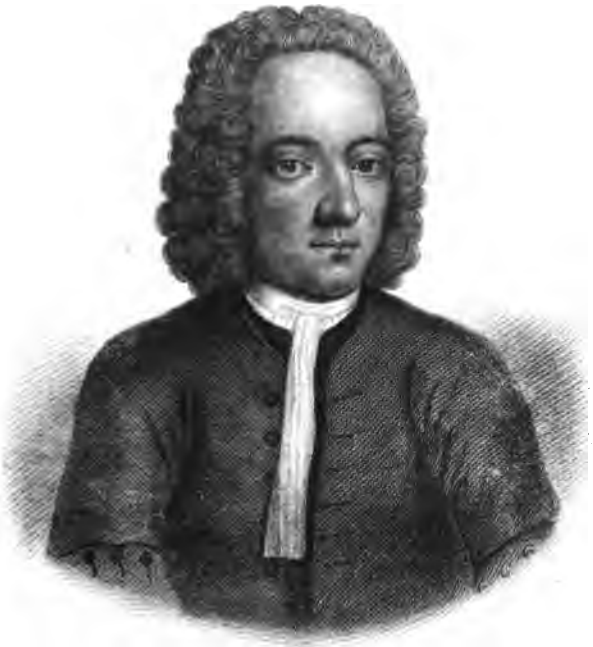

Ralph Erskine

LIFE

OF

RALPH ERSKINE.

BY

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RALPH ERSKINE.

CHAPTER I.

THE OLD PURITAN.

"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."—MATT. v. 10.

BEFORE entering upon the life of Ralph Erskine, it may be interesting to our readers to know something of his grand old puritan father, the Rev. Henry Erskine, of Cornhill, in Northumberland, and afterwards of Chirnside in Berwickshire.

Henry Erskine was born at Dryburgh, "the seat of the ancient abbey," on the banks of the Tweed, 1624. His father, Mr Ralph Erskine of

Shielfield,* was a country gentleman related to the Earl of Mar. His family was a large one, consisting of thirty-three children, of whom his son Henry was amongst the younger members. Henry's education was by no means neglected, though a numerous train of brothers and sisters preceded him under the paternal roof. The early proofs he showed of piety and talent, determined his parents to give him every advantage they could afford. The improvement in knowledge and piety in the lad was probably greatly due to the good ministers under whose pastoral care he was privileged to be reared, and he was equally fortunate in his teachers when attending the Edinburgh University, where he received the degree of Master of Arts.

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* The old family house of the Erskines of Shielfield, at Dryburgh, was possessed by that family from 1559 till 1793. It was a very old-fashioned building, with an ancient tower at the east end, and was referred to in the old ballad of Hilton Hill—

"Ye foemen, ere you storm this ancient peel,
Their motto see,—remember 'tis "*Think Weel.*"

It is also supposed to be the place to which Sir Walter Scott alludes in the beautiful ballad of the "Eve of St. John."

Having carefully studied the Church controversies of that age, he conscientiously and decidedly attached himself to the doctrines of the Scottish Confessions and the Westminster Confession of Faith, and to the Presbyterian forms of worship, discipline, and government. Conformably, therefore, he received license to preach the Gospel from Presbyterian ministers, and was afterwards ordained by ministers of that persuasion.

The place to which Mr Erskine was called after his ordination was Cornhill, a village pleasantly situated on the south bank of the Tweed. Here, his labours were signally blessed, though at first the people were ignorant, ungodly, and rude, as well as virulent in their hostility to religion. However, by the Divine blessing on his faithful ministrations, they became so warmly attached to him for his Master's sake, that when, by the Act of Uniformity, August 24, 1662, he, in common with two thousand faithful ministers in England, was ejected from his living, his removal was greatly regretted.

This Uniformity Act, which in the reign of Charles II. was introduced into Parliament, and carried by a narrow majority of five in the House of Commons, excluded from the benefices all clergymen who before that date failed to comply with certain conditions. Not only must they renounce the Solemn League and Covenant, and abjure the taking of arms, on any pretence whatever, against the monarch; but, if not already episcopally ordained, they must receive ordination anew from a bishop; they must declare their unfeigned assent to everything contained in the Book of Common Prayer, and they must take the oath of canonical obedience to their superiors. The measure was so framed that any member of the obnoxious party of the Puritans could not remain in the Church of England, for the oath not only exacted a strict compliance with the ceremonies of the National Church, but it asked them to acknowledge that their public actings had been a treason.

Bartholomew Day arrived, and upwards of two thousand pulpits were vacated, and amongst

them was Henry Erskine's. By this Act, the Puritans, who for a hundred years had been the lights of the Church of England, were cast forth, and were henceforth to be known as Nonconformists.

For some unknown cause, the emoluments of Erskine's living at Cornhill had been partly, if not altogether withheld, and in order to get redress, he was advised to go to London and make application to the king. The ship in which he embarked having been, from the state of the weather, compelled to put in at Harwich, it was detained three weeks. Mr Erskine was not idle during that time, for the religious people of the town, having heard of his arrival and detention, invited him to preach to them. They were satisfied with the discourses they heard, and on his departure gave him substantial tokens of their gratitude and esteem. On his arrival in London, and presenting his petition to the king, after long waiting, he was dismissed with the ungracious reply that he could not recover his arrears unless he would promise to conform to the

Established Church. To this, of course, the dauntless man would not agree. Several Scottish noblemen then offered him benefices on condition of conformity; but all was of no avail, he would rather cast himself and family on the care of Providence, than do anything to violate his duty, or counteract the dictates of conscience.

Setting sail for Leith, with scarcely any money in his purse after paying his fare, the ship was again constrained to put in at Harwich. It was detained there six weeks, to the no small joy of the people, who gladly welcomed the minister back, and when he left they furnished him with everything requisite for his comfort on his voyage to Scotland.

On reaching that country, he received from his brother a dwelling-house in Dryburgh, where he appears to have resided eighteen years, and where he sometimes exercised the office of the ministry. Owing to the expulsion of a minister from the neighbouring parish of Mertoun, by the Glasgow Act of 1662, and an Episcopal incumbent succeeding him, the services of Mr Henry

Erskine were greatly prized. It would seem that this devoted minister was allowed to preach for some time without much annoyance. But, in 1682, in common with many other Presbyterians, he smarted under the severities inflicted on those found "guilty" of keeping conventicles, and of celebrating baptisms and marriages since His Majesty's late Act of Indemnity, 1679.

