUNDRED YEARS AGO.

By the

REV. J. C. RYLE, B.A.,

Christ Church, Oxford;

AUTHOR OF "EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS;" &c.

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

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VI.

William Romaine and his Ministry.

CHAPTER I.

Born at Hartlepool in 1714—Educated at Houghton-le-Spring and Christ Church, Oxford—Character for Learning at Oxford—Ordained 1736—Curate of Lewtrenchard and Banstead—Lectures at St. Botolph's 1748, and St. Dunstan's 1749—Troubles at St. Dunstan's—Morning Preacher at St. George's, Hanover Square, 1750—Loses his Preachership 1755—Gresham Professor of Astronomy—Morning Preacher at St. Olave, Southwark, and St. Bartholomew the Great—Preaches before the University of Oxford—Gives great Offence.

THE true Church of Christ is curiously like a well-appointed army.

The soldiers of an army all owe allegiance to one common sovereign, and are engaged in one common cause. They are commanded by one general, and fight against one common foe. And yet there are marked varieties and diversities among them. Cavalry, infantry, and artillery have each their own peculiar mode of fighting. Each arm in its own way is useful. It is the well-balanced combination of all three which gives to the whole army efficiency and power.

It is just the same with the true Church of Christ. Its members all love the same Saviour, and are led by the same Spirit; all wage the same warfare against sin and the devil, and all believe the same gospel. But the work of one soldier of Christ is not the work of another. Each is appointed by the Great Captain to fill his own peculiar position, and each is specially useful in his own department.

Thoughts such as these come across my mind, when I turn from Whitefield, Wesley, and Grimshaw, to the fourth spiritual hero of the last century—William Romaine. In doctrine and practical piety, the four good men were, in the main, of one mind. In their mode of working, they were curiously unlike one another. Whitefield and Wesley were spiritual cavalry, who scoured the country, and were found everywhere. Grimshaw was an infantry soldier, who had his head-quarters at Haworth, and never went far from home. Romaine, in the meantime, was a commander of heavy artillery, who held a citadel in the heart of a metropolis, and seldom stirred beyond his walls. Yet all these four men were mighty instruments in God's hand for good; and not one of them could have been spared. Each did good service in his own line; and not the least useful, I hope to show, was the Rector of Blackfriars, William Romaine. In what are called *popular* gifts, no doubt, he was not equal

to his three great contemporaries. But none of the three, probably, was so well fitted as he was to fill the position which he occupied in London.

William Romaine was born at Hartlepool, in the county of Durham, on the 25th of September 1714. His father was one of the French Protestants who took refuge in England after the revocation of the edict of Nantes. He settled at Hartlepool as a corn merchant, and appears to have prospered in business. At any rate, he brought up a family of two sons and three daughters, and left behind a high character as a kind and estimable man when he died, 1757, at the ripe age of eighty-five.

There is every reason to believe that Romaine's parents were decidedly religious people, and that from his earliest years he saw true Christianity both taught and exemplified in his own home. The value of this rare privilege can hardly be overrated. The seeds of a long life of service and usefulness were certainly sown by the Holy Ghost in this Hartlepool home. Romaine never forgot this. In a letter written to a friend when he was seventy years old, he uses the following expressions: "Mr. Whitefield used often to put me in mind how singularly favoured I was. He had none of his family converted; while my father, mother, and three sisters were like those blessed people of whom it is written, 'Jesus loved Martha and her sister, and Lazarus.' And as they loved him again, so do we."

At the age of ten, Romaine was sent to a well-known grammar school at Houghton-le-Spring, in the county of Durham, founded by the famous Bernard Gilpin at the time of the Protestant Reformation. At this school he remained seven years. From thence, in the year 1731, he was sent to Oxford; and after first entering Hertford College, was finally removed to Christ Church. For the next six years he appears to have resided principally at Oxford, until he took his degree as Master of Arts in October 1737.

Of Romaine's manner of life at Oxford we know nothing, except the fact that he was a hard reader, and had a high reputation as a man of ability. Of his friends, companions, and associates, we have no record. This at first sight seems somewhat remarkable, when we remember that it was precisely at this period that "Methodism," so-called, took its rise at the University. In fact, it was just the time when John Wesley, Charles Wesley, Whitefield, Ingham, and Hervey, were beginning to work for Christ in Oxford, and had formed a kind of religious society. There is not, however, the slightest trace of any communication between them and Romaine. The most natural supposition is, that he was wholly absorbed in literary pursuits, and allowed himself no time for other work. To this we may add the fact, that the natural bent of his character would probably incline him to keep by himself and stand alone.

The high character which he attained in the university, as a learned man, is clearly shown by an anecdote related of him by his curate and successor, Mr. Goode, after his death. He says in his funeral sermon: "Dress was never

a foible of Mr. Romaine's. His mind was superior to such borrowed ornaments. Immersed in the noble pursuit of literature, before his consecration to a still more exalted purpose, he paid but little attention to outward decoration. Being observed at Oxford, on one occasion, to walk by rather negligently attired, a visitor inquired of a friend, Master of one of the colleges: 'Who is that slovenly person with his stockings down?' The master replied: 'That slovenly person, as you call him, is one of the greatest geniuses of the age, and is likely to be one of the greatest men in the kingdom."'

Commendation like this was, of course, somewhat exaggerated and extravagant. But at any rate, there can be no doubt that Romaine left Oxford a thorough scholar and a well-read man. His worst enemies in after-life could never lay to his charge that he was "unlearned and ignorant." They might dislike his doctrinal views, but they could never deny that in any matter of Hebrew, Greek, or Latin criticism, his opinion was entitled to respect. Well would it be for the Churches, if in this respect there were more evangelical ministers who walked in the steps of Romaine. Grace and soundness in the faith, diligence and personal piety, are undoubtedly the principal things. But book-learning ought not to be despised. An ignorant and ill-read ministry, in days of intellectual activity, must sooner or later fall into contempt.

