

Review
See Sunday at Home, 1856, p. 366; also Infidelity
in Index to 25 years of that periodical;

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RECOLLECTIONS OF WILLIAM HONE.

THIRTY YEARS AN ATHEIST,
AFTERWARDS A HAPPY CHRISTIAN.

By J. E. HOWARD, ESQ., F.R.S.



"MY LITTLE GIRL, WHAT ARE YOU READING?"

THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY,
56 PATERNOSTER ROW, 65 ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD,
AND 164 PICCADILLY.

No. 1042.

RECOLLECTIONS
OF
WILLIAM HONE.

INTRODUCTION.



HERE are some men whose lives present features of so great interest and instruction to their fellows, that it becomes a duty to collect together and to hand down to posterity such portions of their biographies as may possess these characteristics, before they have faded from recollection.

The responsibility of this undertaking has devolved through lapse of time on me. In fulfilling it, I am carrying out a wish cherished by the deceased himself, to which he gave expression in a letter to Mr. Ball.

After referring to the Lord's dealings with him, and how he was brought to believe in Christ, he went on to say that it had long been his desire to make known his change of heart to all who had ever heard his name, and that he thought it his duty to devote the first fruits of the exercise of his restored faculties to the promotion of the cause of God by testifying of His great mercy. He had made it the subject of frequent and earnest prayer to God to be enabled to do it with a simple desire for His glory and in humble dependence on His

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blessing. He had waited in patience and submission. "I believe," he says, "He has put the desire into my heart to do this public homage to His sovereignty as a subject of His kingdom." He thus evinced the reality of the change that had been wrought by Divine grace in his heart.

And no doubt that "it was well that it was in his heart," but I do not think that health and strength equal to the task were afforded him.

Miss Rolleston published (about 1848 and onward) some particulars included in this tract. I can guarantee these as well as my own recollections as recording the result of much intercourse with this remarkable man, during the latter period of his life.

HONE'S CHILDHOOD.

William Hone was born at Bath in the year 1780 of obscure but religious and respectable parentage.

"His father was an Independent, and brought him up very strictly—unfortunately, too strictly; the ordinary penance for a slight fault being to get by heart a chapter in the Bible. On one occasion, being sent to get his task, sitting on the garret stairs, he threw the book from him down the whole flight, saying, 'When I am my own master, I will never open you. And alas!' said he, in relating it, 'I kept my word but too well; for thirty years I never looked into it. My father and his friends,' said he, 'were in the habit of speaking much and bitterly of John Wesley. They frequently called him, "The Old Devil." I had a most terrific idea of this satanic personage. Being under six years old, I went to a dame-school to learn my book; and be out of harm's way. My dame was a very

staid and pious old woman. She was very fond of me, and I was always good with her, though naughty enough at home. She lived in one room, a large underground kitchen; we went down a flight of steps to it. Her bed was always neatly turned up in one corner. There was a large kitchen grate; and in cold weather always a good fire in it, by which she sat in an old carved wooden armchair, with a small round table before her, on which lay a large Bible open, on one side, and on the other a birch rod. Of the Bible she made great use; of the rod very little, but with fear we always looked upon it. There, on low wooden benches, books in hand, sat her little scholars. We all loved her, I most of all; and I was often allowed to sit on a little stool by her side. I was happier there than anywhere. I think I see her now, that placid old face, with her white hair turned up over a high cushion, and a clean neat cap on the top of it; all so clean, so tidy, so peaceful. I was happy there. One morning I was told I was not to go to school. I was miserable, naughty, disagreeable, cried to go to my dame. It was a dark day to me. The next day I got up, hoping to go to school; but no! I might not: and then they told me she was ill, and then I cried the more from grief. It was my first sorrow. That day, too, passed in tears, and I cried myself to sleep. Next morning everybody was so tired of me, that the servant was told to take me to her. As we approached the house, all was so still, it gave me an awful feeling that all was not right. The kitchen door was shut. The servant tapped, and a girl opened it. No scholars, no benches—the bed let down and curtained; the little round table covered with a clean white cloth, and on it something unintelligible, covered up with another.