From this time until the Act of Toleration granted by King James, in 1687, the life of Mr Erskine was one of continual hardship and persecution, and at the same time, of marvellous and great deliverances, a few of which may be noticed, he himself having related them to another ejected minister. One day, shortly after his ejectment from Cornhill, there was "neither bread, meal, nor money" in his house; the children had awakened early in the morning, crying for food. The father tried to amuse them, and at the same time to encourage his wife to depend upon that Providence "which feeds the young ravens when they cry." While he was thus engaged, a countryman knocked hard at

the door, and called for some one to help him off with his load, which Mr Erskine found to be a sack filled with butcher's meat and meal,—an occurrence which gave him great encouragement to depend on his bountiful Benefactor in future difficulties.

Another time, when on a visit to Edinburgh, he was reduced to such straits that he had only three halfpence in his pocket. Though standing in need of refreshments, he durst not enter a tavern and call for food, for which he could not pay. As he walked along, perplexed and anxious, a stranger accosted him, and asked him if he were Mr Henry Erskine. Being answered in the affirmative, he then produced a letter in which was enclosed some money, and a note bearing these words, "Sir, receive this from a sympathising friend—farewell." Astonished, he turned to address the stranger, but the man had disappeared, and who he was could never be discovered. On another occasion, his money falling short when he was on a journey on foot, he was in danger of being exposed to much inconvenience;

but as he walked over the marshy ground he heard something tinkle at the end of his staff, and on looking down and examining the spot, he found two half-crowns, which did him good service on the road home.

After the King's proclamation of indulgence, a number of pious Presbyterians residing in the parish of Whitsome and its vicinity gave Mr Erskine a call to be their minister, and there he lived, discharging the duties of his office with much acceptance, until the Revolution in 1688.

One instance of the success of his labours in this place deserves to be noticed—the conversion of Thomas Boston, of Ettrick. "Towards the latter end of summer," says this excellent man himself, "the liberty of conscience being then newly given by King James, my father took me away with him to the Presbyterian meetings in the Newton of Whitsome. There I heard the worthy Mr Henry Erskine, minister of Cornhill before the Restoration; by whose means it pleased the Lord to awaken me, and bring me under exercise about my soul's state; being then

bouring towns, he left for the University of Edinburgh, which he entered in his fifteenth year.

The first session of his attendance at the University was marked by a striking instance of the divine goodness in preserving his life when in imminent peril. At that time, February 1700, the Parliament Square was almost entirely destroyed by fire, and Ralph, happening to lodge in a house in the square, narrowly escaped being burned to death, having forced his way through the flames, with a number of his books.

When a student of divinity, he set out from Fife, where he was then residing, to attend the celebration of the Lord's Supper at Liberton, two miles south from Edinburgh. In the hurry of his departure, he neglected his usual personal devotions. After crossing the Forth, on his road from Leith he met a poor man, to whom, unsolicited, he gave an alms. The man seemed much affected by this act of kindness, and thanked him sincerely. This circumstance brought to Mr [illegible]'s mind that expression in Isaiah lxiv. 6,

"I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not," and he said to himself, "What a mercy will it be if the Lord meet me at Liberton, notwithstanding my omission of duty this morning." His soul was stirred up to earnest prayer for the gracious presence of God; nor did he pray in vain, for on that occasion he was favoured with delightful tokens of the divine presence.

His brother Ebenezer having been ordained minister of Portmoak in May 1703, Ralph appears to have spent most of his summer holidays under his hospitable roof. He afterwards obtained the situation of tutor and chaplain to the family of Lieutenant-Colonel John Erskine, a man justly celebrated for his piety and patriotism. The Colonel was a distant relative of his own, the third son of Henry, Lord Cardross, a nobleman also distinguished for his attachment to Presbyterian principles, as well as for his sufferings in the cause of civil and religious liberty.

In that family Ralph seems to have resided, both in Edinburgh and in the retirement of the

Colonel's country house near Culross, until his license, about 1709. How faithful he was, to discharge with fidelity the duty that now developed upon him, we see from his diary—"Thursday afternoon, but especially Friday afternoon, when being thoughtful about my concerns with respect to the family, and my duty therein, and towards the children committed to my trust, I went to seek counsel of the Lord how to carry, and was made, with intentness of spirit while praying, to seek that the Lord might give me a sight of my sins. I was made to beg that the Lord would assist and direct me in my carriage with respect to the family and the children committed to my custody in some measure—praying that the Lord might take the glory of all to Himself, by helping me to my work, and profiting the children."

It speaks well for the tutor who thus seeks to promote the glory of God and the good of the young committed to his care, and happy are the young who are placed under the tuition of such a teacher. Colonel Erskine knew the value

of the tutor to whom he had entrusted his children, and wrote thus:—"I beg earnestly, that the Lord may bless your good designs to my children; and am fully persuaded, that the right impressions that children get of God and the ways of God, when they are young, is a great help to them in life."

Ralph Erskine was borne down with an overwhelming sense of his unfitness to preach the Gospel, and it was with great difficulty he could be prevailed upon to make application for license; but his brother and Colonel Erskine did all they could to encourage him to proceed, and cheered him on with their kind sympathies and counsels. At one time, it is said, Ralph went to the top of a hill, near Portmoak, to attempt preaching a sermon alone, and Ebenezer, having followed him and listened unobserved, was highly pleased with his appearance, and returning home in good spirits, said to his wife, "I hope our *calf* (a bashful person) will preach yet."

Encouraged by his friends, the young man went forward and "was entered on trials" by the

Presbytery of Dunfermline. All his exercises meeting the approval of the court, and having subscribed the Confession of Faith, he was admitted to preach the Gospel, "wherever in providence he should be orderly called."

Mr Erskine's high Christian character and his gifts as a preacher soon came to be heard of throughout the neighbourhood, and he received, at much the same time, two or three different calls to churches around. Dunfermline being one of these, he chose it, notwithstanding the prospect of greater labour and difficulty, with inferior emolument. He was consequently ordained to the pastoral office of that town, as colleague and successor to Mr Buchanan, in the twenty-seventh year of his age, and nearly eleven years after the ordination of his brother Ebenezer to Portmoak.

CHAPTER III.

CALL TO THE MINISTRY.

"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine."—2 TIM. iv. 2.

DUNFERMLINE, to which Ralph Erskine was called, is a town of great interest in Scotland. It is sometimes mentioned in ballads:—

"The king sits in Dunfermline tower,
Drinking the blood-red wine;
Where shall I find a skeeley skipper
Will sail this ship o' mine?"