Romaine was ordained deacon at Hereford in 1736, by Bishop Egerton; and priest in 1738, by the Bishop of Winchester, the notorious Dr. Hoadley. The history of the first eleven years of his ministerial life is involved in much uncertainty. I am unable to tell the reader who gave him a title for orders, or why he was ordained at Hereford. I can only find out that his first engagement was the curacy of Lewtrenchard, near Okehampton, in Devonshire. He went there on a visit to an Oxford friend, whose father lived at Lidford, and upon the express condition that his friend should find him work. He only remained here about six months. From Lewtrenchard he removed into the diocese of Winchester, and was curate of Banstead, near Epsom, for anything we can see, for an unbroken period of ten years. Much of his after-course in life probably hinged on this curacy. It was here that he became acquainted with Sir Daniel Lambert, an alderman of London, who lived in the parish, and was lord-mayor in 1741. He thought so highly of Romaine that he appointed him his chaplain during the year of his mayoralty—a circumstance which brought him into notice as a preacher, both at St. Paul's Cathedral and in many other London pulpits.

It is highly probable that the ten years which Romaine spent at Banstead were years of deep study and literary pursuits. It was at this time that he published two volumes in reply to Warburton's "Divine Legation of Moses," in which he ably controverted the main positions of that mischievous book. He also prepared for the press a new edition of the Hebrew Concordance and Lexicon of Marius de Calasio, in four large volumes—a work which required

very close attention, and which employed him no less than seven years. The small size of his cure at Banstead no doubt left him abundant time for study; and this time was well spent. The extremely firm and unwavering position which he assumed on points of doctrine in after life, may be traced in all probability to the quiet ten years which he spent in his Surrey curacy. Foundation-stones are often laid in a young minister's mind during his residence in such a position, which nothing in after-life can ever shake or displace.

One thing, at all events, is very certain, whatever else is uncertain, about Romaine's ministerial beginnings. There never seems to have been a period, from the time of his ordination, when he did not preach clear, distinct, and unmistakable evangelical doctrines. The truths of the glorious gospel appear to have been applied to his heart by the Holy Spirit from the days of his childhood at Hartlepool. From the very first he was a well-instructed divine, and, unlike many clergymen, had nothing to unlearn after he was ordained.

The proof of this may be seen in the sermon which he preached in St. Paul's Cathedral, as chaplain to the Lord Mayor, on September 2, 1741. At this time, it will be remembered, he was only twenty-seven years old. The title of this sermon is, "No Justification by the Law of Nature," and the text is Romans ii. 14, 15. Cadogan, his biographer, justly remarks on this sermon: "Although we do not discover in this discourse the same fertile experience, use, and application of the truth as are to be found in his later writings, yet we discover the same truth itself by which he was then made free from the errors of the day, and in the enjoyment of which he lived and died. The truth is, he was a believer possessed of that unfeigned faith which dwelt in his father and mother before him, and we are persuaded that it was in him also."

The second marked period in Romaine's ministerial life extends from 1748 to 1766. Within this space of eighteen years he met with some of his greatest trials, and filled many different posts in the Lord's vineyard, but always in London. I may add, that at no time in his life, perhaps, was he more useful and more popular. He was in the full vigour of body and mind, and enjoyed a reputation as a bold and uncompromising preacher of evangelical doctrine throughout the metropolis, which few other living men equalled, and fewer still surpassed.

The first post that Romaine regularly occupied in London was that of lecturer at St. Botolph's, Billingsgate. The circumstances which led to his appointment were so singular that I think it well to mention them. They supply an admirable illustration of the manner in which God works by his providence in finding a right position for his people. It seems, then, to have been Romaine's intention, after finishing his edition of Calasio's Lexicon, to return to his native county, and to seek employment near his home. In fact, he had actually packed up his trunks, and sent them on board ship with this view. But as he was going to the water-side, in order to secure his own passage, he

was met by a gentleman, an entire stranger to him, who stopped and asked him if his name was Romaine. The gentleman had formerly known his father, and was led to make the inquiry by observing a strong resemblance to him in the clergyman whom he met. After some conversation about his family, this gentleman, who was a man of some influence in the city, told him that the lectureship of St. Botolph's, Billingsgate, was then vacant, and that if he liked to become a candidate for the post, he would gladly exert his influence in his behalf. Romaine, seeing in this unexpected providence the finger of God, at once consented, provided he was not obliged to canvass the voters in person, a custom which he always thought inconsistent with the office of a clergyman. The result was, that in the autumn of 1748 he was chosen lecturer of St. Botolph's, and commenced his long career as a London clergyman.

It is deeply instructive to observe in a case like this, how God chooses the habitation of his people, and places them where he knows it is best for them to be. Cadogan, Romaine's excellent biographer, remarks on this part of his history: "A settlement in the metropolis was the thing of all others which he last thought of, and to which he was the least inclined. From the bent of his genius to the study of nature, of minerals, fossils, and plants, and the wonders of God in creation, a country life, so favourable to these pursuits, would have been chosen by him. But God chose otherwise for him; and by a circumstance trivial and accidental to appearance, but in reality a turn of providence such as decides the condition of most men, called him to a city-lectureship, and so detained him in London, where he was kept to the end of his existence as a witness for Jesus Christ, with abilities as truly suited to this meridian as those of the Apostle Paul to the meridian of Ephesus, Corinth, or Rome."

In the year 1749, he was chosen lecturer of St. Dunstan's in the West—an appointment which brought down on him one of the fiercest storms of persecution which he had to face in the course of his ministry. The Rector of St. Dunstan's, for some reason, disputed his right to the pulpit, and occupied it himself during the time of prayers, in order to exclude him from it. Romaine, in the meantime, appeared constantly in his place to assert his claim to the lectureship, and his readiness to perform the duties of the office. The affair was at length carried into the Court of King's Bench, and after hearing the cause argued, Lord Mansfield decided that Romaine was legally entitled to the lectureship, and that seven o'clock in the evening was a convenient time to preach the lecture.

Even then, however, the troubles of the lectureship were not over. Cadogan says that even after Lord Mansfield's decision, the churchwardens refused to open the doors of the church till seven o'clock, and to light it when there was occasion. The result was, that Romaine frequently read prayers and preached by the light of a single candle, which he held in his own hand.

