

LIFE AND CHARACTER OF EDWARD OR PRAYING PAYSON

by Asa Cummings

A biography of the Rev. Edward Payson, the renowned Congregational minister known as 'Praying Payson' for his extraordinary devotion to prayer. Set against the backdrop of fifty years of eminent New England divines in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

36 Chapters

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02. Preliminary Remarks

Preliminary Remarks,

During a period of fifty years, embracing the last quarter of the eighteenth century and the first quarter of the nineteenth, the Congregational Church of New England was distinguished by a host of eminent Divines. Dr. Sprague's "Annals of the American Pulpit," Vols. I and II, contain a brief biography (not including those referred to in the foot-notes) of two hundred and eighteen Congregational ministers, whose labors covered more or less of the above period, and who were born in New England ; namely, one hundred and two in Massachusetts, ninety-five in Connecticut, fifteen in New Hampshire, four in Maine, one in Vermont, and one in Rhode Island. Of these, one hundred and thirty-three were honored with the titles of D.D. or LL.D., conferred, with rare exceptions, by New England colleges.

It is safe to say, that in no one period in the history of New England were there more talent and enterprise displayed in the cause of education and religion, including the missionary cause, than in the last and first quarters of the two centuries. Men of intellectual might and Christian zeal were found hard at work, not only as pastors, but also as tutors, professors, presidents of literary and theological institutions, missionaries, secretaries, authors, and editors. The most of these devoted men were contemporary with the subject of our sketch, their ministry extending into the nineteenth century, and running parallel with his, for a longer or shorter period.

While the New England hills and valleys were all ablaze with the intellectual and spiritual fires that emanated from school-house and academy, from college and theological seminary, from the pulpit and religious press, there was an evangelical fire burning in Portland, Maine; and so bright was the flame as to attract distant attention, and so intensely did it burn as to consume in a few brief years the devoted man who kindled it. That man was Edward Payson.

03. Paysons Parentage.

Paysons Parentage

Edward Payson was born at Rindge, New Hampshire, July 25th, 1783. His father, Rev. Seth Pay-son, was a man of piety and public spirit, somewhat distinguished as a clergyman, and favorably known as an author. His mother was an intelligent, devoted Christian woman.

Payson attributed his religious character and influence, under God, to the instruction, example, and prayers of his Christian parents. Among the earliest impressions made upon his mind by his mother was, that it was his duty to become religious in childhood.

04. Paysons Early Developments.

Paysons Early Developments

Payson early manifested a remarkable inquisitive-ness of mind, which his mother cherished by answering his almost endless inquiries. In the first developments of his moral powers, his infant mind grasped the fact that he was a sinner. He was often known to weep under the preaching of the Gospel when only three years old! He would frequently call his mother to his bedside to answer questions respecting his relation to God and a future world. It was the judgment of his mother that he was converted in childhood. It is believed that he never neglected private prayer while living under the parental roof. His early mental developments indicated that he would be a man of decision, enterprise, and perseverance. His taste for the sublime was remarkable in childhood. During a tempest he might be seen on the top of a fence, or some other eminence, while the lightings played and the thunders rolled around him, sitting in composure and enjoying the sublimity of the scene.

He was a very good reader at four years of age, and could transfer the contents of a book to his own mind with remarkable facility. All the books in his father's collection and in the town library, suitable to his age and attainments, were read before he left the paternal home, and made available in his ministry by the tenacity of his memory.

05. Paysons Early Literary Training.

Paysons Early Literary Training. This was conducted principally by his parents, excepting the studies preparatory to college, which were pursued, in part, at least, at a neighboring academy. He entered Harvard College in 1800, at seventeen years of age, at an advanced standing, and with the reputation of being a magnanimous, honorable, generous youth. Here he was known and respected for the purity of his morals, the regularity of his habits, and his amiable disposition ; as also for his mental industry. He had at college the reputation of being a " great reader." His fellow-students, before knowing the rapidity with which he acquired knowledge, and the strength and tenacity of his memory, rallied him as having a machine to turn over the leaves ; and, at another time, as having left off taking out books, because he had read all of the thousands in the alcoves of Old Harvard. After graduating, in 1803, he spent three years as principal of an academy in Portland, and commanded the esteem and veneration of his pupils.

06. Payson Awakened by the Death of a beloved Brother.

Payson Awakened by the Death of a beloved Brother In the early part of 1804, the death of his brother was the means of fixing his attention on religion more fully for the rest of his life. In a letter to his mother he writes : " Infatuated by the pleasures and amusements this place affords, I gradually grew cold and indifferent to religion. From this careless frame nothing but a shock like that I have received could have roused me. I hope, by the assistance of divine grace, this dispensation will prove of eternal benefit. ,,

07. An Experiment.

An Experiment

Young Payson made the experiment which most are disposed to make before fully consecrating themselves to Christ, and with this result, as stated by himself: "In the impracticable attempt to reconcile God and the world, I spend my time very unhappily, neither enjoying the comforts of this world nor of religion; but I have at last determined to renounce the false pleasures for which I pay so dear; and this I should have done long ago, but for the advice and example of some whose judgment I respected."