Or—

"Merry it is in good greenwood,
When the mavis and merle are singing;
But merrier were they in Dunfermline grey,
When all the bells were ringing."

This town is situated in the western district

of Fifeshire, about three miles from the Firth of Forth. The name signifies "the tower or fortress of the crooked stream." The town and palace of Dunfermline are in Pittencrieff Glen, a little to the south-west of the town. The tower, of which only a part remains, is said to have been built by Malcolm Canmore; the palace, a more modern building, now in ruins, was erected by James IV. This palace was the birth place of Charles I. and of his sister Princess Elizabeth, from whom the present royal family of Britain trace their descent. Dunfermline boasts, too, of the ruins of a once-splendid and very ancient Abbey, the churchyard of which succeeded Iona as the place of sepulture of the Scottish kings, many of whom lie here. To this old historic town, the young minister went, and applied himself with unwearied assiduity at once to sacred studies, and to the active services of his office. He redoubled his exertions in pursuit of knowledge and in studying theology in its various branches. He perused with care voluminous systems of divinity, and consulted many

commentators, preferring, above all, Matthew Henry. Among others he peculiarly valued were Owen, Manton, Flavel, and Boston. He mentions, with great admiration, a book of Boston's now scarcely heard of, his treatise on the "Covenant of Grace," of which he writes: "July 21, 1739.—That which tended to my reviving at this time was a word from Mr Boston, on the Covenant, particularly about the promise being made to Christ, and how faith might be strengthened by hearing the promise. Even when conscience-waiting sins appeared so as to take away all ground of hope or expectation from the soul looking to itself; yet, when the promise is pleaded, as made to Christ, who is worthy for whose sake God should do this thing; it created hope, and strengthened the soul. By this means, I say, I was led, especially in secret, to look again to God's holy temple."

The Bible itself, however, was the book he studied oftenest; and when his spirit was wearied with the dust and work of life, to its pure fountain of living waters he ever resorted,

to refresh and strengthen him for duties and trials. In this way, not only was his own soul refreshed, but from that store he could help and comfort others.

"His delight in study," says his biographer, Mr Fraser of Kennoway, "was cordial and persevering. The diary includes repeated expressions of regret at the interruptions he met with from company; and frequently did he persist in reading and writing till midnight, sometimes till three or four in the morning. Yet all this indefatigable labour was hallowed and softened by prayer. While he exercised an exemplary diligence in using the proper means of cultivating his talents and augmenting his intellectual stores, probably few ministers have been enabled to maintain a more humble and absolute dependence on the Spirit of God, for direction, strength, and success. His reliance on the Divine aid appears from the following extract from his diary:"—

"*October* 7.—After reading Psalm xxxvii. with some consideration, I was helped in prayer to

look to God in Christ, by way of trust and confidence in Him. I was at a loss to look upon myself as among the number of the righteous spoken of in that psalm. Yet I said, 'Though I have no righteousness nor strength in myself, I desire to lay claim to this,—that *surely in the Lord* have *I righteousness and strength;*' and looking to Him as the propitiation for my sin, and to His blood as the atonement, my heart was sweetly melted and dissolved. On this ground I was made to look for the accomplishment of the promise of God, and my heart was pleased that the promise of the Spirit was to be accomplished daily, yea, every moment; also, my eyes were towards Him for a word this day, being to preach, and not knowing yet what to think of for the subject. I preached on Psalm civ. 34, 'I will be glad in the Lord.' After dinner, going to prayer alone, I was helped anew to seek the Spirit to be as a well springing up and watering me every moment, and to look to the faithful Promiser. In seeking this, my soul melted."

Then the next day, we have the following entry:—"After I had remembered the public abroad and at home, particularly in beseeching the Lord to bless my ministry at Dunfermline, and to remember His word, 'Lo, I am with you,' and to bless what I was preaching on, even *all things being in the hand of Christ*, that He would give evidence of it by His working powerfully upon many. I was then helped to beg the Spirit constantly to water and watch me. Under a sense of absolute weakness and inability to stand of myself, I was helped, with a heart poured out before God, to declare to Him that, though He was calling me to wait upon Him, yet I could not wait on Him a moment, unless He would water me 'every moment.' I was made to seek assistance, success, strength, and courage, for my work in the congregation, while the Lord called me to the ministry therein, being conscious that my fainting spirit was unfit for any work, if the Lord would not be with me."

Especially on the Sabbath morning, his earnest desires for the Divine presence to aid him in the

duties of the sanctuary were intense. Listen to his breathings of heart. April 16th, "This morning, after reading, I went to prayer, under a sense of my nothingness and naughtiness, vileness and corruption, and acknowledged myself 'a beast before God,' and nothing but polluted and rebellious dust, yet looking to God as an infinite, eternal, and unchangeable Spirit, who from everlasting to everlasting is God, and always the same, and who manifests Himself in Christ. And, therefore, with holy reverence and with joyful tears, I professed my hope in the word; my hope of the Spirit, because He has said, 'The well of water shall spring up to everlasting life;' my hope of His presence, because He has said, 'Lo, I am with you.' I think He allowed me some communion with Him in a way of believing, and I was made to cry with tears, 'Lord I believe, help Thou mine unbelief.' I was led, in some suitable manner, under a view of my nothingness, and of God's all-sufficiency, to renounce all confidence in the flesh, and to betake myself solely to the name of the Lord, and there

to rest and repose myself." As the result of such earnest supplications, he writes, "This day I was helped in preaching."

When engaged in pulpit preparations, his soul would ascend to heaven in holy desires, and of such he writes,—"This day I studied for the solemnity (the Lord's Supper), and while I thought and wrote, sometimes my heart was much lifted up, in viewing the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne."

At the same time, this faithful servant of God is found as ready to praise as pray, and to acknowledge and thank the Lord for help received. One entry in his diary says:—"This morning, after reading, my heart was at more liberty in prayer, and I had much sweetness upon my spirit in looking towards God in the promise, and pleading His covenant and perfections, and in looking to the promise as the promise of God in Christ, concerning the Spirit. I was helped to look to Him for His presence in my ministerial work. And when I went to the Church, I was helped to some believing view of Christ as

Mediator and Intercessor, and was helped inwardly in public prayer, and also helped in preaching on Romans viii. 34, 'Who also maketh intercession for us.'"

