

GODMAN JOHN DAVIDSON

RAMBLES OF A
NATURALIST

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John D. Godman

Rambles of a Naturalist

The account of the life and character of Dr. John D. Godman has been prepared from the several brief memoirs and eulogies published shortly after his decease, and from the tract issued by "The Tract Association of Friends," entitled "A Sketch of the Life and Character of Dr. John D. Godman."

"The Rambles of a Naturalist" have been republished from "The Friend," a weekly paper, for the columns of which the essays were originally contributed.

MEMOIR

OF

DR. JOHN D. GODMAN

Dr. John D. Godman, the author of the pleasing descriptions which, under their simple title, "Rambles of a Naturalist," contain so much of the beautiful and true, was born at Annapolis, in Maryland, in the year 1798. At a very early age he was deprived, by their death, of both his parents. He was then placed under the care of an aunt, whose intellectual attainments and elevated piety, united to much sweetness of disposition, eminently qualified her for the direction of the youthful mind. His fondness for books and aptitude for learning were remarkable; while his frank, sensitive, and sweet temper gained the affection of all around him. It is said that he had such a reverence for truth, even from infancy, that he was never known to equivocate. When he attained the age of six years, his excellent aunt died. The patrimony which should have provided for his wants, was lost through the mismanagement of those to whom the care of it had been entrusted; and thus, without resources, and without suitable protection, he was left exposed to adversity and temptation. It appears, however, that the moral and religious impressions which had already been made upon his mind, though obscured for a time, were never obliterated. In his last illness he bore this testimony to the affectionate religious care of his pious aunt. "If," said he, "I have ever been led to do any good, it has been through the influence of her example, instruction, and prayers."

Little is known of the next ten years of his life. He appears to have had some opportunities for attending school; but to his own native energy and uncommon intellectual endowments, self cultured under many obstacles and discouragements, is his future superiority of mental attainment to be chiefly attributed. An interesting incident of his character, after he had attained his fifteenth year, has been furnished by a physician who was, in 1810, a senior student in the office of Dr. Thomas E. Bond, of Baltimore. "The office," says he, "was fitted up with taste, and boys, attracted by its appearance, would frequently drop in to gaze on the labelled jars and drawers. Among them I discovered one evening an interesting lad, who was amusing himself with the manner in which his comrades pronounced the 'hard words' with which the furniture was labelled. He appeared to be quite an adept in the Latin language. A strong curiosity soon prompted me to inquire, 'What is your name, my little boy?' He was small of his age. 'My name is John D. Godman.' 'Did you study the Latin language with Mr. Creery?' 'No, he does not teach any but an English school.' 'Do you intend to prosecute your studies alone?' 'I do; and I will, if I live, make myself a Latin, Greek, and French scholar.'"

In 1812 he was bound an apprentice to a printer of a newspaper, in Baltimore, but soon became much dissatisfied with the occupation, which, he said, in a letter to a friend, "cramped his genius over a font of types, where there are words without ideas." He had been placed in this situation against his own wish, being anxious to enter a more intellectual pursuit, and had selected that of medicine; but his guardian was opposed to it.

His early views of the Christian religion are thus expressed in a letter to a friend, in the early part of 1814: "I have not ever had a fixed determination to read the works of that modern serpent (Thomas Paine), nor had I determined not to do it; and it seems to me surprising that a fellow-student of yours should recommend the perusal of such writings.

"There is a great comfort in the belief of that glorious doctrine of salvation that teaches us to look to the Great Salvator for happiness in a future life; and it has always been my earnest desire, and I must endeavour to die the death of the righteous, that my last end and future state may be like His. It would be a poor hope indeed, it would be a sandy foundation for a dying soul, to have no hope but such as might be derived from the works of Bolingbroke and Paine; and how rich the consolation and satisfaction afforded by the glorious tidings of the blessed Scriptures! It is my opinion there has never one of these modern deists died as their writings would lead us to believe; nor are but few of their writings read at the present day."

