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John Fawcett D.D.

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AN
ACCOUNT
OF
THE LIFE, MINISTRY, AND WRITINGS



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OF THE LATE

REV. JOHN FAWCETT, D. D.

WHO WAS

MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL FIFTY-FOUR YEARS,

FIRST AT WAINSGATE, AND AFTERWARDS AT HEBDENBRIDGE, IN
THE PARISH OF HALIFAX;

COMPREHENDING MANY PARTICULARS RELATIVE TO

THE REVIVAL AND PROGRESS OF RELIGION

IN YORKSHIRE AND LANCASHIRE;

AND ILLUSTRATED BY

COPIOUS EXTRACTS

FROM THE DIARY OF THE DECEASED, FROM HIS EXTENSIVE
CORRESPONDENCE, AND OTHER DOCUMENTS.

“Remember them which have the rule over you,
who have spoken unto you the word of God:
whose faith follow, considering the end of their
conversation: Jesus Christ the same yesterday,
and to-day, and for ever.” St. PAUL.

LONDON:

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PATERNOSTER ROW;
AND P. K. HOLDEN, HALIFAX.

1818.



AN ACCOUNT

OF THE LIFE, MINISTRY, AND WRITINGS

OF REV. JOHN FAWCETT, D. D.

BY THE REV. JOHN FAWCETT, D. D.

MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL FIFTY-FOUR YEARS

IN THE PARISH OF ST. MARTIN, VINCEY

AND THE HISTORY OF HIS MINISTRY

IN YORKSHIRE AND LANCASHIRE

WITH A HISTORY OF

THE REVIVAL AND PROGRESS OF RELIGION
FROM THE DIARY OF THE MINISTER, FROM HIS EXTENSIVE
CORRESPONDENCE, AND OTHER DOCUMENTS.

Printed by Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, London.

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MEMOIRS

OF THE LATE

JOHN FAWCETT, D.D.

IN perusing the lives of eminent men we shall, in some instances, find that they have been favoured by their birth, their connexions, and other exterior advantages, in their efforts to attain an elevation above the rest of mankind. Whilst the biographer has paid a tribute to their personal worth, he has had also to recount the deserts of their illustrious ancestors, and to show how these individuals supported the dignity of their families. In the success of such characters we see well-founded expectations realized, and we follow them in their prosperous and splendid career, with a pleasing complacency.

But among those whose names have lived, and whose memory continues to be venerated by posterity, there have been many in all ages who have emerged from obscurity, and instead of enjoying the gales of prosperity, have had, almost through the whole of their progress, to encounter difficulties and discouragements of an overwhelming nature, and such as nothing but the most persevering exertions would have been able to sur-

mount. That there is something in the lives of such men calculated to interest the mind, is too evident to need any illustration. The writer of fiction finds it necessary to keep up the attention of his readers by representing his hero as contending against a variety of obstacles, in order that he may exhibit his excellencies, as not unworthy of that success which at length crowns his efforts. In *real life* it is of great importance, that instances of this kind should be attentively observed, not only as showing the power and efficacy of the principles by which the individuals themselves were actuated, the first traces of that mental progress which afterwards became so conspicuous, the means by which their minds were gradually formed, but more especially that they may be held forth as examples to others, so as to afford incentives to similar exertions.

In reading the Divine Word, we shall find that many of the most distinguished saints, in the early stages of their lives more particularly, passed through the shades of adversity. Abraham, the father of the faithful, and the friend of God, was a stranger in that land which was destined for his posterity. Little would have been recorded of his faith, but for the severe trials with which he was exercised. By these the Almighty *made known* to all succeeding generations his eminence, in this respect. Those worthies mentioned in Heb. xi. wandered about in sheep skins and goat skins, being destitute, afflicted, and tormented; they confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims in the earth. David, the man after God's own heart, was taken from the sheepfolds, where for a considerable period he followed the humble occupation of a shepherd, displaying his

natural courage in defence of his flock. His brethren despised his youth, discouraged and reprov'd him for what they considered as presumption, and an improper attempt to rise above his humble sphere, when the native energies of his mind stimulated him to nobler pursuits and enterprizes ; but it was the will of God, that he should ' feed his people Israel,' though, for a long time after he was anointed by the prophet, his life was a chequered scene, full of troubles and disappointments.

Elijah, that most eminent restorer of the worship of God, who was the bold reprov'er and terror of a wicked race of kings, when first introduced to our notice, is merely described as the Tishbite. The same remarks will apply to the prophets in general, under the former dispensation, and to those persons who were the instruments chosen by the Son of God himself to make known his name to Jews and Gentiles. The apostle Paul, though he had been brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, laboured for his subsistence as a tent maker, and was often exposed to the greatest difficulties, ignominy, and persecution. ' These hands,' says he, ' have ministered to my necessities, and to those that were with me.' Not many mighty, not many noble are called ; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, that no man should glory in his presence. Nor need we to wonder that Sovereign wisdom thus ordains, when we reflect, that the Author and Finisher of our faith was himself *made perfect* through sufferings. Having laid aside his glory, and assumed human nature, he took upon him ' the form of a servant,' he was brought up in poverty and obscurity, in the house of a carpenter, himself following the same occupation ; and even after the

commencement of his public ministrations, he declared, that while 'the foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests, the Son of Man had not where to lay his head.'