Mr Buchanan and Mr Erskine preached regularly three times on Sabbath, and also on Thursday evenings; each taking his turn at the work.

Mr Erskine's sermons were written out in full, and, for the most part, in the delivery he kept pretty close to what he had written. He possessed excellent talents for the pulpit, having a pleasing voice, and winning manners. He particularly excelled in the full and free offers of Christ he made to his hearers, and in the persuasive and attractive manner in which he urged their acceptance of the offer so graciously made to them on the authority of the divine Word. Over and above, from his own varied and extensive experience, he possessed a great knowledge of the human heart, and had a singular gift of speaking to the peculiar circumstances of his hearers, which rendered him more than ordinarily popular.

In conformity with the prevailing practice of the Scottish clergy in that age, he considered the exposition of a portion of sacred writ on the Lord's day an essential part of the service. In the early years of his ministry, as his MSS. show, he expounded the Gospels by Matthew and Mark, and the Acts of the Apostles, and afterwards began to explain the Epistles.

CHAPTER IV.

HIS MINISTERIAL LABOURS.

"Make me to understand the way of Thy precepts; so shall I talk of Thy wondrous works."—Psalm cxix. 27.

WE saw, in the life of Ebenezer Erskine, how much the feast of the Lord's Supper was valued in those days. That sacred institution was celebrated generally once a year, and Dunfermline on these occasions was crowded by strangers from all parts of the kingdom, many of whom, to the day of their death, spoke with transport of the enlargement of heart they had there experienced. The number of the worshippers was such that it was impossible to find lodgings for them, and not a few spent the whole night in the churchyard, or on the banks of the adjoining rivulet, employin-

themselves in pious conference and prayer. We have the key to this outpouring of the Spirit at that time from the journal of the pastor. "June 6th," he writes, "this morning, after wakening, I had some thoughts that this might be the last *action* sermon that ever I might have, and I was affected. I read Psalm lxvii. with some application and affection, and then prayed, and had my heart poured out in prayer. I was made to wrestle with Him for His promised presence, for His Spirit and blessing. I sought his presence particularly on this occasion, and that the Spirit might be sent to glorify Christ as the Lamb of God in the midst of the throne; expressing my hope."

Then again he records blessings received on these occasions in answer to prayer. "Has not God declared His name," says he, "and saved His people, by giving sweet experience of His powerful presence among us, even in our day, particularly on solemn sacramental occasions? Hath not the Lord sometimes shewn Himself, and discovered His glory in the sanctuary, even

here? I remember that at the first communion in Dunfermline, after the Lord had brought me, in His holy providence, to this place, He led me to speak in the evening on that word, 'The name of the city, from that day, shall be Jehovah Shammah, the Lord is there,'—Ezek. xlviii. 35. Although many here were not then born, yet there are many people witnesses to attest that, from time to time, from sacrament to sacrament, God hath been pleased to show forth something of His glory. He saved, He showed Himself, He declared His name; therefore ye are His witnesses that he is God, that He is the God of Bethel, that He is the same God, the same immutable God."

It was not at Dunfermline and Portmoak alone that these sacramental seasons were blessed. We read of one at Abernethy, in 1735, at which Mr Ralph Erskine and other godly ministers took part; and as not only Mr Erskine's services there are seen, but a glimpse is also given of the religious feeling of the Scottish poor at that time, we cannot refrain from quoting pretty fully.

The writer of the description says, "I refrained from going forward to several tables, till at length I heard Mr Ralph Erskine serve a table, when he spoke to many cases a believer might be in, and to mine among the rest. He showed that in Christ there is a particular thing answering the particular case of every believer, which he showed in every case he mentioned, and declared, that it is not sufficient to take Christ wholly to answer our sins wholly, by the lump, but that we must make use of particular things in Christ to answer our particular cases and necessities. I heard these observations with pleasure, and tried to lay them up in my heart, and then I was determined to venture forward to the Lord's Table.

"After the tables were served, and the communicating work over, Mr Ralph Erskine, without any interval, preached on Psalm cxix. 81, 'My soul waiteth for Thy salvation, but my hope is in Thy word.' I heard some parts of that sermon with satisfaction, but when he was ·ating other parts, I was afraid the ground

of the hypocrite's hope was mine, so that I was very unsteady. When the work was concluded, about twelve o'clock, and I had got supper, I felt indisposed in the time of private worship. Though I struggled against it, yet drowsiness prevailed."

"*Monday, 23rd June.*—Having risen from private worship, I went out to the yards (gardens) of Abernethy on the north side of the town, to secret worship, about two in the morning, where I marvelled to hear the whole town ringing like a hive of bees, with prayer—the like I had never before heard, but my heart was lifted up with it. The people were so numerous that I could scarcely find a place, even although it was raining. I lay down, however, at the side of growing lint, and I really had in my own apprehension some liberty and freedom."

No less conscientious was Mr Erskine in other parts of his ministerial work. "On a Friday evening," he says, "I visited at Pittencrieff, and before I went out, looked to the Lord for His blessing and conduct. Again, "Remembering

that this day I was to begin examination, I was made to look to Him that hath said, 'Lo I am with you,' to plead for His promised presence, both in the beginning, and progress of this work. Knowing and professing that the work would be but unpleasant to me and unprofitable, unsuccessful among the people, unless He should be with me; and desiring to hope for His presence because of His own promise, and for His Spirit as a Spirit of light, life, liberty, and power." One evening a few weeks after, he says, "This day I went to Masterton to examine. By the way I was helped to pray on horseback, and my meditation on God was sweet. I sought of Him that He would help me in my work. I thought if He would pity any poor soul, He would get more glory than by sun, moon, and stars—the glory of his grace and mercy; and I was made to look to a promising God."