About this time he appears to have left the printing-office, and became a sailor on board the flotilla stationed in Chesapeake bay, under Com. Barney. It was while in this situation that an incident occurred to which he has himself attributed much of the buoyancy and energy of his character. A raw sailor, who had been sent aloft by the captain, and was busy in performing some duty which required him to stoop, was observed to falter and grow dizzy. "*Look aloft*" cried the captain; and the fainting landsman, as he instinctively obeyed the order, recovered his strength and steadiness. The young philosopher read a moral in this trifling incident which he never forgot, and which frequently animated and aroused him in the most adverse circumstances. It is not treating the subject with undue levity to add, that in the last and closing scene of his life, when the earth was receding from his view, and his failing strength admonished him of his peril, the watchword was still ringing in his ear. At that awful period he "looked aloft" to "worlds beyond the skies," and therein derived strength and hope, which supported him in his passage through the narrow valley.

At the close of the war, young Godman received an invitation from Dr. L., the physician already mentioned, to come to his house in Elizabethtown, Pa., where he would have the opportunity of studying medicine. This offer was accepted with joy; and he resolved, by the most indefatigable study and diligence, to deserve the kindness of his friend. "In six weeks," says the doctor, "he had acquired more knowledge in the different departments of medical science, than most students do in a year. During this short period he not only read Chaptal, Fourcroy, Chesselden, Murray, Brown, Cullen, Rush, Sydenham, Sharp, and Cooper, but wrote annotations on each, including critical remarks on the incongruities in their reasonings. He remained with me five months, and at the end of that time you would have imagined from his conversation that he was an Edinburgh graduate." When he sat down to study, he was so completely absorbed by his subject, that scarcely any event would withdraw his attention.

Returning to Baltimore, he commenced the attendance of the medical lectures in that city, and pursued his studies under the direction of an eminent medical preceptor. In this situation he, through many affecting difficulties, finished his education as a physician. At one time his feelings are thus described in a letter: "I have been cast among strangers. I have been deprived of property by fraud that was mine by right. I have eaten the bread of misery. I have drunk of the cup of sorrow. I have passed the flower of my days in a state little better than slavery, and have arrived at what? Manhood, poverty, and desolation. Heavenly Parent, teach me patience and resignation to Thy will!"

Professor Sewall, in his eulogy on Dr. Godman, remarks, in relation to this period of his life: "He pursued his studies with such diligence and zeal as to furnish, even at that early period, strong

intimations of his future eminence. So indefatigable was he in the acquisition of knowledge, that he left no opportunity of advancement unimproved; and, notwithstanding the deficiencies of his preparatory education, he pressed forward with an energy and perseverance that enabled him not only to rival, but to surpass all his fellows."

While attending his last course of lectures in the University of Maryland, Professor Davidge, who was his preceptor, was disabled by the fracture of a limb from completing the course. He selected his gifted pupil to supply his place. "This situation he filled for several weeks with so much propriety; he lectured with such enthusiasm and eloquence; his illustrations were so clear and happy, as to gain universal applause. At the time he was examined for his degree, the superiority of his mind, as well as the extent and accuracy of his knowledge, were so apparent, that he was marked by the professors of the university as one who was destined at some future period to confer high honour upon the profession."

Dr. Godman graduated in the Second month, 1818, and soon after settled in Maryland, as a practitioner, in a county bordering on the Chesapeake, the spot described with so much truthful beauty in some of the numbers of his "Rambles of a Naturalist." Here he devoted all the intervals of leisure from a laborious practice to the study of natural history, in which, from his ardent love of the subject, and his minute, persevering investigation of it, he became so distinguished.

His intellectual powers had fitted him for a wider sphere than that of a village doctor. His nature urged him to enter on a field more worthy of his gifts. He returned to Baltimore, with the hope of being engaged in the university as a professor, but found that arrangements different from what he anticipated had been made. Here he married, and not long after received an appointment to fill the chair of surgery in the medical college of Ohio, located at Cincinnati. He was recommended by one of the professors of the school in which he had been educated, in this emphatic language: "In my opinion, Dr. Godman would do honour to any school in America."