Payson s Review of his past Life and Covenant Engagement. Under date of July 25, 1805, he writes : " Having resolved this day to dedicate myself to my Creator by a written covenant, I took a review of my past life, and of the numerous mercies by which it has been distinguished. Then, with sincerity, I humbly hope, I took the Lord to be my God, and engaged to love and obey him. Relying on the Holy Spirit for assistance, I engaged to take the Holy Scriptures as the rule of my conduct, the Lord Jesus Christ to be my Saviour, and the Spirit of all grace and consolation as my Guide and Sanctifier. The vows of God are upon me."

08. Worldly Amusements ■ Rules of Action.

Worldly Amusements — Rules of Action To one who urged Mr. Payson to go into society and frequent public amusements, he wrote: " Can a man walk on pitch and his feet not be defiled ? Can a man take coals of fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?" In regard to worldly associations and amusements, Payson adopted the following simple rules :

1. To do nothing the lawfulness of which he doubted in any degree.
2. To consider everything unlawful which indisposes for prayer and interrupts communion with God.
3. Never to go into any company, business, or situation, in which he could not consistently ask and expect the divine blessing. By the help of these rules, he says, " I settle all my doubts in a trice."

09. Payson Makes a Public Profession of Religion.

Payson Makes a Public Profession of Religion

He joined the Church at Rindge, under the pastoral care of his father, while on a visit to his parents, during one of his quarterly vacations, Sept. 1, 1805. Soon after he writes to his mother: "As yet I have no reason to repent of the step I took while at home. I have felt wondrous brave and resolute since my return, but I rejoice with trembling. If I know anything of myself, I shall need pretty severe discipline through life, and I often shrink at the thought of the conflict that awaits me; but I am encouraged by the promise, that my strength shall be equal to my day."

October 6th he writes: " Since my return from Rindge I have hardly known one unhappy moment. I enjoy mental peace, and at times happiness inexpressible."

10. His Appreciation of his Conversion.

His Appreciation of his Conversion

Under the impulse of gratitude, and from a profound sense of obligation, he writes : " Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire ?' Zech. 3: 2. What a just and striking description of every sinner! To snatch a smoking brand from eternal burnings, and plant it among the stars in the firmament of heaven, there to shine like the sun forever! Such a brand am I; a brand yet smoking with the half-extinguished fires of sin ; a brand scorched and blackened by the flames of hell! What then do I owe to Him, who entered the furnace of divine wrath, that he might bring me out?"

11. An Important Step

An Important Step In 1806 Mr. Payson resigned the charge of the academy in Portland, and returned to his father's house, where he pursued his theological studies, till he entered the ministry. This step may be regarded as one of the most important of his life. His biographer thinks, had he entered at once upon the work of the ministry, as he contemplated, he had not been the minister that he became. In comparative retirement, with his father for his tutor, and with an illustration of the purity and power of Christianity before him in the lives of godly parents, he was most auspiciously situated.

He appreciated these advantages, and gave himself up to the work of preparation with an exclusive-ness and ardor perhaps never equaled.

12. Payson as a Bible Student.

Payson as a Bible Student

He seems to have concentrated all his powers upon the acquisition of scriptural knowledge, and the cultivation of Christian and ministerial graces. He entertained the most exalted views of the office of the ministry, and of the qualifications requisite, and sought them with a corresponding zeal.

He regarded himself not so much as a student of systems of divinity, drawn up by men, as a student of the Bible. He regarded these systems with jealousy. Doubtless the works of eminent divines, which he had already read, exerted some influence upon his mind; but in his independence as a thinker, and in his deep reverence for the word of God, he placed them all in subordination to that divine word, embracing that one book as an adequate foundation for his faith, and an infallible guide to duty. His reading was confined principally to such writings as helped to elucidate and unfold the literal meaning of the Bible. In this manner he studied the whole of the inspired book, so that there was not a verse on which he had not formed an opinion. In this way he acquired an unparalleled readiness to meet every question, on every occasion, whether proposed by a caviler or conscientious inquirer. This ready knowledge of the Bible gave him the confidence of the people, as a man mighty in the Scriptures, to confound and silence gainsayers, and to ornament his discourses with the brilliant diamonds of truth, and to set apples of gold in pictures of silver.

13. Earnest Praying and Excessive Fasting.

Earnest Praying and Excessive Fasting

Mr. Payson pursued his studies with almost unceasing prayer, studying theology on his knees, and pleading the promises in a prostrate position, with the Bible open before him.

He added much fasting to prayer. His seasons of fasting were long and frequent, so much so as to injure his bodily health. In after years he saw and lamented his error of fasting too long. But he was at the time a student and candidate for the holy ministry, and desired to comply with the precept, "Mortify the flesh, with the affections and lusts." He felt that as a servant of Christ he should be the master of his own passions and propensities, and resorted to this scriptural way to gain that mastery.

It is safer, perhaps, to go to an extreme in this direction, than to neglect altogether this essential discipline of the body.

14. Apportionment of Time.

Apportionment of Time

Mr. Payson was also too severe upon himself in the apportionment of his time, as will be seen by the following arrangement: twelve hours to be given to study, two to private devotion, two to relaxation, two to meals and family devotion, and six to sleep.