Besides this, as the church doors were kept shut until the precise moment fixed for preaching the lecture, the congregation was usually assembled in Fleet Street waiting for admission. The consequence was a great concourse of people, collected in a principal thoroughfare of the metropolis, and though not noisy or disorderly, occasioning much inconvenience to those who passed that way. This state of things actually continued for some time. Happily for all parties, Dr. Terrick, Bishop of London, who had once held the lectureship himself, happened to pass through Fleet Street one evening when the congregation were waiting outside St. Dunstan's. Observing the crowd, he asked the cause of it, and being told that it was Romaine's congregation, he interfered with the rector and churchwardens on their behalf, expressed great respect for the lecturer, and obtained for him and his hearers that the service should begin at six, that the doors should be opened in proper time, and that lights should be provided in the winter season. From this time forth Romaine continued in the quiet exercise of his ministry at St. Dunstan's, without disturbance, and to the edification of many, to the end of his life. In fact, he held this lectureship for no less than forty-six years, though it was only worth eighteen pounds a-year!

In the year 1750, Romaine was appointed assistant morning-preacher at St. George's, Hanover Square, and held the office for five years. Of all the many pulpits which he occupied during his long ministry, this was by far the most important. Standing, as the church does, in an extremely prominent position in the west end of London, and well known as the mother-church of the most fashionable quarter of the metropolis, it opened up to him a great and effectual door of usefulness. Romaine, in many respects, was just the man for the post. His undeniable powers as a preacher attracted attention. His well-known scholarship commanded respect even from those who did not agree with him. And best of all, his bold, uncompromising declarations of the real gospel of Christ, and plain denunciations of fashionable sins, were precisely the message which the Bible leads us to expect God will bless. It is not, perhaps, too much to say, that from the day St. George's, Hanover Square, was built, to this very day, it has never had its pulpit so well filled on Sunday mornings as it was for five years by Romaine.

The circumstances of the times in which he preached at St. George's made his testimony peculiarly valuable and important. **A** cold heartless scepticism about all the leading truths of Christianity prevailed widely among the upper and middle classes of society. Bishop Butler had complained not long before, that "many persons seemed to take it for granted that Christianity was fictitious, and that nothing remained but to set it up as a principal object of mirth and ridicule." That such principles naturally produced the utmost profligacy, recklessness, and immorality of practice, no Bible reader will be surprised to hear. In fact, the utter ungodliness of the age was so thorough that

few living in the present day can have the slightest conception of it. Against this ungodliness Romaine boldly lifted up a standard, and blew the trumpet of the gospel with no uncertain sound. He was in the highest sense a man for the times, and he was exactly in the right place. Those who would like to see how boldly and powerfully he delivered his Master's message, would do well to read two sermons which he delivered at St. George's, one of them entitled, "A Method for Preventing the Frequency of Robberies and Murders;" and the other, "A Discourse on the Self-Existence of Jesus Christ."

Just about the time that he was removed from the pulpit of St. George's, the inhabitants of London were dreadfully frightened by two severe shocks of an earthquake. Happening simultaneously with the awful earthquake which in a moment overthrew Lisbon and destroyed forty thousand persons, this event caused great alarm. Thousands of persons fled to Hyde Park and spent the night there. Hundreds crowded to the places of worship where so-called Methodist doctrines were preached, and anxiously sought consolation. Even Sherlock, Bishop of London, thought it necessary to publish a Letter to his Diocese on the subject, in which he exhorted the clergy "to awaken the people, to call them from their lethargy, and make them see their own danger." Here again Romaine was just the man for the occasion. He preached and printed two sermons, which even now will amply repay perusal. One of them is called, "An Alarm to a Careless World and the other, "The Duty of Watchfulness Enforced." Delivered at the time they were, we cannot doubt that they are specimens of the kind of sermons which Romaine usually preached at that period of his ministry. I think it impossible to read them without feeling deep regret that the Church of England in the west end of London has not had more of such preaching.

Romaine's ministry, as assistant morning-preacher at St. George's, Hanover Square, began in April 1750 and ended in September 1755. During that time he preached occasionally at Bow Church, in exchange with Dr. Newton, afterwards Bishop of Bristol; and also at Curzon Chapel, then called St. George's, Mayfair, in exchange with the Rector. The circumstances under which he left St. George's are so remarkable that they deserve special notice.

It appears that the office which he filled as assistant morning-preacher was not a regularly endowed and independent appointment, but one entirely dependent on the Rector, and kept up at his own option, discretion, and expense. The Rector of St. George's, who first invited Romaine to take the office, and then at the end of five years removed him from it, was Dr. Andrew Trebeck. His appointment was owing to his high character and reputation, and not to personal friendship; his removal was caused by the popularity and plainness of his ministry. The real truth was, that his preaching attracted such crowds to the old parish-church, that the regular seat-holders took offence, and complained that they were put to inconvenience. Strong pressure was

brought to bear upon the Rector; and he, "willing to please" the parishioners, gave Romaine notice to terminate his engagement. This notice he received quietly, saying, that "he was willing to relinquish the office, hoping that his doctrine had been Christian, and owning the inconvenience which had attended the parishioners." A more discreditable affair than this probably never disfigured the parochial annals of the diocese of London. An eminent and godly clergyman was removed from his post because he attracted too many hearers! And yet, at this very time, scores of clergymen in London churches were no doubt preaching every week to empty benches or to congregations of half-a-dozen people, without any one interfering with them!

It is consolatory to think that there was one parishioner at least in St. George's, Hanover Square, who made a noble protest against the treatment which Romaine received. This was the old Earl of Northampton. He rebuked those who complained that the parish-church was crowded, by reminding them that they bore the greater crowd of a ball-room, an assembly, or a play-house, without the least complaint. "If," said he, "the power to attract be imputed as a matter of admiration to Garrick, why should it be urged as a crime against Romaine? Shall excellence be considered exceptionable only in divine things?"—Another member of the congregation who is said to have adhered steadfastly to Romaine's cause at this juncture, was Mr. John Sanderson, afterwards state-coachman to George III. This worthy man lived to the great age of eighty-nine and died in 1799, after long adorning the doctrine he professed by an exemplary and godly life.