The Ohio school not succeeding, Dr. Godman resided in Cincinnati for one year only; but in that short period inscribed himself deeply on the public mind. The memory of his works remains. In the midst of his varied scientific labours, he found time to cultivate his social relations, and every day added a new friend to the catalogue of those who loved him for his simplicity and frankness, not less than they admired him for his genius, vivacity, and diligence.

He returned to Philadelphia, and soon after began to lecture on anatomy and physiology, his first and greatest objects. His residence in this city continued for several years, during which time he wrote many valuable papers on scientific subjects, and published his celebrated work, "The Natural History of American Quadrupeds," which has attained deserved popularity.

The fame of Dr. Godman as a teacher of anatomy was now widely spread, and he was solicited to accept the professorship of that branch in the Rutgers Medical College at New York. His practice soon became extensive, and the affairs of the college prosperous, when, in the midst of his second course of lectures, a severe cold settled on his lungs, accompanied by a copious hemorrhage, and compelled him to abandon his pursuits, and flee for his life to a milder region. He sailed for the West Indies, and passed the remainder of the winter and spring in the island of Santa Cruz. Returning after this to Philadelphia, he took a house in Germantown, and by the labours of his pen, continued to support his family. His consumptive disease continued, though for a time so far mitigated, that his friends flattered themselves his life was yet to be spared to science and his country. At this time he says of himself: "At present, that I am comparatively well, my literary occupations form my chief pleasure; and all the regret I experience is, that my strength is so inadequate to my wishes. Should my health remain as it is now, I shall do very well; and I cannot but hope, since we have recently passed through a severe spell of cold weather without my receiving any injury. All my prospects as a public teacher of anatomy are utterly destroyed, as I can never hope, nor would I venture if I could, again to resume my labours. My success promised to be very great, but it has pleased God I should move in a different direction."

His disease advanced with steady pace, and, though there were many fluctuations, his strength continued to decline. The gradual progress of his disorder allowed him many intervals of comparative ease. In these he returned to his literary labours with his usual ardour, and wrote and translated for the press until within a few weeks of his death. Perfectly aware of the fatal character of his disorder, he watched its progress step by step with the coolness of an anatomist, while he submitted to it with the resignation of a Christian. The "Rambles of a Naturalist" were among the last productions of his pen, and were written in the intervals of acute pain and extreme debility. These essays are not inferior in poetical beauty, and vivid and accurate description, to the celebrated letters of Gilbert White on the natural history of Selbourne. He came to the study of natural history as an investigator of facts, and not as a pupil of the schools; his great aim being to learn the instincts, the structure, and the habits of all animated beings. This science was a favourite pursuit, and he devoted himself to it with indefatigable zeal. He has been heard to say that, in investigating the habits of the shrew mole, he walked many hundred miles. His powers of observation were quick, patient, keen, and discriminating: it was these qualities that made him so admirable a naturalist.

His fame, however, rested chiefly, during his life, upon his success as a teacher of anatomy, and in this capacity he raised himself at once to the top of his profession. He was so intent on making his students understand him, and he was so fully master of the subject himself, that his clear and animated flow of eloquence never failed to rivet their attention; and he became, wherever he taught, the idol of his pupils. His lectures on anatomy were real analytical experiments. The subject was placed before the class; tissue and muscle and blood, vessel and bone, were laid bare in their turn, their use and position exemplified to the eye, and enforced by the most lively and precise description; while the student was at the same time receiving the most valuable lessons in practical dissection.