“ ‘Here is Master William ; he would come,’ said my bearer, and a low hollow voice from the bed said, ‘Let him stay, he will be good.’ There lay my dame : how altered ! Death on her face, but I loved her all the same. My little stool was placed near her bolster, and I sat down in silence. Presently she said to the maid, ‘Is he coming?’ The maid went to the window and said ‘No.’ Again the same question and the same answer. Who could it be ? I wondered in silence, and felt overawed. At last there was a double knock at the house-door above, and the maid said joyfully, ‘Oh, madam, Mr. Wesley is come.’ Then I was to see the Old Devil ! I crept to the window, I could only see a pair of black legs with great silver buckles. The door was opened. Steps came down the kitchen stairs, each step increasing my terror. I saw the black legs—then came in a venerable old man, with, as it seemed to me, the countenance of an angel ; shining silver hair waving on his shoulders ; with a beautiful fair and fresh complexion and the sweetest smile ! This then was ‘the Old Devil !’ He went up to the bed. I trembled for my poor dame, but he took her hand, and spoke so kindly to her, and my dame seemed so glad ! He looked at me, and said something. She said, ‘He is a good boy ; he will be quite quiet.’ After much talk, he uncovered the table, and I saw the bread and wine, as I had often seen it at my father’s chapel, and then he knelt down and prayed. I do not say I prayed, but I was awfully impressed, and quite still. After it was over, he turned to me, laid his hand on my head, and said, ‘God bless you, my child, and make you a good man.’

“ Was this the Old Devil ? I never saw Mr. Wesley again. My dame died, but from that hour I never

believed anything my father said, or anything I heard at chapel. I felt, though I could not have expressed it, how wicked such enmity was between Christians, and so I lost all confidence in my good father, and in all his religious friends, and so in all religion."

The above narrative was printed by Miss Rolleston. It is so exactly in Hone's style, that I think she must have repeated the very words in which he told it; and quite in accordance with my own recollection, except that Miss R—— substituted the words "child of the devil," for the more repulsive but more expressive term which I distinctly recollect hearing from Hone when he narrated the circumstance to myself.

HONE'S POLITICAL LIFE AND TRIALS.

I read that he was placed at the age of ten at an attorney's office in London; but after some time, his father, finding that he had attached himself to some "reforming" society, and begun to take part in what he thought very objectionable politics, removed him to another master at Chatham.

The vicissitudes of his subsequent life as a struggling London bookseller (detailed in the English Cyclopaedia) I pass over till I come to the narrative of his trials, from the graphic account of which, given in the History of England during the Peace, I extract the following.¹

"Altogether the three trials of William Hone are amongst the most remarkable in our Constitutional History. They produced more distinct effects upon the temper of the country than any public proceeding at that time. . . .

¹ Year 1817, pp. 144-148.

“On the morning of the 18th of December there is a considerable crowd round the avenues of Guildhall. An obscure bookseller, a man of no substance or respectability in worldly eyes, is to be tried for libel. He vends his wares in a little shop in the Old Bailey, where there are strangely mingled twopenny political pamphlets and old harmless folios, that the poor publisher keeps for his special reading as he sits in his dingy back parlour. The doorkeepers and officers of the court scarcely know what is going to happen; for the table within the bar has not the usual covering of crimson baize, but ever and anon a dingy boy arrives with an armful of books of all ages and sizes, and the whole table is strewed with dusty and tattered volumes that the ushers are quite sure have no law within their mouldy covers. A middle-aged man—a bland and smiling man—with a half-sad, half-merry twinkle in his eye—a seedy man, to use an expressive word, whose black coat is wondrous brown and threadbare—takes his place at the table, and begins to turn over the books which were his heralds. Sir Samuel Shepherd, the Attorney-General, takes his seat; and looks compassionately, as was his nature to do, at the pale man in threadbare black.

“The trial went on in the smoothest way, and the case for the prosecution was closed. Then the pale man in black rose, and with a faltering voice set forth the difficulty he had in addressing the court, and how his poverty prevented him from obtaining counsel. And now he began to warm in the recital of what he thought his wrongs; his commitments; his hurried calls to plead; the expense of copies of the informations against him; and, as Mr. Justice Abbott, with perfect gentleness, but with his cold

formality, interrupted him, the timid man, who all thought would have mumbled forth a hasty defence, grew bolder and bolder, and in a short time had possession of his audience, as if he were some well graced actor, who was there to receive the tribute of popular admiration. . . .