During the five years that Romaine was preaching at St. George's, he occupied for a short time the situation of Professor of Astronomy at Gresham College. There is little record extant of what he did in this office, and it is doubtful whether he was very successful in it. In all probability he was a much better theologian than an astronomer, and was better fitted for lecturing about Christ and heaven than about the sun, moon, and stars. But whatever credit he lost as a professor of astronomy, he retrieved a hundred-fold by his conduct about the Bill for removing Jewish disabilities. This he thought it his duty to oppose vehemently, to the great gratification of many citizens of London. In fact, his arguments were so highly esteemed, that his various letters on the subject were collected into a pamphlet and reprinted by his friends in the City in 1753.

From the date of Romaine's removal from St. George's, Hanover Square, until his appointment to the Rectory of St. Anne's, Blackfriars, we find him occupying several different positions, and never long in any one. The only post which he never vacated was the Lectureship of St. Dunstan's, Fleet Street. In the beginning of 1756 he became curate and morning-preacher at St. Olave's, Southwark. He continued in this office until the year 1759, residing most of the time in Walnut Tree Walk, Lambeth. After leaving St.

Olave's, he was morning-preacher for two years at St. Bartholomew the Great, near West Smithfield. From thence he removed to Westminster Chapel, but only preached there six months. The abrupt termination of his engagement there was occasioned by a fresh piece of persecution. The Dean and Chapter of Westminster withdrew their patronage and protection from the chapel, and refused him their nomination for a licence to preach there. From this time he had no stated employment in the Church, except the Lectureship of St. Dunstan's, until he was chosen Rector of St. Anne's, Blackfriars, in 1766.

We must not, however, suppose for a moment that Romaine was an idle man during the years when he had no settled employment in the morning of Sundays. He appears to have been constantly preaching charity sermons in London churches; for which purpose, from his great popularity, his services were eagerly sought after. He also preached very frequently at the chapel of the Lock Hospital, upon the first institution of that charity.

At this period of his life he was several times called upon to preach before the University of Oxford. This, however, came to an end after he had preached two sermons, entitled, "The Lord our Righteousness," on March 20, 1757, in St. Mary's. These sermons gave great offence, and he was never allowed to enter the University pulpit again after delivering them. They are to be found among his published works at the present day, and furnish a melancholy proof of the spiritual darkness in which Oxford was sunk a hundred years ago! The governing body of an University which could exclude a man from its pulpit for preaching such doctrine as these sermons contain, must indeed have been in a miserably benighted state of mind. Romaine's dedication of them to Dr. Randolph, President of Corpus Christi, and Vice-chancellor of the University, is well worth reading. He says, "When I delivered these discourses I had no design to make them public; but I have been since compelled to it. I understand they gave great offence, especially to you, and I am in consequence thereof refused the university pulpit. In justice, not to myself, for I desire to be out of the question, but to the great doctrine here treated of, namely, the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the only ground of our acceptance and justification before God the Father, I have sent to the press what was delivered from the pulpit. I leave the friends of our Church to judge, whether there be anything herein advanced contrary to the Scriptures and to the doctrines of the Reformation. If not, I am safe. If there be, you are bound to make it appear. You have a good pen, and have great leisure; make use of them; and I hope and pray you may make use of them for your good and mine." Comment on the whole affair is needless. The treatment which Romaine received at Oxford was as little creditable to the University as that which he received in the west end of London was to the parishioners of St. George's, Hanover Square.

It was about this period of his life that Romaine became intimate with the well-known Lady Huntingdon, who made him one of her domestic chaplains. In this capacity he used to preach frequently at her house, both in London and near Ashby-de-la-Zouch, and at the various chapels, or preaching-houses, which she built at Brighton, Bath, and elsewhere. To her friendship, indeed, he was finally indebted for his appointment to the Rectory of St. Anne's, Blackfriars, in the fifty-second year of his age. The circumstances, however, of his appointment to this post, the history of his twenty-nine years' ministry in it, and some account of his writings, letters, and character, are matters which I shall reserve for another chapter.

CHAPTER II.

Rector of St. Anne's, Blackfriars, 1764—Difficulties in the way of his Appointment- Letter to Lady Huntingdon—Usefulness at Blackfriars—Peculiarities of Address and Temperament—Last Illness and Dying Saying—Death 1795—Public Funeral—Literary Remains.

THE biographer of William Romaine can hardly fail to observe that his life naturally divides itself into three portions. The first extends from his birth to the commencement of his London ministry in 1746. The second ranges from 1746 to his final settlement at St. Anne's, Blackfriars, in 1764. The third comprises his ministry at Blackfriars, up to the time of his death in 1795. It is this third and last portion of his history which I propose to deal with in this chapter.

Romaine's appointment to the rectory of St. Anne's, Blackfriars, took place at a very critical period in his ministerial life. He was now about fifty years old. After preaching as a lecturer in London for eighteen years, he was still without a stated position as the incumbent of a parish. Every door seemed shut against him. Opposition and persecution followed him wherever he went. It seemed, in short, a question whether he had not better give up London altogether, and turn his steps elsewhere. Lord Dartmouth offered him a living in the country. Whitefield urged him to accept a large church at Philadelphia, in America. Hot-headed friends pressed him to let them build him a chapel. It seemed far from improbable that he might fulfil the predictions of his enemies, and end by leaving the Church of England and becoming a regular dissenter.