Dr. Godman had a remarkable capacity for concentrating all his powers upon any given object of pursuit. What he had once read or observed he rarely, if ever, forgot. Hence it was that, although his early education was much neglected, he became an excellent linguist, and made himself master of Latin, French, and German, besides acquiring a knowledge of Greek, Italian, and Spanish. He had read the best works in these languages, and wrote with facility the Latin and French. His character and acquirements are justly portrayed by a distinguished journalist, in the extracts which follow. "The tributes," said he, "which have been paid in the newspapers to the late Dr. Godman, were especially due to the memory of a man so variously gifted by nature, and so nobly distinguished by industry and zeal in the acquisition and advancement of science. He did not enjoy early opportunities of self-improvement, but he cultivated his talents, as he approached manhood, with a degree of ardour and success which supplied all deficiencies; and he finally became one of the most accomplished general scholars and linguists, acute and erudite naturalists, ready, pleasing, and instructive lecturers and writers, of his country and era. The principal subject of his study was anatomy in its main branches, in which he excelled in every respect. His attention was much directed also to physiology, pathology, and natural history, with an aptitude and efficiency abundantly proved by the merits of his published works, which we need not enumerate.

We do not now recollect to have known any individual who inspired us with more respect for his intellect and heart, than Dr. Godman; to whom knowledge and discovery appeared more abstractly precious; whose eye shed more of the lustre of generous and enlightened enthusiasm; whose heart remained more vivid and sympathetic amidst professional labour and responsibility, always extremely severe and urgent. Considering the decline of his health for a long period, and the pressure of adverse circumstances, which he too frequently experienced, he performed prodigies as a student, an author, and a teacher; he prosecuted extensive and diversified researches; composed superior disquisitions and reviews, and large and valuable volumes; and in the great number of topics which he handled simultaneously, or in immediate succession, he touched none without doing himself credit, and producing some new development of light, or happy forms of expression. He lingered for years under consumption of the lungs; understood fully the incurableness of his melancholy state; spoke

and acted with an unfeigned and beautiful resignation; toiled at his desk to the last day of his thirty-two years, still glowing with the love of science and the domestic affections."

Upon all this bright attainment and brighter promise for the future the grave has closed. Divine Providence saw fit to arrest him in the midst of his unfinished labours. We have now to view him in another and far more important relation – that which man, as an immortal being, bears to his Almighty Creator.

Dr. Godman's generous and enthusiastic devotion to science and learning commands our admiration; and perhaps no more ennobling pursuits can occupy the mind of him who looks not beyond the present state of existence; but when these are brought into contrast with the solemn and momentous concerns of eternity, they sink into utter insignificance. How then was the subject of this memoir influenced by *religious* considerations?

Unhappily, the philosophical and religious opinions of Dr. Godman were formed originally in the school of the French naturalists of the last century. Many of the most distinguished of these men were avowed atheists, and a still greater number rejected absolutely the Christian revelation. Such is fallen human nature! Surrounded by the most magnificent displays of Almighty Wisdom – placed on a scene where all things speak of God, and invite us to worship and obey Him – a purblind philosophy may devote herself to the study of His works, yet pass by the testimony they furnish of His existence and attributes, and see nothing in all this wonderful creation more noble than the mere relations of colour and form. It was so with Dr. Godman; for, while assisted by such lights as these, and guided alone in his investigations by perverted reason, he became, as he tells us, *an established infidel*, rejecting revelation, and casting all the evidences of an existing Deity beneath his feet. In the merciful providence of a long-suffering God, the light of truth at length beamed upon his darkened understanding. In the winter of 1827, while engaged in his course of lectures in New York, an incident occurred which led him to a candid perusal of the New Testament. It was a visit to the death-bed of a Christian – the death-bed of a student of medicine. There he saw what reason could not explain nor philosophy fathom. He opened his Bible, and the secret was unfolded. He was in all things a seeker of the truth, and could not satisfy himself with any superficial examination.

He applied himself assiduously to the study of the New Testament; and that this sincere and thorough examination of the inspired volume was made the means of his full conversion, will best appear from his own eloquent pen. The following is an extract of a letter he addressed to a medical friend, Dr. Judson, a surgeon in the navy of the United States, who was at that time in the last stage of consumption:

"Germantown, December 25th, 1828.