15. Impaired Health ■ Conflicting Emotions.

Impaired Health — Conflicting Emotions

Payson's health had now become impaired by his severe regimen, and also by a fall from a horse, so that he writes at different dates : " Was excessively melancholy." " Was oppressed with pride and vanity." " Spent the day in the woods in fasting and prayer, to obtain a mortification of my abominable pride and selfishness." " More gloomy and oppressed than yesterday." "I was greatly oppressed with pride and vanity, which made their attack upon me in inexpressible shapes."

Yet interspersed with these gloomy sentences we find others, describing a deep, happy Christian experience : " God was pleased to fill me with himself, so that I was burned up with most intense love, and panting after holiness." " Never before had such faith and fervency in prayer." " I am as happy as nature could sustain."

Melancholy, at times, overwhelmed him like a thousand monsters, so that his soul was crushed under it. At other times he was " surprised with visits from his blessed Lord, full of sweetness and love." His peculiar mental constitution and physical condition had much to do with these sudden and frequent transitions of religious feeling. Besides his constitutional predisposition to melancholy, his health had been shattered by abstinence, night vigils, and extraordinary exertions. The sentiment of Bishop Home will apply here: Religion was not the cause of his gloom, but was his refuge in times of depression.

16. Horrible Temptations.

Horrible Temptations

Payson's peculiar temperament and bodily weakness made him a conspicuous mark for the infernal archer to shoot at. " I thought long since," he writes, " that I had endured everything horrible and dreadful that was ever felt, heard of, or conceived ; but I find that the depths of Satan and the depths of a depraved and wicked heart are not easily fathomed. These unfathomed depths, however, serve to show me more clearly the infinite height and depth of Christ's love!" ' At a later period in his history he explains the reason why God permitted him to be so grievously tormented in the past: " That I might counsel and comfort those of Christ's sheep against whom Satan raged violently."

Under date of Dec. 5, 1823, he writes, "I have been sick and laid by for two Sabbaths, but am now able to resume my labors. But, O the temptations which have harassed me for the last three months!

I have met with nothing like them in books. I dare not mention them to any mortal, lest they should trouble him as they have troubled me. Should I become an apostate, and write against the Christian religion, it seems to me that I could bring forward objections that would shake the faith of all the Christians in the world. What I marvel at is, that the arch-deceiver has not been permitted to suggest them to his scribes, and have them published to the world. All the atheistical and deistical objections which I have met with in books are childish babblings compared with those which Satan suggests, and which he urges upon the mind with a force which seems irresistible."

17. Paysons only Pastoral Charge,

Paysons only Pastoral Charge This was in Portland, Maine. He was ordained pastor of the Congregational Church of that place, Dec. 16, 1807. He served the Church with remarkable fidelity and success for twenty years; indeed, lived and died with them and for them. This was the more remarkable as he was so uncompromising in his preaching and intercourse with his people. His remaining in one charge for a lifetime shows him to have been remarkably free from a worldly and ambitious spirit. It was his prayer that if God had any worldly blessings in store for him he would be pleased to give him grace instead of them, or change them into spiritual blessings. He writes, " I can hardly help praying, sometimes, that he would take away all he has bestowed, so that I shall not sin against such goodness." He felt " to bless God that when his roots began to shoot into and cleave to the earth, he plucked them up before they were too deeply and firmly fixed."

18. Payson Protests Against an Increase of Salary.

Payson Protests Against an Increase of Salary

We may readily suppose that, possessing, as he did, so unselfish a nature, his people would never have any difficulty with him about salary. They had difficulty, however, but it came from him in the shape of strong protests against an increase of the salary voted him at the time of his settlement! And although he had calls from Boston and New York, with higher salary and position, he could not be tempted to leave his beloved Portland charge.

19. A Successful Reencounter.

A Successful Reencounter In carrying out his rule "to make none but pastoral visits, and always to have religion recognized in every social circle in which he mingled," he once had a successful reencounter with a lawyer in Portland who ranked high for wealth and influence, but was skeptical. When he gave his consent to his wife that Mr. Payson might be invited socially to visit them, it was on the condition that he should not converse on religion, nor ask a blessing over his food, nor offer a prayer in his house. But so skillfully did Mr. Payson manage his host that he did ask a blessing, returned thanks, read the Scriptures, and had family prayer, and all at the request of the master of the house! As the critical moment arrived, Mr. Payson inquired of his host, "What writer has said that the devil invented this fashion of carrying round tea to prevent a blessing being asked?"

"I do not know, sir," replied the lawyer, "who it was; but we will foil the devil this time. Please to ask a blessing, Mr. Payson." This reminds us of an anecdote of the Rev. Ezekiel Cooper, who is said to have satirized the fashion of handing round tea in this manner. On an occasion of the kind he was heard to exclaim, "What a poor, helpless creature man is, with a cup of tea in one hand, a piece of cake in the other, and a fly on his nose, and no means of getting him off."