But Romaine had a very deep sense of the value of the Church of England. He loved her Articles and Prayer-Book with no common love. Whatever her defects in administration, and however ill she treated her best children, he believed that the occupant of her pulpits had peculiar advantages; and he steadfastly refused to leave her. He was catholic, and kind, and liberal to those who were not churchmen, and lived in habits of friendly communion with many of them. To this even John Wesley, Arminian as he was, bears strong testimony. In a letter to Lady Huntingdon, in 1763, he says, "Mr. Romaine has shown a truly sympathizing spirit, and acted like a brother." But nothing could induce him to give up his own position and become a Nonconformist. At this juncture he was greatly strengthened in his determination by the advice of that excellent clergyman, Walker of Truro. He resolved to stick by the Church in which he had been ordained, and to wait patiently for some door to be opened. His patience was at length rewarded. By a singular train of providences, he became rector of an important parish in the City, and there

spent the last twenty-nine years of his life in the undisturbed exercise of his ministry.

The circumstances under which Romaine was appointed to his new sphere of duty were somewhat remarkable. The patronage of the united parish of St. Andrew by the Wardrobe with St. Anne's, Blackfriars, is vested in the Lord-Chancellor and the parishioners alternately. The immediate predecessor of Romaine was Mr. Henley, nephew of the then Lord-Chancellor Henley. He only held the living about six years, and died of putrid fever, caught in visiting a parishioner. Upon his death the appointment fell to the turn of the parishioners; and at once some friends of Romaine, without his knowledge and consent, resolved to nominate him as a candidate for the vacant living. It was soon found that at least two-thirds of the parishioners were in his favour; and though he refused to canvass for votes himself, his interest was warmly supported by Lady Huntingdon, Mr. Thornton, and Mr. Madan.

There were two other candidates beside Romaine, and in accordance with the custom on such occasions, he was called on to preach a probationary sermon before the parishioners. This sermon, preached on September 30, 1764, from 2 Cor. iv. 5, is to be found among his printed works, and is creditable both to his heart and head. One part of it, in which he assigned his reason for not canvassing the electors in person, deserves particular notice. He says,—

"Some have insinuated that it was from pride that I would not go about the parish, from house to house, canvassing for votes; but truly it was from another motive,—I could not see how this could promote the glory of God. How can it be for the honour of Jesus that his ministers, who have renounced fame, riches, and ease, should be most anxious and earnest in the pursuit of those very things which they have renounced? Surely this would be getting into a worldly spirit, as much as the spirit of parliamenteering. And as this method of canvassing cannot be for Jesus' sake, so neither is it for our honour; it is far beneath our function: nor is it for your profit. What good is it to your souls—what compliment to your understanding—what advantage to you, in any shape, to be directed and applied to by every person with whom you have any connection, or on whom you have any dependence? Is not this depriving you of the freedom of your choice? Determined by these motives, when my friends, of their own accord, put me up as a candidate, to whom I have to this hour made no application, directly or indirectly, I left you to yourselves. If you choose me, I desire to be your servant for Jesus' sake; and if you do not, the will of the Lord be done."

It deserves notice that this sermon did the preacher's cause no harm, but rather operated in his favour. It was well received by the parishioners, and was published at their request.

Notwithstanding the strong support Romaine received, his appointment was not finally secured without great difficulty and opposition. A hotly contested election, a poll, a scrutiny and an appeal to the Court of Chancery, interposed between the first movement of his friends and the final accomplishment of their wishes. At length, after eighteen months' delay, all obstacles were overcome, a decree was given in his favour by Lord Henley, and he was instituted and inducted rector of St. Anne's, Blackfriars, in February 1766. No one, perhaps, throughout this anxious period of suspense, worked more heartily in his behalf than Lady Huntingdon. She saw clearly the immense importance of such a champion of Christ's gospel being settled in a prominent position in London; and she left no stone unturned to secure his success. Help, too, was raised up in some quarters of a most unexpected kind. A publican in the parish is said to have been one of his most active supporters and canvassers; and at first no one could understand the reason. But after all was over, on Romaine's calling on him to thank him, the worthy publican replied, "Indeed, sir, I am more indebted to you than you to me; for you have made my wife, who was one of the worst, the best woman in the world."

Romaine entered on his new sphere with a very deep sense of his own insufficiency. He who intended him to be a wise master-builder, taught him to lay a sound foundation of self-abasement and humility. His own letters on the occasion of his election give a very graphic picture of his feelings.

In one he says: "My friends are rejoicing all around me, and wishing me a joy that I cannot take. It is my Master's will, and I submit. He knows best what is for his own glory and his people's good; and I am certain he makes no mistakes on either of these points. But my head hangs down upon the occasion, through the awful apprehension which I ever had of the care of souls. I am frightened to think of watching over two or three thousands, when it is work enough to watch over one. The plague of my own heart almost wearies me to death; what can I do with so vast a number?"

In a letter to Lady Huntingdon, of the same date, he says: "Now, when I was setting up my rest, and had begun to say unto my soul, Soul, take thine ease, I am called into a public station, and to the sharpest engagement, just as I had got into winter quarters. I can see nothing before me, so long as breath is in my body, but war; and that with unreasonable men, a divided parish, an angry clergy, and a wicked world, all to be resisted and overcome. Besides all these, a sworn enemy, subtle and cruel, with whom I can make no peace—no, not a moment's time, night and day—with all his children and his host, is aiming at my destruction. When I take counsel of the flesh I begin to faint; but when I go to the sanctuary, I see my good cause, and my almighty Master and true Friend, and then he makes my courage revive. Although I am no way fit for the work, yet he called me to it, and on him I depend for strength to do it, and for success to crown it. I utterly despair of doing

anything as of myself, and therefore the more I have to do, the more I shall be forced to live by faith on Him. In this view I hope to get a great income by my *living*. I shall want Jesus more, and shall get closer to him."

Whatever anticipations of trouble Romaine may have formed in his mind, he met with comparatively little at Blackfriars. In fact, his twenty-nine years' ministry there, compared to his earlier days, was a season of quietness. Enemies and opponents no doubt he had, like every faithful clergyman who preaches the gospel. But they could do little to disturb him. The result was that the latter years of his life, though not less useful than the former, were certainly less eventful. Like the river that at first dashes brawling down the mountain-side, but glides silently along when it reaches the plains and becomes navigable, so Romaine's ministry from the time of his settlement at Blackfriars, though it made less noise, was probably more beneficial to the Church of Christ. He necessarily became less of an itinerant and missionary preacher. The claims of his own parish and pulpit obliged him to stay much at home, and absorbed much of his time and attention. But his usefulness, whatever some hasty judges might think, was not only not diminished, but was probably much increased.