In relation to dying, my dear friend, you talk like a sick man, and just as I used to do, when very despondent. Death is a debt we all owe to nature, and must eventually ensue from a mere wearing out of the machine, if not from disease. Nature certainly has a strong abhorrence to this cessation of corporeal action, and all animals have a dread of death who are conscious of its approach. A part of our dread of death is purely physical, and is avoidable only by a philosophical conviction of its necessity; but the greater part of our dread, and the terrors with which the avenues to the grave are surrounded, are from another and a more potent source. "'Tis conscience that makes cowards of us all,' and forces us by our terrors to confess, that we dread something beyond physical dissolution, and that we are terrified not at merely ceasing to breathe, but that we have not lived as we ought to have done, have not effected the good that was within the compass of our abilities, and neglected to exercise the talents we possessed, to the greatest advantage. The only remedy for this fear of death is to be sought by approaching the Author of all things in the way prescribed by himself, and not according to our own foolish imaginations. Humiliation of pride, denial of self, subjection of evil tempers and dispositions, and an entire submission to His will for support and direction, are the best preparatives for such an approach. A perusal of the gospels, in a spirit of real inquiry after a direction

how to act, will certainly teach the way. In these gospels the Saviour himself has preached His own doctrines, and he who runs may read. He has prescribed the course; He shows how the approval and mercy of God may be won; He shows how awfully corrupt is man's nature, and how deadly his pride and stubbornness of heart, which cause him to try every subterfuge to avoid the humiliating confession of his own weakness, ignorance, and folly. But the same blessed Hand has stripped death of all the terrors which brooded around the grave, and converted the gloomy receptacle of our mortal remains into the portal of life and light. Oh! let me die the death of the righteous; let my last end and future state be like his!

This is all I know on the subject. I am no theologian, and have as great an aversion to priestcraft as one can entertain. I was once an infidel, as I told you in the West Indies. I became a Christian from conviction produced by the candid inquiry recommended to you. I know of no other way in which death can be stripped of its terrors; certainly none better can be wished. Philosophy is a fool, and pride a madman. Many persons die with what is called *manly firmness*; that is, having acted a part all their lives, according to their prideful creed, they must die *game*. They put on as smooth a face as they can, to impose on the spectators, and die *firmly*. But this is all deception: the true state of their minds at the very time, nine times out of ten, is worse than the most horrible imaginings even of hell itself. Some who have led lives adapted to sear their conscience and petrify all the moral sensibilities, die with a kind of indifference similar to that with which a hardened convict submits to a new infliction of disgraceful punishment. But the man who dies as a man ought to die, is the humble-minded, believing Christian; one who has tasted and enjoyed all the blessings of creation; who has had an enlightened view of the wisdom and glory of his Creator; who has felt the vanity of merely worldly pursuits and motives, and been permitted to know the mercies of a blessed Redeemer, as he approaches the narrow house appointed for all the living. Physical death may cause his senses to shrink and fail at the trial; but his mind, sustained by the Rock of Ages, is serene and unwavering. He relies not on his own righteousness, for that would be vain; but the arms of mercy are beneath him, the ministering spirits of the Omnipotent are around him. He does not die manfully, but he rests in Jesus; he blesses his friends, he casts his hope on One all-powerful to sustain and mighty to save, then sleeps in peace. He is dead, but liveth; for He who is the resurrection and the life has declared, 'Whoso believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.' 'And whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die.'" ...

This letter, which so truly contrasts the death-bed scene of the infidel with that of the Christian, so beautifully portrays the history of the change which had been effected in Dr. Godman's own sentiments and affections, and so clearly points the benighted wanderer to the true source of life and light, was not lost upon his friend to whom it was addressed. It described his condition, and it reached his heart.