20. Paysons Intense Earnestness,

Paysons Intense Earnestness

Payson's experience, prayers, hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, indeed his whole ministerial life and labors, were marked with an intensity seldom known. "My disposition," said he, "is naturally so ardent that I can enjoy nothing with moderation ; so that I must either be totally indifferent to worldly objects, or else love them to such a degree as to render them idols."

He was very jealous for the Lord of Hosts, and was a living witness of the power of divine grace, and a living reproof to cold and formal professors. The indifference of men to their salvation, and the prevalence of wickedness, made " his heart ache, and his eyes weep." He expostulated, warned, and entreated ; he mourned in secret places, and interceded with God to save the people. In keeping with this spirit of zeal that burned within him and blazed around him, he highly appreciated revivals—prayed, and fasted, and worked for them, and was never satisfied without a revival state in his Church. He ardently loved the work of the ministry. If he had sufficient strength for the duty, he considered it no favor for a visitor to supply his pulpit. It was like a man proposing to eat up a good dinner prepared for himself when half starved. " Since the failure of my health/' he writes, " I preach but three sermons a week !" On being urged by his people to visit Europe for his health, with the offer of a free passage, he replied, " It would be gratifying to see Old England, but I cannot spare the time."

21. Paysons Zeal and Fidelity Rewarded by Success.

Paysons Zeal and Fidelity Rewarded by Success

Payson's success may be attributed in a great measure to his ardent and persevering prayers, and the undoubted sincerity of his belief in what he taught. Though he drew crowds around him, there was nothing of stage effect either in his eloquence or personal appearance—no imposing attitudes or gestures ; no extremes of intonation ; no affectation. It was a simple uttering of the deep convictions of the heart. It was the eloquence of truth spoken in love. The words seemed to come from his mouth encompassed by that glowing atmosphere in which they left the heart. He was always in earnest, and impressed the fact upon his hearers. " It is a glorious day to live in," said he; " so much to be done. I would not now exchange a place in the Church below for a place in heaven. The longer our time of labor is, the better. There will be time enough for rest." With such a spirit he could not fail of success. In one year of his ministry his Church received an accession of seventy-three, and in the year of his death seventy-nine. The average number was more than thirty-five a year during the whole of his ministry.

He often performed services for other congregations, and went on missionary tours to places not having a settled ministry, spending several days in arduous labors, and with signal results. His agency was also felt in raising the tone of piety in all the Churches that could be reached by his influence ; and his presence, counsels, example, and prayers, gave shape tone, and energy to many public institutions of his day.

22. Pay sons Rule in Preparing for the Pulpit.

Pay sons Rule in Preparing for the Pulpit

It was his invariable object to introduce so much of the fundamental truths of the Gospel into every discourse, that one who had never heard a sermon before, and should never hear another, might learn from it what is essential to salvation.

23. His Influence Through the Press.

His Influence Through the Press

Mr. Payson was mistaken when he said that God had denied him the honor of doing good with his pen, and of speaking for Christ when silent in the dust. No man, probably, whose pen was so limited in its work has accomplished so much? "The Bible Above All Price" was the first production suffered to go to press. Myriads of copies have been circulated. His "Address to Seamen" was so effectual at the time of its delivery that nine thousand copies were printed at once, and unnumbered copies since. Also a sermon before the Maine Bible Society, entitled "The Oracles of God," was a popular discourse, but did not reach the extent of popularity or circulation as did those just mentioned. Besides, how full of instruction, influence, and inspiration are the pregnant sentences falling from his pen, as contained in his Diary and Letters, and given to the world in his Biography. Thousands of Gospel ministers have doubtless been made wiser and better men, and have been stimulated to seek a richer experience, and higher devotion to the work of the ministry, by reading the published Sermons, and especially the Biography, of Dr. Payson.

24. Paysons Conflict with a Lingering Pride of Heart.

Paysons Conflict with a Lingering Pride of Heart

" I find," he writes, " scarcely any time to read or study, and am constrained to go into the pulpit with discourses so undigested, my pride is constantly mortified, and though it lies groaning and bleeding under continual wounds, it will not be persuaded to give up the ghost." In a letter to his mother he writes, " You must not say one word that even intimates that I am growing in grace. I cannot bear it. Everybody here, whether friends or enemies, is conspiring to ruin me. Satan and my own heart will of course lend a hand, and if you join them too, I fear all the cold water which Christ can throw upon my pride will not prevent it from breaking out into a destructive flame. As certainly as anybody flatters or caresses me, my heavenly Father has to whip me for it, and it is an unspeakable mercy that he condescends to do it. I can easily muster a hundred reasons why I should not be proud, but pride won't mind reason, nor anything else but a good drubbing. Even at this moment, I feel it tingling at my finger ends and seeking to guide my pen."

25. Paysons Humility.

Paysons Humility In the following extract we find true humility expressed in one of his beautiful figures : " Could I paint a true likeness of Christ, I should rejoice to hold it up to the view and admiration of all creation, and to be hid behind it forever. It would be heaven enough to hear him praised and adored, though no one should care about insignificant me." In a letter to a candidate for the ministry he expresses himself thus : " Let those who choose to engage in such a race (for worldly distinctions) divide the prize. Let one run away with the money, another with applause; be God's approbation the only prize for which I run." In alluding to two distinguished characters, who asserted that they were never happy until they ceased striving to be great, he writes, " My heart saw it and consented to it, and now I am comparatively happy." In reviewing his life in this same spirit of humility, he could say, U I have done nothing myself; I have not fought, but Christ has fought for me; I have not run, but Christ has carried me; I have not worked, but Christ has wrought in me; Christ has done all."