“The judge charged the jury in vain. William Hone was acquitted, after a quarter of an hour’s deliberation. . . .

“Again Mr. Hone entered the court with his load of books on Friday, the 19th of December. He was this day indicted for publishing an impious and profane libel, called ‘The Litany, or General Supplication.’ Again the Attorney-General affirmed that, whatever might be the object of the defendant, the publication had the effect of scoffing at the public service of the Church. Again the defendant essayed to read from his books, which course he contended was necessary for his defence. Then began a contest which is perhaps unparalleled in an English court of justice. Upon Mr. Fox’s libel bill, upon ex-officio information, upon his right to copies of the indictment without extravagant charges, the defendant battled his judge; imperfect in his law, no doubt, but with a firmness and moderation that rode over every attempt to put him down. Parody after parody was again produced, and especially those parodies of the Litany which the Cavaliers employed so frequently as vehicles of satire upon the Roundheads and Puritans. The Lord Chief Justice at length gathered up his exhausted strength for his charge; and concluded in a strain that left but little hope for the defendant. . . .

“The jury, in an hour and a half, returned a verdict of ‘Not guilty.’”

“It might have been expected that these prosecutions would have here ended. But the chance of a conviction from a third jury, upon a third indictment, was to be risked. On the 20th December, Lord Ellenborough again took his seat on the bench, and the exhausted defendant came late into the court, pale and agitated. The Attorney-General remarked upon his appearance, and offered to postpone the proceedings. The courageous man made his election to go on. This third indictment was for publishing a parody on the Creed of St. Athanasius, called ‘The Sinecurist’s Creed.’

“The triumph of the weak over the powerful was complete. ‘The frame of adamant and soul of fire’ (as the biographer of Lord Sidmouth terms the Chief Justice) quailed before the indomitable courage of a man who was roused into energies which would seem to belong only to the master spirits that have swayed the world. Yet this was a man who, in the ordinary business of life, was incapable of enterprise and persevering exertion; who lived in the nooks and corners of his antiquarianism; who was one that even his old political opponents came to regard as a ‘gentle and innocuous hunter after all such reading as was never read;’ who in a few years gave up his politics altogether, and devoting himself to his old poetry and to his old divinity, passed a quarter of a century after this conflict in peace with all mankind, and died the sub-editor of a religious journal.

“Grave and temperate was the charge to the jury this day; and in twenty minutes they returned a verdict of not guilty.

“He spoke for six hours on the first day, for seven hours on the second, and his address to the jury on the third day especially, which lasted seven hours

and a half, when although fatigued by his previous exertions he was inspirited by success, was remarkably effective."

Omitting much that is interesting, I take these particulars from the work referred to. They show the character of the man; and I may add, from his own account to me, that on one occasion during these trials, being fatigued and unwell he asked for a chair, which was denied him; on which he said he felt as if a bucket of cold water was poured over him, and his sense of fatigue entirely disappeared.

I think it is due to his memory to record a circumstance in connection with his trial which does credit to his filial feelings; and also places the character of his father before us as a man of stern principle, whatever mistake he may have made in the education of his son. Hone used to relate that when his father became acquainted with what had happened, he came to him and said, "William, what have you done?" Seeing his father's grief, Hone promised faithfully to suppress all further issue of the Parodies. To this promise he adhered, although a very tempting offer was made to him by a bookseller whilst under confinement, which would have put him in possession of money, of which he was sorely in need.

HONE'S ATHEISM.

The account of the further advance of his opinion, and his domestic history, shall follow in his own words, as reported by the same authority.

"'I had been fond of that good woman at next door,' continued he, looking towards his own cottage, 'from our childhood up, and we married at eighteen. I saw much of the clever sceptics of those days, but

I could not rest in deism. I became an atheist, as I believe every consistent reasoner must, who rejects Christianity. I was an atheist thirty years. One day, walking down Holborn, I stopped as usual at an old book-stall; there I found a book open with some stories in it, that I saw at once would throw light upon some of my old prints that I could learn nothing about. The book was Jeremiah Jones on the Canon of Scripture; the stories were the Apocryphal Gospels.¹ When I had studied my prints with them, and found what light they threw on their subjects, I thought they would do for the public, particularly for antiquarians and print collectors; so I took a pair of scissors (for that is the way I make books) and cut out what I wanted, and gave them to the printer; and out came my Apocryphal Gospels that made such a noise in the world. When I found what an outcry there was against me, I said to myself, "What have I done?" and I set to work to read the canonical Gospels, and said he (solemnly raising both his hands), 'Oh, what a flood of light burst in upon me.'