If the life of the Christian is uniformly represented as a state of trial, and if the promises of the gospel are peculiarly adapted to such a state, we ought not to think it strange that adversity has been the lot of good men in almost every age. The Almighty not only *chooses* them in the furnace of affliction, but he often permits them, for wise ends, to *continue* there for a considerable time, to humble them, to prove them, and to know what is in their hearts. In this respect, as well as in many others, it is good for a man 'to bear the yoke in his youth.'

Some of these desultory remarks are, in a measure, applicable to many periods in the life of him to whose memory these pages are dedicated. During his long life, he passed through many changes; he knew both how to 'be abased and suffer need, and how to abound;' but his path, though often strait and difficult, was the right way for the exercise of Christian graces and dispositions, and as a preparation for a better and brighter world.

He was earnestly solicited by his family and by many of his friends to write some account of his life, as connected with the changes that took place in the moral and religious world, so far as they came under his observation, and in the circle in which he moved. Every individual is certainly best able to judge of, and describe the successive operations of his own mind, the train of his feelings, opinions, and habits, and the influence which particular events have had in determining

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his course of life. On these, as well as on many other accounts, such a memorial was desirable, and might have usefully employed his pen in the later periods of life, had not his modesty induced him to decline the task.

The first part of this narrative has been collected partly from hints dropped in conversation, which were committed to writing at the time, and partly from a diary contained in several MS. volumes, with heads of sermons and fugitive pieces, written chiefly between the age of twenty and twenty-four. This diary was, in a great measure, discontinued after he entered upon his ministerial labours; the composition of sermons, preparatory reading, and other urgent engagements, engrossing almost the whole of his time and attention. It is to be regretted that many parts of the diary are written in a short hand, which cannot now be easily deciphered.

The associates of his early years have long been numbered with the dead. The partner of his joys and sorrows, whose recollection might have supplied many incidents, though spared to an advanced age, left this world several years before him. Of those who once formed his family circle, one only now remains, who looks back with a mournful kind of pleasure on a period of nearly fifty years, during which he enjoyed the society and endearing solicitude of so affectionate a parent. The intimate intercourse which subsisted between them certainly afforded him every opportunity of appreciating his character, his views, and sentiments. On account of the near relationship subsisting between himself and the deceased, he has often felt, and still continues to feel, great diffidence and hesitation as to the propriety of submitting these papers to the inspec-

tion of the public,—In other respects also he is conscious of being unequal to the undertaking; but whatever imperfections may be observed, he will consider himself amply rewarded if the attempt to record past events may tend to lead the attention of his readers to those all-important truths which it was the great object of the deceased to inculcate by his preaching and writings, and to enforce by his example. If this should happily be the case, though now mouldering in the dust, he will yet speak, not only to those who were personally acquainted with him, but to others who were strangers to him.

“ Then in the history of my age

When men review my days,

They'll read thy love in every page,

In every line thy praise.”

JOHN FAWCETT was born January 6, (O. S.) 1739-40, at Lidget-Green, near Bradford, in Yorkshire. His father, Stephen Fawcett, whom he always mentioned with the most tender filial affection, died of a fever in the fiftieth year of his age, leaving a widow who long survived him, and a numerous family, to lament their loss. When this affecting breach took place, he was in his twelfth year. His grandfather was still living and resident in the family, but unable to take an active part in the management of it, being totally blind. On the day of the funeral this aged relative was, by his own particular request, led to the coffin, that he might take his leave of his departed son, by weeping over what he could not see, and placing his hands on his face.—This must have

been a moving scene to all present, and particularly to the widowed mother and her bereaved children. It certainly made a deep and lasting impression on the subject of this memoir, as he often mentioned it with much emotion, when speaking of his family. At that early age his mind was evidently under serious impressions; and no doubt such a sudden and affecting stroke, while it deprived him of the resources on which he depended for support, must have been an awful lesson to him of the uncertainty of all created good. For some time he was greatly agitated by fears respecting the final state of a parent he had loved so much. These painful apprehensions led him fervently to supplicate the Divine throne for relief and consolation. The melancholy subject not only engaged his waking but his sleeping thoughts; and he had, on one occasion, a dream, by which he fancied some intimation was conveyed to him that his fears respecting the state of his departed parent were groundless:—this greatly relieved his mind. How far such impressions ought to be regarded is not now the subject of inquiry. The incident is here simply stated; and if, at so tender an age, some degree of enthusiasm was mixed with a pious train of feeling, it is not to be wondered at, much less to be censured. It certainly shows how deeply he was affected, not only on account of the loss of his parent, but from an anxious solicitude about his eternal welfare, which prevailed to such a degree that he thought he never could have been happy again if some relief had not been afforded.