26. His Domestic Character.

His Domestic Character

He at one time expressed a fear of marrying, lest, from his ardent temperament, he should love a wife too little or too much. Nor would he be anxious about the selection, nor waste his Master's time in seeking one, confident that he should certainly have a good wife if God saw best. He did marry wisely and well, and we here give an extract showing that his heart was as true to his companion as it was, in a higher sphere of affection, true to Christ and his Church.

He writes on board of a vessel sailing up the Delaware in sight of Philadelphia, " The prospects on the banks of the river were delightful and cheering every moment. The day was fine and the swiftness of our motion was agreeable, and, to crown all, I saw God in his works, and tasted his goodness in everything. I thought of you almost every moment, and nothing but the presence of yourself and the children was wanting to make me as happy as I could be in this world. Everyone on board is in a bustle, and I am standing away in one corner talking with my best, dearest earthly friend. You, at the distance of five hundred miles, have more attractions for me than the whole city of Philadelphia, which is spread out before me. Kiss the children for me, talk to them about me ; love me as I do you. I love you far better than I did when I wrote the last letter to you before our marriage." The qualities of .a tender husband, and of a faithful and affectionate father, were uniform in their action, and were daily manifested in his household in a manner that showed the intense interest he felt in the religious welfare of his family and domestics.

He had both religion and good sense enough not to be a vain and foolish father, but avoided that doting partiality for his children which causes so many parents to hold the reins of parental discipline with a lax hand. Here is a specimen in which with keen humor he takes off the vanity of doting parents.

" As to baby," he writes, " she is the greatest genius and the greatest beauty in these parts. Suffice it to say, that she has four teeth; stands alone; says 4 Pa' and 'Ma;' 'no,' 'no/ very stoutly, and has been whipped several times for being wiser than her father."

27. Paysons Humor - A Specimen

Paysons Humor - A Specimen

After speaking of attacks from other diseases, he writes, "Rheumatism next arrived, eager to pay his respects, and embraced my right shoulder with such ardor of affection that he had well-nigh torn it from its socket. I had not thought much of this gentle-man's powers before, but he has convinced me of them so thoroughly, that I shall think and speak of them with respect as long as I live. Not content with giving me his company all day, for a fortnight he insisted on sitting up with me every night, and what is worse, made me sit up too. During this time my poor neck, back, and shoulder, seemed to be a place in which the various pains and aches had assembled to keep holiday, and the delectable sensations of stinging, pricking, cutting, lacerating, wrenching, burning, gnawing, succeeded each other, or all mingled together in the wildest confusion.

"The cross old gentleman, though his zeal is somewhat abated by fomentations and blisters with which we welcomed him, still stands at my back, threatening that he will not allow me to finish my letter."

28. His Intense Sufferings.

His Intense Sufferings

He writes on one occasion, " My flesh trembles and my blood almost runs cold when I look back on what I have suffered. A very large proportion of my path lies through the valley of the shadow of death."

Parts of his body, including the right arm and left side, were singularly affected. They were incapable of motion, and lost all sense of feeling externally, while in the interior parts of the limbs thus affected he experienced at intervals a most intense burning sensation, which he compared to a stream of fused metal or liquid fire coursing through his bones.

29. Remarkably Sustained by Views of the Divine Perfections.

Remarkably Sustained by Views of the Divine Perfections

" God's promises appear most strong, solid, real, substantial: more so than the rocks and everlasting hills. And his perfections ! what shall I say of them ? When I think of one, I wish to dwell on it forever; but another and another equally glorious claims a share of my admiration, and when I begin to praise I wish never to cease. Let who will be rich, or admired, or prosperous, it is enough for me that there is such a God as Jehovah, and such a Saviour as Jesus, and that they are infinitely and unchangeably glorious !

"Dec. 19. Had a most ravishing view of Christ this morning, as coming at a distance in the chariot of his salvation. In an instant, he was with me and around me, and I could only cry Welcome! a thousand times welcome to my disconsolate heart!"

After enumerating some special instances of God's goodness to him, he adds, " But great as are my reasons to love God for his favors, he is infinitely more precious on account of his perfections. Never did he appear so inexpressibly glorious as he has for some weeks past. I have nothing to fear, nothing to hope from creatures. They are all mere shadows ! There is only one being in the universe, and that being is God! May I add, He is my God ! I long to get to see him in heaven: I long still more to stay and serve him on earth. Rather, I rejoice to be just where he pleases, and what he pleases.

Dec. 16, 1817, he writes, "Never before enjoyed such a sense of his love, or felt so constrained to love him and everything that belongs to him ; especially his word, which I could not forbear kissing and pressing to my bosom. Was perfectly willing to die without leaving my chamber. Had for a long time a melting heart, and came with a broken frame to the feet of Christ weeping aloud, and obtained a full and sweet assurance of pardon."