"The mutilated copy of Jones on the Canon passed from his possession into the hands of a clergyman near London. When told after his conversion that his republication of the Apocryphal Gospels had done service to the cause of pure religion, by showing on what good grounds they had been rejected, Hone replied with the humility of true repentance, 'But I did not so intend it.'"

To this period of his life belongs the narrative of a circumstance which I find thus related, as the account was given by himself to Miss Rolleston, the writer of the tract (part ii. p. 21).²

¹ Forgeries of the early heretics.

² My remembrance, as referred to in a subsequent letter, was as

“I was sent for on business to a house in a street in London, the name of which I did not know. I was shown into a room to wait; on looking round, to my astonishment everything appeared perfectly familiar to me. I seemed to recognise every object. I said to myself, ‘What is this? I was never here before, and yet I have seen all this. There is something here which, on my principles, I cannot account for. There must be some power beyond matter.’

“The thought then suggested, he said, never left him till he was brought from the ‘horror of great darkness’—from that atheism of which he ever spoke with shuddering memories, into the glorious light of revelation.

HONE’S CONVERSION.

This important—*all-important* change, may be said to have resulted (under God’s blessing) from the circumstance of his being led to dwell upon the truth from which his mind was turned away in his early years. He learned to love the Bible, which once he had regarded with aversion; and in the course of a long series of providential dealings, every high thing that exalted itself against the knowledge of God was laid low, and every thought brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

follows:—He was called, in the course of business, into a part of London quite new to him, and as he walked along the street he noticed to himself that he had never been there; but on being shown into a room in a house where he had to wait some time, he immediately fancied that it was all familiar, that he had seen it before, “And if so,” he said to himself, “there is a very peculiar knot in the shutter.” He opened the shutter and found the knot. Now then, thought he, here is something I cannot explain on my principles.

I will first present the reader with the manuscript of a letter sent by my late friend Mr. Richard Ball to Miss Rolleston, who published this and the following letter, as well as other particulars, in some obscure tracts, which have now become very scarce.

“It affords me pleasure to give such particulars as my memory may supply of the intercourse which my honoured father had with that remarkable man, William Hone. I well remember the lively interest he felt in the progress of Hone’s memorable prosecution for libel before Lord Ellenborough. While totally disapproving the publication of parodies of sacred subjects, my father regarded with indignation what he considered the character of the proceedings against him. He saw, as every unprejudiced man saw, that the prosecution was not because Hone had parodied Scripture subjects, but because those parodies were directed against the government and ministers; and that while men of all grades and professions, including Canning (a member of the then Administration) had freely indulged in parodies offensive to Christian feeling, they were approved, while he was singled out for prosecution. It was evident that had he employed the same talent in the same way to support instead of to subvert the Administration, he would probably have found his way to a seat in Parliament instead of a committal to prison. With these feelings my father called on Hone the first time he went to town after the trial. He expressed to Hone his strong feeling of regret that such parodies had ever been published by others as well as by himself; but that he felt at the same time his acquittal was most just, and could therefore congratulate him upon it. This paved the way for more confidential intercourse, which my dear father thankfully availed

himself of, to press upon his mind the infinite importance of those truths which, though embodied with forms and ceremonies, were still part and parcel of the word of God; and that, therefore, though perhaps unwittingly, he had committed a grave offence against God in thus bringing His word into contempt.

“My father’s kindness evidently won upon him, and he invited him to call again. When next in London he did so; further and more interesting conversation ensued, and my father asked Hone if he had ever attentively read the New Testament? Hone said he had, but confessed he might have done so with a mind prejudiced against its doctrine by the manifest hypocrisy of many who made great parade of reverence for its authority. My father affectionately pressed him to read it through once again, remembering that the hypocrisy of those who bore the name of Christians, or even their wickedness, could not be held by any sensible man as an argument against that truth; and if it were true, then eternity, heaven or hell, hung upon the issue of our accepting or rejecting that revelation of Christ as the Saviour of sinners and salvation by Him.