Having been early initiated in the common branches of learning, he soon showed a taste for books, and read with eagerness such as came in his way, particularly

Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress." He often talked with his mother about it, and told her there was nothing he so much desired as to become a pilgrim. Such an idea as this might occur to a child who was merely entertained by the narration, but there is reason to believe he understood something of the spiritual meaning of many passages in that inimitable work. He also read Bunyan's "Heavenly Footman," Alleine's "Alarm," and Baxter's "Call to the Unconverted;" the last two are admirably calculated to excite earnest inquiry about the best things. The other books which he perused were chiefly in the legal strain: among others, "The Whole Duty of Man," which, from the number of editions through which it formerly passed, must have had a most extensive circulation. His oldest brother, for whom through life he retained the most sincere affection, encouraged and united with him in these inquiries after the one thing needful. They often retired into the barn together for prayer, whither their pious mother, pleased with these early appearances of serious concern, sometimes secretly followed them to listen to their artless and devout aspirations.

Soon after the death of his father, the family left the small farm at Lidget-green, and the children were placed in different situations. At the age of thirteen, the subject of this narrative was put apprentice to a person at Bradford, with whom he remained to the expiration of his term, which was six years. He was there in an orderly family, and was encouraged both by precept and example in a regular attendance on public worship at church, to which indeed he had been trained up from his earliest years. For the Rev. Mr. Butler, who was many years lecturer at Bradford church, he

always retained great respect, both on account of the regularity of his deportment, and the fervour and seriousness with which he inculcated what he considered as of importance to his hearers. He strenuously recommended the necessity of holiness, though he enforced the practice of it rather by legal motives, than by those more noble and efficacious arguments which the gospel holds forth.

From this gentleman he received many marks of kindness, which he afterwards acknowledged with gratitude. The preacher was no doubt pleased to see in one so young a spirit of inquiry about the best things. He treated him with great condescension, and encouraged him both by the loan of books and occasional instruction in classical learning, for which he was well qualified, being head master of the Grammar School, which situation he filled for many years with high and deserved reputation.

During the continuance of his apprenticeship, his time was occupied in his master's service from six in the morning to eight at night, so that what time he had for reading was principally redeemed from sleep, or seized by stealth. The Sacred Book, whether he was in the house or by the way, whether engaged in work or at leisure, was his constant companion. Between the age of twelve and fourteen he had read it over repeatedly; and he thought himself enriched for ever when he had obtained possession of a *small pocket Bible*. Perhaps it would scarcely be proper to relate the different plans he adopted to elude the notice of the family, who had no idea of the enjoyment he found in reading and retirement, and the means he employed to rescue from sleep a little time for these purposes. Happily for his

turn of mind, he had a small lodging room to himself: a considerable part of his pocket money was employed in the purchase of candles. His master and mistress, with the domestics, retired at an early hour: he, among the rest, took his candle up stairs, and, to avoid suspicion, when he had been a little time in the room, hid the lighted candle under an earthen vessel till he supposed the family were all asleep; when he betook himself to his delightful employment for a considerable part of the night. Sometimes he tied a weight to his foot, and at others fastened his hand to the bed-post, that he might not sleep too long. These circumstances are not mentioned here to excite imitation, for he was himself afterwards sensible of their impropriety, in the injury which his health sustained; but they show the decided bent of his mind, which no obstacles, even of a prudential nature, could restrain. This notice of them may likewise lead those who are distinguished by privileges, and have every encouragement from their parents and other connexions, to value their opportunities, and to be more solicitous to improve them in a suitable manner. A considerable portion of the time thus redeemed from sleep was spent in earnest and fervent prayer.

During the former part of this period he knew nothing of the dissenters, and methodism was not much talked of; but he occasionally went on Sabbath evenings to the presbyterian chapel at Bradford, where, according to a custom which had long prevailed among the puritans, the sermons preached at the place were rehearsed from notes, which, in this instance, had been taken down by a gentleman of the name of Swain. The discourses were principally such as Mr. Swain had heard there in his younger days. The good man read

his MS. papers with great piety and affection, sometimes introducing a few remarks of his own. He was often melted into tears, both from a recollection of past days, and a painful conviction that there had been a considerable declension in religion since the time when these sermons were first preached. With this worthy gentleman he formed an acquaintance, which was of great service to him. His constant aim was to seek the society of those from whose judgment and experience he might derive advantage. He had indeed, as was often remarked by those who knew him, from the age of fifteen or sixteen, all the gravity and appearance of maturity; he soon 'put away childish things,' and associated with men.