" Sept. 1. While lying awake last night had most delightful views of God as a father; felt that my happiness is as dear to him as to myself; that he would not willingly hurt one hair of my head, nor let me suffer a moment's unnecessary pain. Felt that he was literally as willing to give as I was to ask— seemed, indeed, to have nothing to ask for.

" Sept. 19. Last night, while lying awake, had more distinct apprehensions of God's greatness than at any previous time. Realized little of anything except simple greatness, and this almost crushed me to death. I could not move a limb or scarcely breathe. Could realize more than ever that a clear view of God must be hell to the wicked, for had any sense of his anger accompanied this view of his greatness, I could not have supported it!"

30. Paysons Demeanor under Bodily Sufferings

Paysons Demeanor under Bodily Sufferings The most agonizing sufferings of body, when exempted from depression of mind, never rendered him the less cheerful and agreeable. His demeanor in these seasons of suffering was often such that he was rather envied than pitied by his family and attendants, being seasons of unusual gayety and cheerfulness, and in which he allowed his playful imagination to throw a brightness upon the gloom of the sick-chamber.

31. Last Scenes of his Life and Labors.

Last Scenes of his Life and Labors His last sermon was preached from the text, "The word of the Lord is true." It was not written, of course, but no discourse that he ever wrote was more instructive or eloquent. When speaking of the trials to which the Bible had been subjected by its enemies, never were the mightiest infidels made to appear so puny, insignificant, and foolish. " He who sitteth in the heavens" could almost be seen deriding them. When describing the manner in which Christians have tried it, his experience aided his eloquence, and added strength to the conviction it wrought in the minds of his hearers. On pronouncing the benediction, he descended from the pulpit, took his station in front of it, and commenced a most solemn appeal to the assembly.

" I now put aside the minister," said he. " I come down among you—place myself on a visible equality. I address you as a brother and fellow-traveler to the bar of God." He then gave vent to the struggling emotions of his heart in a stream of affectionate entreaty, and requested them, mentally and silently, to adopt a series of resolutions touching a belief in and practice of Christianity, which he was about to propose. Though his withered arm hung helpless by his side, yet he seemed instinct with life, and every succeeding resolve was rendered emphatic by a gesture of the left.

One of his last communion seasons is thus described : " His body was so emaciated by long and acute suffering that it was scarcely able to sustain the effort; but his soul, raised above its perishing influence, and filled with a joyful tranquility, seemed entirely regardless of the weakness of its mortal tenement. His right hand and arm were so palsied by disease as to be quite useless, except that in the act of breaking the bread he placed it on the table with the other hand, raising it as a lifeless weight, until it had performed the service required, as if unwilling that even the withered hand should be found unemployed in the holy work!

Aug. 5. This day he entered the meeting-house for the last time. Twenty years had passed since he entered it for the first time as a preacher: then a trembling youth, now the spiritual father of many hundreds ; then just girded for the warfare, now the veteran who had fought the good fight, and was about to resign his commission.

He was supported into the house by his senior deacons, and was privileged to witness the admission of twenty-one candidates into the Church. He only had strength to read "the Covenant" and to say to the Church, " I want you always to believe that God is faithful. However dark and mysterious his dispensations may appear, still confide in him. He can make you happy when everything else is taken from you."

Payson Confined to the Chamber of Sickness and Death — His Triumph.

He was asked by a friend if he could see any particular reason for this dispensation. He replied, " No; but I am as well satisfied as if I could see ten thousand reasons." In a letter dictated to his sister, he writes : " Were I to adopt the figurative language of Bunyan, I might date this letter from the land of Beulah, of which I have been for some time such a happy inhabitant. The celestial city is full in my view. Its glories beam upon me, its breezes fan me, its odors are wafted to me, its

sounds strike upon my ears, and its spirit is breathed into my heart. Nothing separates me from it but the river of death, which now appears as an insignificant rill, which can be crossed at a single step, whenever God shall give permission. The Sun of Righteousness has been gradually drawing nearer and nearer, appearing larger and brighter as he approached, and now fills the whole hemisphere, pouring forth a flood of glory, in which I seem to float like an insect in the beams of the sun, exulting, yet almost trembling, while I gaze on this excessive brightness, and wondering why God should deign thus to shine upon a sinful worm." On being asked, " Do you feel reconciled ?" he replied, " O that is too cold ; I rejoice ; I triumph ; and this happiness will endure as long as God himself, for it consists in admiring and adoring him. I can find no words to express my happiness. I seem to be swimming in a river of pleasure which is carrying me on to the great fountain. It seems as if all the bottles in heaven were opened, and all its fullness and happiness have come down into my heart. God has been depriving me of one blessing after another, but as each one was removed he has come in and filled up its place. If God had told me some time ago that he was about to make me as happy as I could be in this world, and that he should begin by crippling me in all my limbs and removing from me all my usual sources of enjoyment, I should have thought it a very strange mode of accomplishing his purpose. Now, when I am a cripple and not able to move, I am happier than I ever was in my life before or ever expected to be.