The plain truth is, that as rector of a London parish, Romaine became a rallying point for all in London who loved evangelical truth in the Church of England. Man after man, and family after family, gathered round his pulpit, until his congregation became the nucleus of a vast amount of good in the metropolis. His constant, unflinching declaration of Christ's whole truth insensibly produced a powerful impression on men's minds, and made them understand what a true clergyman of the Church of England ought to be. His undeniable learning made him an adversary that few cared to cope with, and gave a weight to his assertions which they did not always possess when they came from the lips of half-educated men. His position gave him peculiar advantages. Almost within sight both of St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey, he held a post from which he was always ready to go forth and do battle, either with tongue or pen. If error arose rampant, he was on the spot prepared to attack it. If truth was assaulted, he was equally prepared to sally forth and defend it. In short, the good that he did, as rector of Blackfriars, though less showy, was probably more solid and permanent than the good that he did all the rest of his life.

To attempt to chronicle all the events of his life during his twenty-nine years at Blackfriars would be of little use, even if we possessed materials for doing it. From the very beginning of his incumbency, he took great pains to have the services of his church conducted with strict reverence and good order. Like many other clergymen, he never rested till he had put the fabric of his church in good repair, had built a good parsonage, and made the parochial schools thoroughly efficient These things once accomplished, he gave

himself entirely to the direct work of his office. He was never idle, and seldom passed a silent Sabbath. Preaching, visiting, writing for the press, or corresponding with the many who asked his advice, occupied nearly all his time to his life's end.

He was not perhaps what would be called now-a-days a "genial" man. He was "naturally close and reserved," says Cadogan, "irritable to a certain degree, short and quick in his replies, and frequently mistaken as being rude and morose where he meant nothing of the kind. Had he paid more attention than he did to the various distresses of soul and body which were brought before him, he would have had no time left for reading, meditation, and prayer, and, in short, for what every man must attend to in private who would be useful in public. It was not uncommon for him to tell those who came to him with cases of conscience and questions of spiritual concern, that he said all he had to say in the pulpit: Thus people might be hurt for the moment by such a dismissal, but they had only to attend his preaching, and they soon found that their difficulties had impressed him as well as themselves; that they had been submitted to God, and that they had been the subject of his serious and affectionate consideration."

These observations of Cadogan's deserve special attention. Romaine, unhappily, is not the only minister whose reputation has suffered from gross misrepresentation and misconstruction. Few men, unfortunately, are so liable to be unfairly judged as ministers who fill prominent posts, and are eminent for gifts and graces. Even Christians are too ready to set them down as haughty, proud, cold, distant, reserved, and unsocial, without any just ground for so doing. The immense demands continually made on their time and strength, the many private difficulties they frequently have to contend with, the absolute necessity they are under of much daily reading, meditation, and communion with God—all these things are too often entirely forgotten. Many indeed are the wounds of feeling which ministers have to endure from the unkind remarks of unreasonable friends. The cup which Romaine had to drink is a cup which many clergymen have to drink in the present day.

The few anecdotes preserved about Romaine are all somewhat characteristic of the man as Cadogan describes him. They all give the idea of one who was short and abrupt to an extreme in his communications; so much so, in fact, that we can quite understand captious people being offended by him. And yet the anecdotes always tend to prove that he was a man of no common graces, gifts, and good sense.

He was one evening invited to a friend's house, and, after tea, the lady of the house asked him to play at cards, to which he made no objection. The cards were brought out, and when all were ready to begin playing, Romaine said, "Let us ask the blessing of God." "Ask the blessing of God!" said the lady in great surprise; "I never heard of such a thing before a game of cards."

Romaine then inquired, “Ought we to engage in anything on which we cannot ask God’s blessing?” This reproof put an end to the card-playing.

On another occasion he was addressed by a lady, who expressed the great pleasure she had enjoyed under his preaching, and added that she could comply with his requirements, with the exception of one thing. “And what is that?” asked Romaine. “Cards, sir,” was the reply. “You think you could not be happy without them?” “No, sir, I know I could not.” “Then, madam,” said he, “cards are your god, and they must save you.” It is recorded that this pointed remark led to serious reflections, and finally to the abandonment of card-playing.

When the unhappy Dr. Dodd was sentenced to death for forgery, Romaine, among others, felt a deep and melancholy interest about him. There was once a time when he and Dodd had been on terms of intimacy, from their common zeal for the prosecution of Hebrew learning. When, however, poor Dodd began to love the world better than Christ, the intimacy gradually ceased, and he actually told Romaine that he hoped he would not acknowledge him if they met in public! Before his execution, Romaine visited him in Newgate at his particular request, and many were anxious to know what he thought of the prisoner’s spiritual state. But the only answer that could be extracted from him was this: “I hope he may be a real penitent; but there is a great difference between saying, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner,’ and really feeling it.”

Short and abrupt as the rector of Blackfriars evidently was in his demeanour, he was very sensible of his own deficiencies of temper, and very willing to confess himself in the wrong. On one occasion a dissenting minister who often attended his lectures, called on him to complain of some severe reflections which he thought Romaine had made upon Dissenters. Having made his complaint, Romaine replied, “I do not want to have anything to say to you, sir.”—“If you will hear me,” added the other, “I will tell you my name and profession. I am a Protestant dissenting minister.”—“Sir,” said Romaine, “I neither wish to know your name nor your profession.” Upon this the unfortunate Nonconformist bowed and took his leave. Not long after Romaine, to the great surprise of his hearer and reprover, returned the visit, and after the usual salutation, began: “Well, Mr. T., I am not come to renounce my principles, **I** have not changed my sentiments, I will not give up my preference for the Church of England; but I am come as a Christian to make some apology. I think my behaviour to you sir, the other day, was not becoming, nor such as it should have been.” They then shook hands, and parted good friends.