Dr. Judson, though religiously instructed when young, having a pious clergyman for his father, and another for his elder brother, had nevertheless long since freed himself from what he called the prejudices of education, the shackles of priestcraft, and was ranging the fields of infidelity. He had acquired wealth and reputation, and was an estimable man in all the domestic relations of life; but the self-denying doctrines of the Saviour were too humbling to his proud spirit, and he could not submit to their influence. At the time he received Dr. Godman's letter, however, he was gloomy and despondent, looking forward with fearful forebodings to the period of his dissolution, which seemed not far distant. He had no confidence but that of the sceptic – no hope but that of ceasing to be. Aware of the fatal nature of the disease under which he had lingered for years, he had long been arming himself to meet the king of terrors with composure, that he might die like a philosopher, "*with manly firmness*;" but as he drew nearer to the grave, the clouds and darkness thickened around him, and he began to fear that there might be something beyond this narrow prison. His infidelity now began to give way, and he inquired with solicitude: "Is there such a thing as the new birth, and if so, in what does it consist?" He at length consented to make the investigation recommended by Dr. Godman.

He took up the New Testament, and read it in the spirit of candid inquiry. A conviction of the truth of its doctrines fastened upon him. The clouds which had so long enveloped him were dissipated, light broke in upon his mind, and he was enabled to lay hold of the promises. The remaining days of his life were devoted to fervent prayer and the constant study of the Scriptures. Through the holy influences of Divine grace, he was enabled to rely with undoubting confidence on the infinite merits of his Redeemer, his soul was filled with heavenly composure, and the last words he uttered were, "Peace, peace." If he did not die with "*manly firmness*," he "*rested in Jesus*."

Dr. Godman's views of the authenticity and practical tendency of the gospel, are expressed with singular force and beauty in the following extract from an essay written not long before his death:

"Is proof wanting that these gospels are true? It is only necessary for an honest mind to read them candidly, to be convinced. Every occurrence is stated clearly, simply, and unostentatiously. The narrations are not supported by asseverations of their truth, nor by parade of witnesses: the circumstances described took place in presence of vast multitudes, and are told in that downright, unpretending manner which would have called forth innumerable positive contradictions had they been untrue. Mysteries are stated without attempt at explanation, because *explanation* is not necessary to establish the *existence* of facts, however mysterious. Miracles, also, attested by the presence of vast numbers, are stated in the plainest language of narration, in which the slightest working of imagination cannot be traced. This very simplicity, this unaffected sincerity, and quiet affirmation, have more force than a thousand witnesses – more efficacy than volumes of ambitious effort to support truth by dint of argumentation.

What motive could the evangelists have to falsify? The Christian kingdom is not *of this world*, nor *in it*. Christianity teaches disregard of its vanities, depreciates its honours and enjoyments, and sternly declares that none can be Christians but those who escape from its vices and allurements. There is no call directed to ambition, no gratification proposed to vanity: the sacrifice of self, the denial of all the propensities which relate to the gratification of passion or pride, with the most humble dependence upon God, are invariably taught and most solemnly enjoined, under penalty of the most awful consequences. Is it, then, wonderful that such a system should find revilers? Is it surprising that sceptics should abound, when the slightest allowance of belief would force them to condemn all their actions? Or is it to be wondered at that a purity of life and conversation so repugnant to human passion, and a humility so offensive to human pride, should be opposed, rejected, and contemned? Such is the true secret of the opposition to *religion*— such the cause inducing men who lead unchristian lives, to array the frailties, errors, weaknesses, and vices of individuals or sects, against *Christianity*, hoping to weaken or destroy the system by rendering ridiculous or contemptible those who *profess* to be governed by its influence, though their conduct shows them to be acting under an opposite spirit.

What is the mode in which this most extraordinary doctrine of Christianity is to be diffused? By force, temporal power, temporal rewards, earthly triumphs? None of these. By earnest persuasion, gentle entreaty, brotherly monition, paternal remonstrance. The dread resort of threatened punishment comes last; exhibited in sorrow, not in anger; told as a fearful truth, not denounced with vindictive exultation; while to the last moment the beamy shield of mercy is ready to be interposed for the saving of the endangered.

Human doctrines are wavering and mutable; the doctrines of the blessed and adorable Jesus, our Saviour, are fixed and immutable. The traditions of men are dissimilar and inconsistent; the declarations of the gospel are harmonious, not only with each other, but with the acknowledged attributes of the Deity, and the well-known condition of human nature.