His public examinations were prepared for by much study, and he sought by them to awaken the careless from their false security. When he did not find them properly attended, he spared

not reproof, as the following words will show, that he delivered from the pupit in 1717:—

"I believe that it is for ordinary the most ignorant people that are most averse from waiting on these diets of examination. Those means of knowledge, however, that you now enjoy, will rise up in the judgment against you, in the day of the Lord. Wilful ignorance, when people may have the means of knowledge, is a sin that will bring on a double and dreadful damnation. 'It is a people of no understanding; therefore He that made them will not have mercy on them, and He that formed them will show them no favour.' People may sometimes be more edified at one diet of examination than at the preaching; and if people neglect these means let their blood be upon their own head. We can go to God and say, 'Lord, we would have taught that people as we were able, by Thy grace, but they would have none of our teaching. They neglected the means of instruction, and cared not for our endeavours, so that it is not our fault, if they perish in their ignorance, and be damned

neglecting the great salvation.' Mind what our Master said, 'He that despiseth you, despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me, despiseth Him that sent Me.' I find the worst of you all, sirs, that care not a straw for ministers or means in time of health, yet crying for ministers and means of grace and salvation, when the cold hand of death is taking a grip of you. I'll assure you it is an ill-chosen time, when possibly you have no strength to speak to us, and we have no time to speak to you; and God may leave your conscience to fill you with horror, and to roar upon you. . . . I love not, sirs, to preach of wrath and hell; but I see so many people running that way through their slighting the road that leads to Heaven, that I am resolved you shall not have it to say hereafter, that you had a minister who never told you where you were going. Nay, you shall rather have it to say, 'Our ministers told us to flee from the wrath to come.'"

CHAPTER V.

LABOURS—CONTINUED.

"But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, charity, patience."

WHILE attending to the grown-up people of his flock, Mr Erskine did not overlook the young. We have again and again notices such as these:—"This day I examined the children of the town, according to the proposal on Sabbath," or, "I examined the children in church;" and one of his note-books contained a series of questions and an address, which shows his plain, earnest, and affectionate manner with them, a specimen of which may be given—

"*Q.* 1.—Are you so young that you ma

be sick and die? Are young folk exempted from death, and the grave from swallowing you up, more than those that are older? Have you not seen infants laid in the cold dust?

"*Q.* 2.—Can you be good too soon? Can you love God and mind your soul too soon—is not youth the usual time of conversion? An old sinner converted is a miracle that God works but now and then.

"O then, delay not! By beginning early, you will prevent a multitude of sins, and a multitude of sorrows; you will have a stock of prayers, and a stock of grace laid up. Be afraid of that word, Job, xiii. 26, 'Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth.'

"Consider that you are poisoned in your nature, defiled as soon as born, as soon as conceived. You have plague-spots on your heart. Can you delay, while these are calling away your souls? Can you be careful about many things, and forget the one thing necessary? Consider to what a great honour and happiness it is to

be an old disciple. O how comfortable it will be, to feel the weight of the crown of glory, and the richness of your robes according to the years of service.

"Does any say, 'You would have me religious but I have no power, I can do nothing, I cannot even think a good thought?' Answer.—You even swear and lie, and you say you cannot read and pray. Do you think that God will be satisfied with such an excuse? or can you satisfy your own conscience to think you have done all you can, or should do? Has not God enough to condemn you, in that you have not done what you could and what you may? Never pretend, therefore, you were not able, while you have not done what you could.

"Christ's complaint is, 'Ye will not come to me that ye might have life' (John v. 40). Do you ask, How shall we come to Him? It is said, verse 39, "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of Me.' So that one of the ways of winning to Christ is by reading and searching

the Scriptures. Prayer is another way. All that came to Christ for help and healing came praying with the blind man, 'Jesus thou son of David have mercy on me;' or with the leper, 'Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou can'st make me clean;' or with Peter, when ready to sink in the waters, 'Lord save me.' There is no coming to Christ, it is true, but by faith, or believing; nor can any come to Christ, except the Father draw them. But yet, as the common road that faith takes in coming to Christ is in the duty of reading and praying, so the common channel wherein the drawing power of the Spirit runs, is in the use of these very means. Let young and old, therefore, be diligent in reading and praying, and so in coming to Christ in that road, perhaps He will sometime or other tell you,—'When thou wast under the fig-tree I saw thee.' And if you hold on in that road, He may say to you, as He said to Nathanael, 'Thou shalt see greater things than these' (John i. 50). 'Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not' (Jer.

xxxiii. 3). Those things which He hides from the wise and prudent, He reveals unto babes (Matt. xi. 25)."

In like manner was the interest Erskine showed in the sick, dying, or bereaved in his flock; also for the tempted and disconsolate. Many notices in his journal show us this. At one place he says, "This evening in secret my heart was composed and enlarged. I was also disposed towards sympathy with Gask's family, they having a pleasant child dead this day." Or again, "This day, being called to see John Black, our precentor's son, I went, and was helped and quickened in prayer for the child. My heart was kindly engaged to look to the Lord in behalf of the child." Or this, "I was to see Mrs Meldrum dying, and as I was sweetly helped in prayer last night, so going out to Mrs M., I was helped to speak and pray with her; and after I had been with her a while, went to see another dying saint, Elizabeth Cleland. After I came home, I went to my knees, and was helped, especially in behalf of Mrs M., to plead His covenant and promise."

Neither did he forget or neglect those unhappy individuals whose crimes rendered them victims to public justice, as appears from several entries in his diary :—

Once he says, "My eyes were towards God in His promise; I went to the prison and dealt with the condemned man to confess and give God glory."

At another time, when attending a criminal to the scaffold, Mr Erskine smote on his breast, and uttered these words—"But for restraining grace I had been brought by this corrupt heart to the same condition with this unhappy man."

The most unpleasant part of a minister's duty is connected with discipline, and in the large parish of Dunfermline offences not unfrequently occurred requiring the delinquents to be dealt with, to bring them to repentance. Mr Erskine considered it his undisputable duty to deal with such; but though this faithful reprover was stern in his rebukes, his severity was softened by tenderness and affection. If any of his elders assumed a tone of harshness, he was wont to check them,

with, "Remember Him who has compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way"

To incite members of session to diligence and faithfulness in the discharge of duty, Mr Erskine drew up the following list of questions:—

1. Do you keep up the worship of God in your family, and endeavour it morning and evening?

2. Do you visit the sick in your own quarter, and pray with them?

3. Do you attend the monthly meetings of the session, except in cases of necessary absence?

4. Do you endeavour to bring in no subject that may divert from duty in these meetings?

5. Do you search out scandals that you hear of in your several quarters?

6. Do you inquire for certificates from persons coming from other congregations, that live in your quarters?

7. Do you take care of the poor in your quarters, and duly apply for them when you know that they are really needy?

8. Do you keep the session's private affairs;

and make it your business, before the dispensing of the Lord's Supper, to inquire into the conversation of every one in your quarter, that apply for tokens?

The two ministers were zealously assisted by the elders in their attempts to maintain order in the parish. The session often made efforts to check the profanation of the Sabbath, the revellings at "penny weddings," and other evils; and it seems to have been the custom of a few of the elders and constables, during public worship on Sabbath to walk about and try to curb disorderly persons that neglected divine ordinances, or otherwise desecrated that holy day.