Romaine’s last illness found him still doing his Father’s business, and happy in his work. He lived to the great age of eighty-one, and enjoyed the full use of his faculties to the very last. During the last ten years of his life he

seems to have become greatly mellowed and softened, and to have been a beautiful example of that lovely sight, a godly old man, “a hoary head found in the way of righteousness.” He went gradually down the valley toward the river, with all the golden richness of a setting sun in summer. There appeared to be little but heaven in his sermons or in his life; and, like dying Baxter, he spoke of his future home with great familiarity, like one who had already seen it.

It was well remarked by some of his friends, in these last days of his ministry, that he was a true diamond, naturally rough and pointed, but the more he was broken by years the more he appeared to shine. There was often a light upon his countenance—and particularly when he preached—which looked like the dawn, or a faint appearance of glory. If any one asked him how he did, his general answer was, “As well as I can be out of heaven.” He made this reply, shortly before his death, to a friend of a different communion, and then added, “There is but one central point, in which we must all meet—Jesus Christ and him crucified.” This was the object which he always kept in sight—the wonderful God-man, whom, according to his own words, “He had taken for body and for soul, for time and for eternity, his present and everlasting all.”

Romaine’s simple and regular habits of life, no doubt, had much to say to his length of days and vigorous old age. There are ministers, unquestionably, who seem independent of regular food and hours, and whose iron constitutions appear to stand any strain. But their number is small. Of Romaine, Cadogan says, “His hour of breakfast was six in the morning; of dinner, half-past one in the afternoon; and of supper, seven in the evening. His family were assembled to prayer at nine o’clock in the morning, and at the same hour at night. His Hebrew Psalter was his constant companion at breakfast, and he often said how much his first repast was sanctified by the Word of God and prayer. From ten o’clock to one he was generally employed in visiting the sick and friends. He retired to his study after dinner, and sometimes walked again after supper in summer. After evening service in his family, he retired again to his study, and to his bed at ten. From this mode of living he never deviated, except when he was a guest in the house of friends; and then he breakfasted at seven, dined at two, and supped at eight. His adherence to rules, in this respect, was never more marked than in a circumstance which happened during the last years of his life. He was invited by an eminent dignitary of the Church to dine with him at five o’clock. He felt respect for the inviter, and wished to show it. Instead, therefore, of sending a written apology, he waited upon him himself, thanked him for the invitation, and excused himself by pleading his long habits of early hours, his great age, and his often infirmities.”

Romaine's death-bed was a beautiful illustration of the truth of John Wesley's saying, "Our people die well! The world may find fault with our opinions, but the world cannot deny that our people die well." This was eminently the case with Romaine. His fatal illness attacked him on Saturday, the 6th of June 1795, and put an end to his life on the 26th of July. The last sermon which he preached was on the preceding Thursday evening at St. Dunstan's. It was an exposition of the eighteenth chapter of St. John's Gospel; and he remarked to his curate that he must get on as fast as he could, lest he should not get through the Gospel before the lectures closed for the summer. His concluding sermon at Blackfriars was on the preceding Tuesday morning, from the thirteenth verse of the 103rd Psalm—"Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." These dates are worthy of special notice. This fine old servant of Christ, at the age of eighty-one, was evidently preaching at least three days in every week!

From the moment he was seized with his illness, he considered it to be his last; and though he had occasional symptoms of recovery during the seven weeks that his illness continued, he never entered the pulpit again. He spoke of himself as a dying man, but always as one that had peace in believing. On the morning of his seizure he came down to breakfast as usual, in the house at Balham Hill, where he was staying, and presided in family devotion. It was observed that he prayed most earnestly to God that "he would fit them for, and support them in their trials that day, which might be many." He returned the same day to his own house in London, and conversed most profitably and comfortably in the way, on the approach of death and near prospect of eternity. He said, "How animating is the view which I have now of death, and the hope laid up for me in heaven, full of glory and immortality!" On arriving at home his last illness struck him.

He continued at his own house in London under medical advice for three weeks, and used all the means which his physician thought fit to prescribe. But he said, "You are taking much pains to prop up this feeble body; I thank you for it: it will not do now." His Hebrew Psalter lay close by him, and out of it he frequently read a verse or two, not being able to attend to more. From the nature of his illness he could speak but little; and being once asked if he would see some of his friends, he replied, "He needed no better company than he enjoyed."

"On the 26th of June," says his biographer, Cadogan, "he left town, and went to a friend's house at Tottenham for a fortnight, where he was so much better that he was able to walk about the garden. Upon his return to town, he told his curate that he had laid long in the arms of death, and if recovering, it was very slowly. 'But,' said he, 'this is but a poor dying life at best; however, I am in His hands who will do the best for me; I am sure of that. I have lived to experience all I have spoken and all I have written, and I bless God for

it.'— To another friend he said, 'I have the peace of God in my conscience, and the love of God in my heart; and that, you know, is sound experience. I knew before that the doctrines I preached were truths, but now I experience them to be blessings.'—Thanking another friend for a visit, he told him 'that he had come to see a saved sinner.'—This he often affirmed should be his dying breath; he desired to die with the language of the publican in his mouth—'God be merciful to me a sinner!'"

He continued in London for a few days in this blessed frame of mind, and then returned on the 13th of July to the house of his friend, Mr. Whitridge, at Balham Hill, where he had been the day that he was first taken ill. From this date his strength rapidly decayed, but his faith and patience never failed him. He was often saying, "How good is God! What comforts does he give me! What a prospect do I see before me of glory and immortality! He is my God in life, in death, and throughout eternity." On the 23rd of July, as he sat at breakfast, he said, "It is now nearly sixty years since God opened my mouth to publish the everlasting sufficiency and eternal glory of the salvation in Christ Jesus; and it has now pleased him to shut my mouth, that my heart might feel and experience what my mouth has so often spoken."