What do sceptics propose to give us in exchange for this system of Christianity, with its 'hidden mysteries,' 'miracles,' 'signs and wonders?' Doubt, confusion, obscurity, annihilation! Life, without higher motive than selfishness; death, without hope! Is it for this that their zeal is so warmly displayed in proselyting? Is such the gain to accrue for the relinquishment of our souls? In very deed, this is

the utmost they have to propose; and we can only account for their rancorous efforts to render others like themselves, by reflecting that misery loves company."

His intellect was strong and undimmed to the last, and almost the only change that could be observed in his mind was that which belongs to a being on the verge, of eternity, in whose estimate the concerns of this life are sinking in comparison with the greater interests of that to which he is approaching. His principal delight was in the promises and consolations of the Bible, which was his constant companion. On one occasion, a few days before his death, while reading aloud from the New Testament to his family, his voice faltered, and he was desired to read no longer, as it appeared to oppress him. "It is not that," replied he; "but I feel so in the immediate presence of my Maker, that I cannot control my emotion!" In a manuscript volume which he sent to a friend, and which he intended to fill with original pieces of his own composition, he wrote as follows: "Did I not in all things feel most thoroughly convinced that the overruling of our plans by an all-wise Providence is always for good, I might regret that a part of my plan cannot be executed. This was to relate a few curious incidents from among the events of my most singularly guided life, which, in addition to mere novelty or peculiarity of character, could not have failed practically to illustrate the importance of inculcating correct religious and moral principles, and imbuing the mind therewith from the very earliest dawn of intellect, from the very moment that the utter imbecility of infancy begins to disappear. May His holy will be done, who can raise up abler advocates to support the truth." "This is my first attempt to write in my Token; why may it not be the last? Oh! should it be, believe me, that the will of God will be most acceptable. Notwithstanding the life of neglect, sinfulness, and perversion of heart which I so long led, before it pleased Him to dash all my idols in the dust, I feel a humble hope in the boundless mercy of our blessed Lord and Saviour, who alone can save the soul from merited condemnation. May it be in the power of those who chance to read these lines, to say, Into thy hands I commit my spirit, for Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord! thou God of Truth!"

A reliance on the mercies of God through Jesus Christ became indeed the habitual frame of his mind, and imparted to the closing scenes of his life a solemnity and a calmness, a sweet serenity and a holy resignation, which robbed death of its sting and the grave of its victory. The following extracts from some of his letters afford additional evidence of the great and glorious change which he had been permitted to experience.

"Philadelphia, Feb. 17th, 1829.

"My dear Friend, – Since my last to you my health has suffered various and most afflicting changes." – "But thanks to the mercies of Him who is alone able to save, the valley and shadow of death were stripped of their terrors, and the descent to the grave was smoothed before me. Relying on the mercies and infinite merits of the Saviour, had it pleased God to call me then, I believe I should have died in a peaceful, humble confidence. But I have been restored to a state of comparative health, perhaps nearly to the condition in which I was when I wrote to Dr. Judson; and I am again allowed to think of the education of my children and the support of my family."

In reply to a letter from Professor Sewall, giving an account of the last moments of his friend Dr. Judson, he responds in the following feeling manner:

"Germantown, May 21st, 1829.

My dear Friend, – I feel very grateful for your attention in sending me an account of our dear Judson's last moments. After all his doubts, difficulties, and mental conflicts, to know that the Father of mercies was pleased to open his eyes to the truth, and shed abroad in his heart the love and, salvation offered through the Redeemer, is to me a source of the purest gratification, and a cause of the most sincere rejoicing. The bare possibility of my having been even slightly instrumental in effecting the blessed change of mind he experienced, excites in me emotions of gratitude to the Source of all good which words cannot express." – "My health has been in a very poor condition since my last to you. The warm weather now appears to have set in, and possibly I may improve a little, otherwise it will

not be long before I follow our lately departed friend. Let me participate in the prayers you offer for the sick and afflicted, and may God grant me strength to die to His honour and glory, in the hopes and constancy derived from the merits and atonement of the blessed Saviour."

"Philadelphia, Oct. 6th, 1829.