“To all this Hone assented, and promised to do so; and when on again seeing him, my father found he really had read the New Testament with attention, he begged him to accept a volume, on the one condition of reading that also (the volume was Cecil’s Remains, of which my father was very fond). Hone objected that, having to struggle for a bare subsistence by his pen, time was his capital, and that he could hardly promise to read a book of perhaps two hundred pages; but again my father’s kind entreaty prevailed, and Hone passed his word, and my father gave him the book.

“A long time elapsed before my father again saw him, but it was then evident a great change was taking place in his view and feelings; the truth of Christianity had convinced his judgment, even if it had not influenced his heart: and he attributed to those interviews, and to the consequent perusal of the New Testament, and that other volume, the beginning of that blessed change in his views and feelings which ultimately issued in his remarkable conversion.”

The remainder is best told in the sequel of Mr. Hone's letter to Mr. Ball, from which I have already quoted.

“Well, then, my dear sir, in this respect you may gather in some degree how it is with me, and how God has wrought upon my mind, and operates upon it still, to the end. I speak of the time when His hand struck me as for death. It was in a house of prayer; and while being carried out from the place in men's arms as for dead, He lifted up my heart to a throne of grace.

“During the loneliness of what seemed to me my dying bed, the discomfort of my awful infirmity, and the ruin of my name and family, and property, He was with me; and I bless His holy name, my faith in Him is unshaken. He keeps me constantly to Himself; and in despite of worldly afflictions and nature's fears, I depend upon Him, and the workings of His gracious providence, that He will never leave me nor forsake me. It has never entered my mind, even as a shadow, that I can do anything for Him; but whatever He enables me to do, I would do it for His glory. In the dark season of the hiding of His face, I would wait for Him, as He waited for me, while I resisted the drawings of His love; and when I sit

in the light of His countenance, I would rejoice, and magnify His name before the people. And now that He has wonderfully raised me up, after a long season of calamity, to the power of using my pen, I pray that He may direct it to tell of His mercy to me; and by what means He has brought me to acknowledge Him the Lord our righteousness, God blessed for ever.

“‘ At all times, and in all places, when there is need for it, I trust I may never be ashamed to declare His name, but readily exemplify by His help the courage and obedience of a Christian; and as a good soldier of Christ, fight the good fight of faith with the sword of the Spirit. May God grant me strength to do His will, is my humble supplication.’”
(Written by W. H., July, 1834.)

About New Year's Day, 1835, he publicly joined the Christian community at the Weigh House Chapel under the pastoral care of the late Dr. Binney, and received the Lord's Supper as a member of it; but the memorable conversion of a most determined foe into a humble disciple of Christ had been some time accomplished.

HONE'S LATTER YEARS.

The pleasing record of years brightened by Christian faith and hope is thus given by Miss Rolleston, then an elderly lady of marked intellectual and religious character. In a letter from herself to me, she said, “‘I do not know whether you are aware that William Hone, when I talked of his autobiography and said, ‘If you don't write it, I must do it for you,’ replied, ‘Do, my dear lady, no one knows it so well.’”

Her first acquaintance with Mr. Hone she describes thus :

“The friend above alluded to, early in the spring of 1832, being resident in a village near London, observed daily in the garden of an adjoining cottage a fatherly-looking person with the appearance of a respectable retired tradesman, evidently an invalid, but every morning seated in a little arbour, with a small table before him and a large family Bible on it, in which he read much, at intervals walking up and down the garden, conversing with his children. The gardens were only separated by a trellis work ; the quiet inmates of the one cottage therefore unavoidably heard much of the conversation of the large family occupying the other, who lived a great deal in the open air. This affectionate parent was frequent and earnest in striving to impress his children with the importance of religion, and to instruct them in its principles. The strong sense and energetic simplicity of his language were very soon remarked ; so was his early rising and devoted study of his Bible, and his constantly taking his family to a place of worship, generally three times on the Sunday.