On the 24th of July, after being helped down-stairs for the last time, he said, "Oh, how good is God! With what a night has he favoured me!" requesting at the same time that prayer without ceasing might be made for him, that his faith and patience might not fail. He spoke with great kindness and affection of his wife; and, thanking her for all her care of him, said, "Come, my love, that I may bless you: the Lord be with you a covenant God for ever to save and bless you!"—Mrs. Whitridge, in whose house he was dying, on seeing and hearing him bless his wife, said, "Have you not a blessing for me, sir?" "Yes," he replied; "I pray God to bless you." And so he said to every one that came to him.

On Saturday the 25th of July he was not able to get down stairs, but lay upon a couch all day, in great weakness of body, but strong in faith, giving glory to God, and the power of Christ resting on him. Towards the close of the day some thought they heard him say, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for thou art with me."—About an hour before his death, Mr. Whitridge, his host and friend, said, "I hope, my dear sir, you now find the salvation of Jesus Christ precious, dear, and valuable to you." His answer was, "He is a precious Saviour to me now." These were the last words he spoke to man. To the Lord he was heard to say, "Holy! holy! holy! blessed Jesus! to thee be endless praise!" About midnight, as the Sabbath began, he breathed his last, and entered that eternal rest which remains for the people of God. Well saith the Scriptures, "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace" (Ps. xxxvii. 37).

Romaine's friends and relations had fully intended to give him a private funeral. But this proved impossible. The many hearers of a minister who had preached the gospel in London for forty-five years could not be prevented showing their respect and affection by following him to the grave. Scores looked up to him as their spiritual father. Hundreds venerated his character and consistency, even though they did not fully embrace the gospel he had preached. The consequence was that his funeral, in spite of all wishes and intentions, was a peculiarly public one. Fifty coaches followed the hearse from Clapham Common, besides many persons on foot. By the time the procession reached the obelisk in St. George's Fields, the multitude collected was very great indeed; but silence, solemnity, and decorum prevailed. At the foot of Blackfriars' Bridge the city marshals were waiting with their men in black silk scarfs and hatbands, and rode before the hearse to the entrance of the church. They had been ordered out by the lord mayor, as his token of respect for the memory of a man whose character had stood so high in the city of London. Thus went to his long home on August 3rd, 1795, amidst every outward mark of respect and affection, the venerable rector of Blackfriars. At the end of his long forty-five years' ministry no one lifted up his tongue against him. The winds and waves of persecution had at length ceased. He had fairly lived down all opposition, and he died honoured and lamented. So true is that word of Scripture, "When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Prov. xvi. 7).

Romaine was once married, though rather later in life than many ministers. His wife was a Miss Price, and, as we have already seen, she survived him. He had children, of whom one son died at Trincomalee in 1782, to his great sorrow. Another son was with him in his last illness, of whom he spoke with great affection, expressing his hope of him as a son in the faith, as well as a son in the flesh. Of his other children I can find no account.

Most of Romaine's literary works are so well known that I need not trouble my readers with any account of them. His largest work, "The Life, Walk, and Triumph of Faith," has been often reprinted, and holds a respectable position among English evangelical classics. His "Twelve Sermons on the Law and the Gospel" have also been more than once republished, and in my judgment deservedly so. I regard it as the best and most valuable work he ever sent to the press. His expository sermons on the 107th Psalm and on Solomon's Song are not so well known as they ought to be. The latter especially throws more light on a most difficult book of Scripture than many works of much higher pretensions. His single sermons are of course very little known. But no one who wants to get a just idea of the kind of preacher Romaine was, should omit to read them. For simplicity, pith, point, and forcibleness,—for short, true, vigorous sentences,—they will bear a favourable comparison with almost any evangelical sermons of the last century.

Many of his letters in his published correspondence are very valuable. Like John Newton, he wrote in days when the modern machinery of societies, committee meetings, Exeter Hall gatherings, &c., was totally unknown, and when a man had more leisure to write long letters than he has now. Those who like reading Newton's "Cardiphonia" and "Omicron," would find Romaine's correspondence well worth perusing. Christ and the Bible are the two golden threads which seem to run through all his letters.

Perhaps, after all, one of the most useful publications that Romaine ever sent forth is one that is hardly known at all. I may be wrong, but my firm belief is, that my estimate of its usefulness will be found correct at the last day. The publication I refer to is called "An Earnest Invitation to the Friends of the Established Church to join with several of their brethren, clergy and laity, in London, in setting apart an hour of every week for Prayer and Supplication during the present troublesome times." There is strong reason to believe that this little publication was made eminently useful when it first appeared, and has led to an amazing succession of supplications, intercessions, and prayers down to the present day. It was beyond all doubt a move in the right direction. It sent men to Him who alone has all hearts in his hands, and alone can revive his Church in dead times. Who can tell but that much of the Spirit's work in the last sixty years will be found at last to have been the answer to Romaine's prayers? One fact, at any rate, deserves to be specially remembered. When Romaine first sent forth this Invitation in 1757, he only knew about a dozen clergymen in all England who were willing to unite with him, and join his scheme of prayer. But when he died, in 1795, he reckoned that the number of like-minded men in the Establishment had swelled to at least three hundred. That fact alone speaks for itself.

I leave the fourth spiritual hero of the eighteenth century here, and ask my readers to give his name the honour that it deserves. He had not all the popular gifts of some of his contemporaries. He had not the genial attractive characteristics of many in his day. But take him for all in all, he was a great man, and a mighty instrument in God's hand for good. He stood in a most prominent position in London for forty-five years, testifying the gospel of the grace of God, and never flinching for a day. He stood alone, with almost no backers, supporters, or fellow-labourers. He stood in the same place, constantly preaching to the same hearers, and not able, like Whitefield, Wesley, Grimshaw, and other itinerant brethren, to preach old sermons. He stood there witnessing to truths which were most unpopular, and brought down on him opposition, persecution, and scorn. He stood in a most public post, continually watched, observed, and noticed by unfriendly eyes, ready to detect faults in a moment if he committed them. Yet, during all these forty-five years, he maintained a blameless character, firmly upheld his first principles to the last, and died at length, like a good soldier at his post, full of days and

honour. The man of whom these things can be said must have been no common man. It is place and position that specially prove what we are. In England one hundred years ago there were not four spiritual champions greater and more honourable than William Romaine.