My dear Friend, – My health is, as for a considerable time past, in a very tolerable condition; that is, I can sit up a great part of the day, writing or reading, without much injury. My emaciation is great, and, though not very rapid, is steady, so that the change in my strength takes place almost imperceptibly. On the whole, though I suffer greatly, compared with persons in health, yet so gently have the chastenings of the Lord fallen upon me, that I am hourly called upon for thankfulness and gratitude for His unfailing mercies. Equal cause have I had for rejoicing, that I have learned to put my whole trust in Him, as He has raised me up help and friends in circumstances which seemed to render even hope impossible, and has blessed me and mine with peace and content in the midst of all afflictions, trials, and adversity."

In his last letter to Dr. Best, of Cincinnati, with whom he had long maintained an affectionate correspondence, he writes:

"It gives me great happiness to learn that you have been taught, as well as myself, to fly to the Rock of Ages for shelter against the afflictions of this life, and for hopes of eternal salvation. But for the hopes afforded me by an humble reliance on the all-sufficient atonement of our blessed Redeemer, I should have been the most wretched of men. But I trust that the afflictions I have endured have been sanctified to my awakening, and to the regeneration of my heart and life. May we, my dear friend, persist to cling to the only sure support against all that is evil in life and all that is fearful in death!"

Dr. Best's circumstances were in several respects similar to those of his friend Godman: like him, he had been a disbeliever in the Christian religion, and like him had been brought by a careful examination of its evidences to a perception and an acknowledgment of the truth. He too was at this time languishing in consumption, which brought him to the grave a few months after Dr. Godman; and like him he was supported and animated by the precious faith of the gospel, and yielded up his spirit in hope and peace.

Professor Sewall,¹ from whose account much of this memoir has been derived, remarks: "In the last letter which I ever received from him, he observes: 'I have just concluded the publication of the translation of Levasseur's account of Lafayette's progress through the United States, which will appear next week. My health has for the last week or two been very good, for me, since, notwithstanding my rather excessive application during this time, I continue to do well. My cough and expectoration are sufficiently troublesome; but by light diet, and avoiding all irritation, I have but very little trouble from night sweats, and generally sleep tolerably well. To-morrow I must resume my pen to complete some articles of zoology for the Encyclopedia Americana, now preparing in Boston. It shall be my constant endeavour to husband my strength to the last; and, by doing as much as is consistent with safety for the good of my fellow-creatures, endeavour to discharge a mite of the immense debt I owe for the never-failing bounties of Providence.'"

He did husband his strength, and he toiled with his pen almost to the last hours of his life; and by thus doing has furnished us with a singular evidence of the possibility of uniting the highest attainments in science, and the most ardent devotion to letters, with the firmest belief and the purest practice of the Christian. But the period of his dissolution was not distant: the summons arrived; and conscious that the messenger, who had been long in waiting, could not be bribed to tarry, he commended his little family in a fervent prayer to Him who has promised to be the 'Father of the fatherless, and the widow's God,' and then, with uplifted eyes and hands, and a face beaming with

¹ "An Introductory Lecture delivered November 1st, 1830, by Thomas Sewall, M. D., Professor of Anatomy and Physiology in the Columbian College, District of Columbia."

joy and confidence, resigned his spirit into the arms of his Redeemer, on the morning of the 17th of Fourth month, 1830.

A friend who was his constant companion during his sickness, and witnessed his last moments, writes thus:

"You ask me to give you an account of his last moments: they were such as have robbed me of all terror of death, and will afford me lasting comfort through life. The same self-composure and entire resignation which were so remarkable through his whole sickness, supported him to the end. Oh! it was not death; it was a release from mortal misery to everlasting happiness. Such calmness, when he prayed for us all – such a heavenly composure, even till the breath left him, you would have thought he was going only a short journey. During the day, his sufferings had been almost beyond enduring. Frequently did he pray that the Lord would give him patience to endure all till the end, knowing that it could not be many hours; and truly his prayers were heard. '*Lord Jesus, receive my soul*

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