The poor also came under their consideration, and many plans were tried for their relief. At last they fell back on the old custom, as being the best, of having collections at church-doors on the diets of worship

The session seemed often to be called together for the purpose of prayer and spiritual conference, as well as for the exercise of discipline, the management of the poor, and for their religious

meetings. Mr Erskine has some such notices in his diary—"Nov. 9.—The session met for prayer in my room, being the first Monday of the month. I prayed last; was strengthened and helped therein." And again, "This evening, the meeting (of the elders) being in my room, we were helped to some very heavenly conversation about Christ and His glory, and the glory of His everlasting kingdom. I prayed last, and was strengthened in praise, and enlarged to bless the Lord for Christ and His Gospel, and the Covenant; and for the Spirit, the Comforter—the promise of the Spirit, and the performance of the promise in part; and for Christ being at the right hand of God, and for the expediency of His going away, that He might send the Spirit; and also for this, that the government of the Church and its concerns is in the hands of Christ, and on His shoulders; and that the tongues and hearts, and wrath of men are in His hand."

It would also appear from his journal, that amongst the private members of his congregation there were meetings for prayer and religious con-

versation, called "Fellowship Meetings,' at which the minister sometimes presided, and so of one he writes—"This evening, in the *fellowship meeting*, as I was helped in conversation, so in prayer my heart and lips were somewhat opened, and my soul quickened in the duty." Before closing this chapter, it may be interesting to give a minute from the Records of Presbytery of Dunfermline. There had been a presbyterial visit of his parish, July 2, 1716, of which it is said,—"Mr Erskine having preached on his ordinary, being 2 Cor. v. 14, was asked if he had made timeous intimation of this meeting, to which he answered in the affirmative. Then he was removed, and the presbytery, having considered his sermon, did approve thereof. Then elders and heads of families were called, and the usual questions anent his soundness in doctrine, diligence, piety, and orderly walk being asked, they all declared their great satisfaction with him on these heads. He was called in, and this was intimated to him, and he was encouraged to go on in his Master's work."

CHAPTER VI.

MR ERSKINE AS A COLLEAGUE.

"Behold how good and how pleasant a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.—PSALM cxxxiii. 1.

MR ERSKINE was ordained, as we have seen, minister of Dunfermline, in 1711, by the unanimous wish of the people, and also, by the earnest desire of the senior pastor, Mr Buchanan. These two colleagues seem to have laboured most harmoniously together until the death of Mr Buchanan, four years afterwards. Sometime after this, his surviving colleague was unanimously appointed to succeed him as first minister of the parish, and a few years after, Mr James Wardlaw was chosen as second minister, in Mr Erskine's room. A hearty welcome was given to the new minister by his colleague, who expressed himself happy

receive the assistance of a fellow-labourer so worthy of his esteem, and so much beloved and respected by the people.

United by the bonds of Christian friendship, and deeply impressed with the importance of entire harmony in their work, the two colleagues drew up and subscribed a bond of mutual agreement, at the beginning of their pastoral connection; and the brotherly concord thus pledged was happily maintained for a long period of time. They did, however, fall out in course of time, when Mr Erskine seceded from the national Church.

In many notices in Mr Erskine's diary we find numerous proofs of the high esteem these two good men entertained for each other.

In one place he said,—"In the time of my colleague's *action* sermon upon the sufferings of Christ, the Lord gave me much of a sweet melting frame in looking towards a crucified Christ, and many heart-melting actings of faith, which dissolved me in tears in hearing. Then I went down to the table with my colleague, and had, I

may say, communion with God through Christ in a way of believing, both while the psalm was singing and while the words of instruction were reading, and in the distribution of the elements. And when I received the elements, I had many distinct actings of faith upon Christ, such as made me melt before God, viewing Him as a promising God, and laying hold upon His faithfulness. After communicating, I served two tables, and was helped therein. Then I went into the house, and shutting up myself in a closet, poured out my heart in thankful acknowledgement of the Lord's goodness and mercy, and expressed my confidence in Him through Christ as a promising God, who had allowed me to apply. I preached in the evening on Ezek. xliii. 12,—'This is the law of the house. Upon the top of the mountain, the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy. Behold this is the law of the house.' My doctrine was, that universal holiness is so much the law of God's house, and the whole family, being privileged with access to a most holy place, are under th-

strongest obligations to be a most holy people. Lord glorify Thy name."

Again,—"Helped in hearing my colleague, to hear with some application of the testament confirmed by the death of the testator; helped in prayer, when he prayed for the blessing on the elements, while I sat at the Lord's table; helped to look towards Jesus with a mourning, weeping eye; helped to look to Him in the promise of the Spirit, and in the promise of His presence. My heart was humbled and poured out before the Lord at the table, and I assisted immediately afterwards in serving two tables."

Not only did these colleagues attend upon one another's ministrations with delight, but they also helped and encouraged one another in conducting matters of discipline and order in the parish. Amongst other clerical friends around, Mr Erskine, in like manner, was on the most intimate and affectionate terms. They met often on sacramental occasions, where they mingled sweet and confidential intercourse, both in public and private

Then as regarded Church matters, ardently attached to divine truth, he was on all occasions its dauntless advocate. In the case of Professor Simson, noticed in the life of Ebenezer Erskine, he stood up manfully for the regular exercise of discipline, both in the first and second process. Then, in that well-known case of dispute and animosity in the Church of Scotland, the *Oath of Abjuration*, his sentiments entirely coincided with those of his brother Ebenezer. He strongly objected to it, and expressed his disapprobation in a poem he wrote on the coronation of King George I., where he says—

> "Redeem us, Sire, from things our country loathes,
> Subverting patronages, ranting oaths,
> Such was the woeful, dubious *abjuration*
> Which gave the clergy ground of speculation."

At the same time, Mr Erskine displayed the spirit of Christian meekness and forbearance, as is shown from an extract from one of his sermons at that time. "The miseries of the Church," he says, "and the sins that bring them on, heart-rending things to the people of God;

particularly, their hearts are rent for the lusts of the Church; *For the divisions of Reuben there were great thoughts of heart.* For my own part, I am but a person of little experience in the world, and therefore I desire to be modest at this juncture, about *the present rent* among us. It is plain that the anger of the Lord hath divided us, and rent us in twain, like the veil of the temple, from the top to the bottom. God is angry because we have sinned."