"It has often been remarked that people who have passed into the other world cannot come back to tell us what they have seen, but I am so near the eternal world that I can almost see as clearly as if I were there; and I see enough to satisfy me of the truth of the doctrines I have preached. I do not know that I should feel at all surer had I been really there."

"Watchman, what of the night?" asked a gray-headed member of his Church. " I should think it was about noonday," replied the dying Payson. The ruling passion being strong in death, he sent a request to his pulpit that his people should repair to his sick-chamber. They did so in specified classes, a few at a time, and received his dying message.

32. Payson Dying Words to the Young Men of his Congregation.

Payson Dying Words to the Young Men of his Congregation

" I felt desirous that you might see that the religion I have preached can support me in death. You know that I have many ties which bind me to earth: a family to which I am strongly attached, and a people whom I love almost as well; but the other world acts like a much stronger magnet, and draws my heart away from this.

" Death comes every night and stands by my bedside in the form of terrible convulsions, every one of which threatens to separate the soul from the body. These grow worse and worse till every bone is almost dislocated with pain. Yet while my body is thus tortured, the soul is perfectly, perfectly happy and peaceful. I lie here and feel these convulsions extending higher and higher, but my soul is filled with joy unspeakable! I seem to swim in a flood of glory which God pours down upon me. Is it a delusion that can fill the soul to overflowing with joy in such circumstances ? If so, it is a delusion better than any reality. It is no delusion. I feel it is not. I enjoy this happiness now. And now, standing as I do on the ridge that separates the two worlds—feeling what intense happiness the soul is capable of sustaining, and judging of your capacities by my own, and believing that those capacities will be filled to the very brim with joy or wretchedness forever, my heart yearns over you, my children, that you may choose life and not death. I long to present every one of you with a cup of happiness and see you drink it.

"A young man," he continued, "just about to leave the world, exclaimed, ' The battles fought, the battles fought, but the victory is lost forever!' But I can say, 'The battles fought, and the victory is won—the victory is won forever!' I am going to bathe in the ocean of purity, and benevolence, and happiness, to all eternity. And now, my children, let me bless you, not with the blessing of a poor, feeble, dying man, but with the blessing of the infinite God." He then pronounced the apostolic benediction.

33. Paysons Unparalleled Sufferings and Unbounded joy.

Paysons Unparalleled Sufferings and Unbounded joy. A friend said to him, " I presume it is no longer incredible to you that martyrs should rejoice and praise God in the flames and on the rack ?"

"No," said he; "I can easily believe it. I have suffered twenty times as much as I could in being burned at the stake, while my joy in God so abounded as to render my sufferings not only tolerable but welcome." At another time he said: " God is literally now my all in all. While he is present with me no event can in the least diminish my happiness ; and were the whole world at my feet trying to minister to my comfort they could not add one drop to my cup." To Mrs. Payson, who observed to him, " Your head feels hot and seems to be distended," he replied : " It seems as if the soul disdained such a narrow prison, and was determined to break through with an angel's energy, and I trust with no small portion of an angel's feeling, until it mounts on high.

" It seems as if my soul had found a new pair of wings, and was so eager to try them that in her fluttering she would rend the fine network of the body in pieces."

34. Paysons Last Agony.

Paysons Last Agony On Sabbath, Oct. 21, 1827, his last agony commenced, attended with that labored breathing and rattling in the throat which rendered articulation extremely difficult. His daughter was summoned from the Sabbath-school, and received his dying kiss and " God bless you, my daughter." He smiled on a group of his Church-members, and exclaimed, with holy emphasis, " Peace, peace ! Victory !" He smiled on his wife and children, and said in the language of dying Joseph, " I am going, but God will surely be with you."

He rallied from the death conflict, and said to his physician, that although he had suffered the pangs of death, and got almost within the gates of Paradise, yet if it was God's will that he should come back and suffer still more he was resigned. He passed through a similar scene in the afternoon, and again revived. On Monday morning his dying agonies returned in all their extremity. For three hours every breath was a groan. On being asked if his sufferings were greater than on the preceding Sunday night, he answered, "incomparably greater." He said the greatest temporal blessing of which he could conceive would be one breath of air.

Mrs. Payson, fearing from the expression of suffering on his countenance that he was in mental distress, questioned him. He replied, " Faith and patience hold out." These were the last words of this dying Christian hero ! Yet his eyes spoke after his tongue became motionless. He looked on Mrs. Payson, and then rested his eyes on his eldest son with an expression which said, and was so interpreted by all present, " Behold thy mother!"

He gradually sunk away, till, about the going down of the sun, his chastened and purified spirit, all mantled with the glory of Christian triumph in life and death, ascended to share the everlasting glory of his Redeemer before the eternal throne!

"His ruling passion was strong in death." His love for preaching was as invincible as that of the miser for gold, who dies grasping his treasure.

Dr. Payson directed this label to be attached to his breast: " Remember the words which I spake unto you while I was yet present with you;" that it might be read by all who came to look at his corpse, and by which he, being dead, still spake. The same words, at the request of his people, were engraven on the plate of the coffin, and read by thousands on the day of interment.