Of all his acquaintances at this period, a Mr. David Pratt was the most intimate. This good man treated him with the kindness of a parent. He was a person of considerable literary attainments, and desirous of giving every encouragement to young persons of promising talents and dispositions. He not only lent him many valuable books, to the purchase of which his own finances were not adequate, but assisted him in the study of the Latin language, and in other branches of learning. They passed their evenings, and frequently their midnight hours, with each other. Among the Latin books for which he was indebted to his friend, he placed great value on one containing a short system of divinity, wherein the original story may be found, from which the poet Parnel took the idea of his "Hermit." Mr. Pratt was well versed in the system professed by the presbyterians, and took great pains in catechizing young persons. He was very fond of Mr. Flavel's writings, which he no doubt recom-

mended to his youthful associate; and we may, probably, from this period, date his attachment to the works of that excellent divine.

This valuable friend he lost at a time when his continuance with him was most desirable; and it does not appear, from the scanty documents remaining, that he became acquainted with any other person, during his residence at Bradford, from whom he received much advantage, in a literary point of view. His last interview with his friend was very affecting. He went to see him on the morning of the day on which he died, and had some interesting conversation with him; at the close of it, after inquiring the hour, and being informed it was six, he stretched himself on the bed, and instantly expired.

About the time when he was deprived of the aid of this kind and intelligent friend, his attention was irresistibly attracted by the ministry of those eminent men, the Rev. George Whitefield, Messrs. John and Charles Wesley, and Mr. Grimshaw, whose unwearied labours produced a most important change in the Christian church; the effects of which not only remain, but have been extending ever since that period. That we may be the better able to form an idea of what they, as instruments in the hand of God, effected, it may not be improper to take a cursory review of the state of the professing world previous to their appearance on the scene of action.

The ministers of our holy religion had been for a succession of years more distinguished by their learning than by that primitive simplicity and holy fervour which are no less necessary to a faithful discharge of the trust reposed on them, as dispensers of the oracles

of God. Avoiding every thing which they considered as bordering on intemperate zeal and enthusiasm, as puritanical, and as such obnoxious to the court party, their sermons became polished harangues on virtue, illustrated more frequently by quotations from heathen writers than by references to the only true standard of faith and practice. It is readily allowed that many of them were able defenders of the Protestant faith, against the assaults of infidelity and the errors of the church of Rome. They understood and judiciously stated those external arguments by which the attacks of the avowed enemies of Christianity might be repelled. On these accounts their writings are justly held in high estimation. They also explained and enforced the duties incumbent on man as a creature of God, and a member of civil society; but their preaching, in too many instances, degenerated into a cold system of morality, so that both ministers and people were 'at ease in Zion,' and, to use the language of the parable, the foolish and the wise virgins slumbered together. This declension was apparent both in the episcopal church and among the descendants of the old presbyterians. Moral essays delivered in a dull, uninteresting manner cannot be likely to produce a permanent impression on the minds of the hearers. "Si vis me flere, dolendum est primum tibi ipsi."* Where

* We are here reminded of the answer given by a celebrated actor to a minister, who had expressed his surprise that theatrical performances excited so much attention and interest, though known to be mere effusions of fancy, while the truths delivered from the pulpit were heard with indifference: "*We*," says he, "exhibit fictions as though they were realities, while *you* utter realities as though they were fictions."

this strain of preaching prevails the grand, the distinguishing doctrines of the gospel are glossed over, or lightly touched upon; its glory is obscured, and it is scarcely distinguishable from a system of mere ethics. It is evident that sermons of the above description could not be calculated to alarm the conscience; the necessity of an atonement was in a great measure kept out of sight, and a kind of intermediate system held forth, concealing the dreadful, the fatal disease, and lulling the mind into security under the idea that *imperfect services* would be accepted, and that in performing them, as far as the frailty of human nature would permit, there would be no doubt of their ensuring the Divine favour, and making their peace with God. This kind of preaching was adapted to the taste of the fashionable world; it did not run counter to their prejudices and proud imaginations; so that the *offence of the cross ceased*.—With respect to the lower classes, they either could not comprehend what was advanced, or, if they paid any attention, their feelings and passions were not interested, so that what they heard passed away like a ‘tale that is told.’ In how many instances, alas! is this the case still, where the same method is continued, both within and without the pale of the church! What a contrast do we observe in them to the apostolical labours of a Whitefield, a Wesley, a Grimshaw, and a Venn! What zeal, what steady perseverance, did these men evidence in promoting the all-important objects they had in view, being willing to spend and be spent for the sake of Christ! It is acknowledged that, on some occasions, their zeal bordered too much on enthusiasm; that they sometimes used expressions which were neither justifiable nor prudent, of which