When the rebellion broke out in 1715, he did not fail to exhort his people, and rouse their zeal to help them to defend their civil and religious liberties; and when, in the following year, Argyle marched to Perth to dispossess the rebels, a solemn fast was held, on which Mr Erskine preached from Lament. iii. 37-40, and earnestly charged the people to humble themselves before God on account of their sins and provocations. Adverting to the probable consequences of the success of the rebellion, he says,—"As some of this Popish and Jacobite party have threatened, we have no reason to doubt, that, if they

prevail, *their little fingers will be heavier than their fathers' loins.* Therefore we have all reason to pray and cry to God this day, for success to the Protestant forces against that Popish and desperately-inclined party. It is reasonable and seasonable that, when the forces are fighting for us, we should be praying for them, and fasting too."

Mr Erskine took the deepest interest in the *Marrow Controversy,* before noticed in the life of his brother. He seems to have been the first to write Mr Boston an encouraging letter when the book was condemned in the Assembly of 1720, and none embarked in the cause with greater alacrity, or supported it with greater decision and activity than he did.

He also tenderly sympathised with brethren who suffered under tedious and harrassing processes for their faithfulness in preaching doctrines like those contained in *The Marrow of Divinity.* For example, Mr Gabriel Wilson of Manton, having preached, at the opening of the Synod of Merse and Teviotdale, a "faithful and excell

sermon," entitled "The Trust," and being condemned for the same, Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine travelled together, once at least, to Kelso, to give their countenance to that esteemed brother, when he appeared as a panel at the bar of his Synod. The following rapartee was given on that occasion. Mr Ramsay of Kelso, one of Mr Wilson's keenest adversaries, said to the younger Erskine, "Ralph, they say you are a poet; will you favour me with a specimen of your poetry?" "Yes, sir," he instantly replied; and, alluding to the Christian name of their obnoxious friend, said *impromptu*—

> "We be two angels who did ride and run,
> To see the angel Gabriel fight and won."

To vindicate the true Scripture doctrine of grace was one of the principal designs of Mr Erskine for writing the "Gospel Sonnets," in particular the sixth book, entitled "The Believer's Principles," which contains a variety of "spiritual songs,"—the difference between the law and the Gospel, and the ground of a sinner's justification before God. The vast importance

of our Lord's divinity, and the guilt and danger of denying or relinquishing this doctrine, he often alludes to, both in his sermons and sonnets. In one place he says,—"Whatever doctrine tends to the disparagement of Christ, or to the robbing Him of any part of salvation work is to be rejected as erroneous; *for to Him alone must the gathering of the people be*; and to Him only shall the glory of our whole salvation, from first to last, belong."

And in the sonnets are the following stanzas:—

> "My Lord appears; awake my soul,
> Admire His name—*the Wonderful*—
> An infinite and finite mind,
> Eternity and time conjoined.
> All heaven's astonished at His form,
> The mighty God become a worm.
> Down Arian pride to Him shall bow;
> He's Jesus and Jehovah too."

But among the public events to which his name is most attached is the Secession from the Church, which took place two years after his brother Ebenezer and other four left it. We have already seen, in the life of Ebenezer, what

drove these four brethren to take the step they did in the matter. All along, Mr Ralph Erskine deeply sympathised with the Secessionists, but he felt for a time considerable difficulty in bringing his mind to join them. At length, after much anxious reflection, and repeated communications with the brethren, he considered it his duty to follow them, and of this he writes in his diary,—"On Wednesday, Feb. 16th, 1737, I gave in an adherence to the Secession, explaining what I meant by it. May the Lord pity and lead."

For some time it was hoped that the Secession from the Church would not be final, but in 1740 the Assembly fairly shut the door against their return, and banished from her pale the very cream of her ministers and people.

The year before the final disruption, the attached members of Mr Erskine's congregation, fearing the worst, contributed willingly and largely for the erection of a new place of worship, when his deposition by the Assembly rendered this measure indispensible. Mr Wardlaw differed in opinion with Mr Erskine in regard

to the Secession, and although the intimate co-pastoral relations which had long subsisted between them were dissolved, they continued to regard each other with mutual esteem.

The great majority of the congregation, as well as most of the members of session, concurred with Mr Erskine, however, and with him left the Established Church. Accordingly, a large church, capable of accommodating about two thousand people, was soon erected, and there the faithful minister preached until death removed him.

It would have been a great comfort to Mr Erskine, if Mr Wardlaw had seen eye to eye with him in this matter, but an all-wise Providence judged otherwise; however, they tried to agree while they differed, as we see from the following notice in the diary:—"This evening my colleague came to my house with another gentleman; and having taken my colleague alone, I talked with him, in a friendly way, about the peace and concord we should study; declaring I had made no secession from him, and that w

ought to abstain from every word that should seem to import as if there were any difference in public betwixt him and me, to which he assented. And I found him, and the people generally more easy than I had feared."

Notwithstanding all this, the mutual harmony of of these excellent men was somewhat impaired.

In the life of Ebenezer Erskine, mention was made of the intercourse, and afterwards disagreement, between the associate brethren and Whitefield, in which Ralph bore so large a part. The story need not be repeated here; it cannot justly be disputed, that when the correspondence began Ralph Erskine was actuated in this matter by unfeigned Christian affection, and aimed at something nobler than the advancement of a party. Neither can it be proved, that when they met together their personal interviews were less satisfactory than they had allowed themselves to anticipate; but notwithstanding that they parted in anger, and this supplies another example of human infirmity, as a warning to Christians in succeeding times.

The only other public event in which Mr Erskine took a deep interest, was in reference to the Burgess Oath; and no one suffered more severely from his wish to support what he thought the right side at the time than he did. Firmly persuaded that it was not lawful on the part of any Seceder to take the Burgess Oath, he, with three other brethren, was singled out to receive ecclesiastical censure from those brethren who differed from him, and amongst those was his own son, the Rev. John Erskine of Leslie. "You may be sure," wrote the poor father, "it was as a sword piercing my heart, to see that Johnny was sitting in the midst of them." Nevertheless, the father, however irritated and vexed, confessed that "what John did was from conscience," which helped to mitigate the blow; and of this trial the good man wrote,—"God is trying us, but when tried, we shall come forth as gold. May the Lord be with us, and we shall fear no evil going through the dark valley."

CHAPTER VII.

DOMESTIC LIFE.

"A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach."—1 TIMOTHY iii. 2.

WE have gone thus far in our history of this good man, and faithful servant of God, without touching on his domestic life.