“Some weeks elapsed before the name of these newcomers was ascertained, and a still longer before it occurred to any one to identify the name of this quiet, regular family with one that had so different an idea attached to it in general. Those privately acquainted with Hone, even while the adversary of Christianity, were however well aware that as a husband and a father he failed only in the one (but most important) duty of religious instruction. Those who knew him only from his public character could never recognise him in the simple-minded,

humble Christian, whose daily life and conversation was thus unintentionally the subject of unbiassed observation for some months, and afterwards of admiration and astonishment at the power of Divine grace exhibited in him."

This was written in 1836. In another letter in 1843 the authoress describes with more detail her first impressions, including the discovery that her neighbour had an almost universal acquaintance with English literature and most with the most sterling authors.

"He frequently spoke on religious subjects, on which he appeared to be very seriously inquiring. One day he asked, 'In what books shall I find your religious opinions.' I replied, 'In one, the Bible.' A day or two after he observed, 'I have been thinking much of what you said; there is but one book, the Bible!'

"As he recovered his health his remarkable powers of wit and humour began to show themselves, and the force of his character was again in action. He heard of an act of oppression to a defenceless woman in the neighbourhood, and took up her cause with his accustomed energy. His first visit was on this affair. Two gentlemen were sitting with me, both very clever men. When he left us they said, 'That is an extraordinary man; such fearlessness, such benevolence, such acute perception of the wrong, and the way to get it set to rights!'

"Soon after this he asked me some questions in English literature. 'I shall never again attempt to teach you,' said I, rather pointedly. 'Then you know me now, the arch blasphemer!' returned he, with an expression of the greatest self abasement, 'and will you now converse with me?' 'A brand

plucked from the burning,' was my reply; and he was, I believe, deeply though silently grateful, and now his communications became more and more confidential, and more than ever on the concerns of eternity. Much of his past life he related to me from time to time, in the desultory sort of way in which alone I can relate it. One evening he told me, 'I have spent a delightful day alone in Norwood' (then retaining much of its wild wood walks and lonely beauty); 'I have stood humbled before a child. I saw a little girl sitting at a cottage door reading a Bible which lay on her lap. I said to her, "My little girl, what are you reading?" "My Bible, sir." "What; are you getting your lesson for your Sunday-school?" "No, sir." "Why are you reading it, then?" "Because I love it!" I stood humbled before that child.'

"Most expressive was the gesture and the voice that accompanied these words—few and simple and striking, as was his wont.

"A very celebrated contemporary, who highly appreciated Hone's talents and honesty, being applied to for assistance in what was then doing for his service, said, 'The man has been dead for years.' It was thought best to have the report contradicted under his own hand; and it was thus he did it. 'Yes, I have been dead for some years—dead to the world—and I am willing so to remain. I am thankful to God that, by His help, while faculty and life remain, they must be devoted to Him, through honest endeavours in promoting the extension of His cause on earth.' Speaking of his then employment, he goes on to say: 'A sense of duty to my family confines me to the dreary sound

of this treadmill' (as sub-editor of a paper) 'six days a week. Only one thing reconciles me to it—the seventh day. The first day of the week is the Sabbath, and it is to me thrice blessed.'"

Miss Rolleston proceeds in her narrative to record a letter from the writer, whose acquaintance with both these parties was of a somewhat later date.

"Another of the Christian friends from whom, in his latter years, William Hone received so much kindness, has also furnished recollections of him.

"It is pleasing to recall the memory of one whom I think of as a monument of special mercy—a brand snatched from the burning; for such was William Hone during the period of my acquaintance with him, including the few years before his death. None so sensible as he was himself of the awful abyss of infidelity from which he had been delivered. I well remember the mental shudder with which he spoke of the state of his soul, when wandering in the darkness of materialism. My course of inquiry in this conversation was directed to the investigation of his then opinions. I asked him if he had believed in causation without a first cause. His replies showed that the present thing to his soul was the deep conviction of his rebel state by nature; which led him, at that time, to a state of feeling and thought on which it is unnecessary to dwell.¹ I never shall forget how his fine intellectual countenance brightened when speaking of his hopes for eternity—a radiant beam of joy kindling in his piercing eye; the new creation becoming more beautiful as decay stole over the outward man, for he

¹ Although instructive, and illustrating the truth that *Atheism* is an affair rather of the *heart* than the *head*.

was so much shattered by paralysis, that towards the close, I believe, mental power was very much withdrawn from this once dauntless brow. He gave me the copy of lines written on a blank leaf in his pocket Bible; and with this note, 'Written before breakfast, 3rd June, 1834, the anniversary of my birthday in 1780.'