35. Extract from Paysons Funeral Sermon, preached by Rev, Charles Jenkins.

Extract from Paysons Funeral Sermon, preached by Rev, Charles Jenkins

" I might speak of his gifted intellect; I might dwell on his wonderful powers of combination; on that excursive faculty which, forever glancing from earth to heaven, could gather the universe around him in aid of his illustrations. But to speak on these points becomes not this solemn occasion. He would frown on the attempt. He counted 'all things loss for Christ/ If I may speak of his character, it shall be that character which had so conspicuously the Christian stamp. In this respect, grace made him great. It wrought a deep work in his soul. The predominant features of his whole mind, for many years, were high spiritual views and deep spiritual feelings. These tinged, or rather were the element, of his thoughts and efforts. His natural ardor of temperament doubtless affected not a little his religious exercises. It gave them violence and energy. His seasons of spiritual elevation were heaven brought down to earth ; his seasons of religious depression resembled the storms of autumn—sudden, dark, threatening—leaving a serener and purer sky, but betokening that winter is approaching.

He was pre-eminently a man of prayer. There was in his prayers a copiousness, a fervor, a familiarity, a reaching forth of the soul into eternity, that was almost peculiar to himself, and that told every hearer that heaven was his element, and prayer his breath, and life, and joy. As a preacher it is easier to say what he was not than what he was. He was eloquent, and yet no one could describe his eloquence to the apprehension of a stranger; it consisted in an assemblage of qualities that could be seen and felt, but not described. He did not preach himself; his subject always stood between himself and audience. Ah! I will not, I cannot, enlarge. Let the thousand voices of them who have been brought to the knowledge of Christ by his ministrations tell what he was as a preacher'

36. Concluding Remarks.

Concluding Remarks

We have aimed in this sketch so to exhibit the man and minister that his points of character would be at once recognized without special analysis.

We have seen him as the precocious child, a good reader and thinker at four years of age ; as the penitent boy, weeping under the preaching of the Gospel when only three years old ; as the ardent youth, pursuing his studies with untiring diligence and success ; as the Bible student, attaching to the divine records an infinite pre-eminence over all other books, and seeking, with corresponding reverence and zeal, to enrich his heart and mind with its treasures, and leaning upon the promises like a pilgrim upon his staff, and grasping with a giant faith the perfections of Jehovah, and the plan of redemption as therein revealed. We have seen him as the conscientious Christian, with a nature as sensitive to sin in every form as the tender flower to the breath of winter.

We have seen him battling with the rage, and power, and insidious schemes of the tempter to destroy his confidence in God and revealed religion, and in these terrible conflicts foiling his mighty adversary. We have seen him, in his zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of men, devoting himself with intent of mind, and ardor of soul, and effort of body, seldom if ever equaled in the history of the ministry. And blending, as he did, a deep and intense Christian experience, integrity of principle, and simplicity of spirit with dignity of manners, his influence was irresistible in his day. And his gifted intellect and fertile imagination have given to the world those sublime thoughts and splendid imagery which have contributed to perpetuate that influence. We have seen him in death strong in faith, giving glory to God, with the language of victory upon his lips, and the fires of hope blazing in his eye, and the joy of heaven filling his soul.

37. Payson ■ Bramwell ■ Fletcher - Hedding

Payson – Bramwell – Fletcher - Hedding In reading the Biography of Payson we have been reminded of Bramwell, whom he resembled in his devotional spirit, struggling mightily with God in prayer for the salvation of sinners, and, like him, putting forth a corresponding effort to save them. In the higher life we would associate him with the heavenly-minded Fletcher, whom he approximated in the heights and depths of Christian experience, his soul, like that of Fletchers, glowing with the fires of holiness, for which he panted, and which he gloriously realized. In his dying triumph he may be associated with his distinguished contemporary, Bishop Hedding. Between these two Christian heroes there was a very remarkable coincidence in their sickness and death, both in regard to the severity of their sufferings and the greatness and grandeur of their triumph.

Payson suffers and dies with such language as this falling from his lips: " Hitherto I have viewed God as a fixed star; bright, indeed, but often intercepted by clouds, but now he is coming nearer and nearer, and spreads into a sun so vast and glorious that the sight is too dazzling for flesh and blood to sustain." Among his last utterances were the words, " Peace, peace ! Victory, victory !"

Hedding suffers and dies exclaiming, " God has been wonderfully good to me. His goodness has been overwhelming, overwhelming! I never saw such glory before, such light, such clearness, such beauty! O what glory I feel! It shines and burns all through me! It came upon me like the rushing of a mighty wind as on the day of Pentecost!"

If in heaven, as on earth, congenial spirits seek companionship, we may expect to find Payson talking with Bramwell on the power of prayer, with Fletcher on the beauty of holiness, and with Hedding on the triumphs of faith over suffering and death. May every reader of this sketch be stimulated by the lofty example it records to aim high in the pursuit of Christian attainments and usefulness, and finally reach that heaven where the immortal spirit of Edward Payson bathes in a sea of glory, and

" Where saints of all ages in harmony meet, Their Saviour and brethren transported to greet; Where anthems of rapture unceasingly roll, And the smile of the Lord is the feast of the soul."

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