"I much wished him to write his autobiography, but am inclined to think he had not health or nerve to undertake the task. I have no means at all at my command for sketching even the outlines of his religious history. Two or three anecdotes which he related are all that I can contribute towards a piece of mental history which, if preserved, would have been highly interesting. The first in point of time as to his state of mind was a circumstance which shook his confidence in materialism, though it did not lead to his conversion. It was one of those mental phenomena which he saw to be inexplicable by the doctrine he then held. I hesitate a little as to recording the circumstance, which to some persons would savour too much of the marvellous.¹ . . .

"A second anecdote he related to me thus:—

"He had been spending a holiday in the woods near Rochester, rambling and thinking till he was weary, when he came upon a farmhouse which he entered, and asked the good woman of the house to get him some milk. She rose to comply with his request, and left the book she was reading on the table. In her absence he took it up, found it was the New Testament, and read some verses in the 5th chapter of Matthew. The impression made upon his mind was chiefly the richness of thought and condensation of matter in the style. He said to himself, 'There is

¹ Letter from Mr. J. E. Howard to Miss Rolleston.

more in one verse here than in a whole page of the Greek Philosophers,' which he had been reading. He determined at once to buy the book, and to study it with attention. On his return to Rochester he attempted that very night to procure a copy, but it was too late. The next morning, however, he succeeded, purchased a Testament, which he read carefully with pencil in hand, crossing out all the passages he could not believe. He then with a pair of scissors cut out the portions which he could believe, and pasted them into a book for his own use. He said to himself, 'What a beautiful thing is Christianity, but this Paul has wrought it up into a philosophical system.' He did not speak of this as directly instrumental to his conversion, but mentioned as more immediately connected with this the gift of Cecil's Life and Remains by a gentleman, a member of the Society of Friends, the late Mr. Ball, of Bristol. The gift was accompanied with a promise on his part that he would read the work. This he only partially accomplished at the time, but at a subsequent and critical period of his mental history, the perusal was accompanied by a blessing to his soul.

"The above are the chief particulars which I can recall relative to the latter years of this gifted man, by nature a lion, but changed by grace into a lamb; and I doubt not received, as washed in a Saviour's blood, into heavenly rest.

HONE'S DEATH.

Miss Rolleston wrote me, in a letter (not dated, probably 1848) from which I now copy :

"Can you furnish me with any letter of his, or

anything relative to his last hours? Many persons ask me how he died."

It is not the death, but the life that I have to record. William Hone died at Tottenham on the 6th November, 1842.

CONCLUSION.

My pleasant task as compiler is now completed. It may be expected that I should say something in the way of improvement and application; but I never had much taste for this sort of writing, and I remember that the subject of this memoir told me that though he read Cecil's Life with interest, he left the "Remains" till a time when he happened to be destitute of any other reading.

I would therefore leave the life to tell its own tale. The inimitable biographies we find in Scripture are thus left to produce their own effect. I trust that by the Divine blessing this account may be rendered useful to those young persons, especially, who have been led to think of the reception of the truth as a mere matter of excitement, and as something unworthy of a manly character.

Hone's conversion was connected with his receiving the testimony of the Scripture to the glad tidings proclaimed to us, and of which God has given a pledge¹ unto all men, in that He hath raised up Christ again from the dead. Those who assail the Gospel have therefore in the first place to attempt the impossible task of disproving the historical evidences of Christianity.

I conclude with the verses written by W. Hone on the anniversary of his birthday in 1834, as finally

¹ See Paul's discourse at Athens, in the Greek.

corrected and given by himself to the writer. They were published in a periodical, "The Inquirer," of which I was proprietor.

"The proudest heart that ever beat
Hath been subdued in me;
The wildest will that ever rose,
To scorn Thy cause, and aid Thy foes,
Is quelled, my God, by Thee!

"Thy will, and not my will, be done;
My heart be ever Thine!
Confessing Thee, the mighty Word,
I hail Thee, Christ, my God, my Lord,
And make Thy Name my sign."
W. HONE."

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