On the 15th July 1714, nearly three years after his ordination, he married Margaret, daughter of John Dewar, Esquire of Lassodie, an estate in the parish of Beath. She proved an eminent blessing to her husband, from her high Christian graces, as well as from the sweetness of her natural temper. She was spared to him sixteen years, and had ten children, five of whom survived her. We have few notices in his diary of

her life and the death of her children; but from a letter to a friend at the time of her decease, and by remarks afterwards, we see how much he had valued her, and how worthy she was of his love.

Part of this letter may be given, as it shows so clearly the loving heart of the man. He says: —"Your kind, sympathising letter came to my hand on Saturday at noon, when I was alone in my closet, and my soul eating bitter herbs in great plenty, insomuch that I could not read your compassionate line without bedewing it with tears of sorrow at the occasion of it, and joy upon occasion of the Lord's goodness, in stirring you up to take a lift of my burden, which I take to be one of the fruits and effects of His sympathy, who is the burden-bearer, and who has said, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

'Dear Brother,—I may say with Ezekiel (xxiv. 18), 'I spake unto the people in the morning, and at even my wife died.' I lectured in the forenoon, preached in the afternoon, heard the

exercises in the evening, and after that saw some sick persons, and all this time the Lord saw fit to hide it from my eyes that my dear wife was dying. Though I knew she was in distress that day and two or three days before, yet it was not reckoned mortal by any but herself; for she many a time expressed her apprehensions of death, not only then, but a long time before; and it is part of my grief that these advertisements were so overlooked by me, and that I had so little will to believe what I now find to be true. Her last words expressed the deepest humiliation, and greatest submission to the sovereign will of God, that words could manifest, and thereafter, she shut up all with that,—'O Death, where is thy sting! O Grave, where is thy victory! Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord!'—which she repeated two or three times over. And yet, even at this time, I knew not that they were her dying words, till instantly I perceived the evident symptoms of death; in view whereof I was lunged, as it were, into a sea of confusion, when

she, in less than an hour after, in a most soft and easy manner, departed this life.

"She was one that had piety and seriousness, without the least noise or show; virtue and industry, without vanity or levity; and the greatest kindness and care, especially towards me, all the lifetime we had together, which was sixteen years. And now my groaning is sometimes heavy, and yet my stroke is heavier than my groanings; but it is the Lord, and therefore it becomes me to be dumb and not to open my mouth, because He did it. O pray to Him, that He may sanctify this providence, and that Christ Himself may be more than ever the desire of my heart, since He has taken away the desire of my eyes, with a stroke."

Two years after the death of his first wife, he married again, Margaret Simson, daughter of Daniel Simson, Esquire, W.S., Edinburgh. The contract of marriage entered into at that time is mentioned in the following terms:—

"*January* 12, 1732.—I looked to the Lord this morning, and urged Him that He would

for me for His name's sake, and I was helped. . . . . The meeting was managed without any altercation, and the frame of the contract was agreed upon with much harmony. I had told, again and again, that I had nothing to contract but myself and providence."

The celebration of the marriage is thus recorded :—

"*February* 24, 1732.—I was married by my brother Ebenezer, at Edinburgh, to Mrs Margaret Simson. Sometime after the marriage, I called my wife alone, and prayed with her."

As to how he went about this second marriage-relationship of his, we get an idea from extracts from his journal of his letters to her during their courtship.

Of the time he first began to think of her as his wife, we read thus :—"Also, I prayed that if she, ————, were the person I should see after, the Lord, the Angel of the Covenant, the Angel of angels, might guide and direct me. I was made to look to God in the promise, that He would lead me in the right way, in a way

I know not, in a way I have not known—that he might do these things, and not forsake me." Then in his first letter to her, of Dec. 8, 1731, he says:—"As it is in itself no light affair for one to be called in providence to be a wife and a mother at once, so my heart bears me witness, that it has been no light matter unto me, to have the conduct and direction of heaven in my choice; which if I am favoured with, it is not great things in the world I desire to aim at, knowing from experience that bountiful Providence has made my cup to run over many times, when I have been far from laying down measure to that end;" and he concludes by requesting her "to spread his proposal before the Lord," imploring His direction.

After being encouraged to go forward with his suit, he writes, and hopes she will "prove a help, comfort, and blessing to himself and his family—which I also hope," he continues, "will be comfortable to you, and easily managed to your satisfaction, whose temper and disposition, so far as I have heard or can discern, is such as

expect will be agreeable to me and them. Such is my natural endearment to the five children the Lord has spared to me, that, if I were *trysted* with one in a conjugal relation with me that was of a rugged and unkindly disposition towards them, I doubt not but it would contribute to hasten me with sorrow to my grave."

Then a third letter, bearing date, January 31st 1732, gratefully acknowledges a kind reply she had sent him, and contains the following passage:—"It has been part of my prayer that you may be filled with much of the spirit of love to Christ, and in Him to me and my children, and I desire it may be part of your prayer also; for that love is the purest and sweetest that is of His creating by His Holy Spirit, and that is founded upon love to Himself. Such love among friends and relations makes the life sweet, and every desire easy and pleasant. It ennobles the soul, and elevates it far beyond all natural pleasures."

That same day he writes in his journal:—"This morning, after reading some Scripture, I

went to prayer. . . . I acknowledged the Lord might righteously write bitter things against me; but I looked to Jesus who had drunk the bitter cup, and was made sin for me; and through Him I sought to be blessed, particularly in this matter of my intended marriage. I was made again to commit my bride to the Lord. Having read that word, 'In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths' (Prov. iii. 6). I now acknowledged that a prudent wife was from Him, and that the qualifying a wife for me was from Him. I acknowledged him as a promising God, to whom I looked for the blessing, and sought her as a blessing to me and to my children. And here again the poor lass, and the four lads were rolled over upon that covenant—'Thy God and the God of thy seed.' I looked upon them as not my children, but the children of God, His concern. I was made to seek that the Lord, who had taken away their mother, and left them orphans, would provide a mother for them, and make my bride a loving, kindly mother to them. Here, with all my heart me

ing, and my eyes dissolved in tears, I was made to seek that the Lord would create love in her heart, first to God, and then in Him to me, and to the children. . . . Lord, hear, though it is not man's way to love or delight in children not our own, even when marriage takes place, yet God's way being the way of love, contrary to man's way, which is the way of hatred, strife, and variance, I thought the promise might be accomplished in a way like Himself, that His name and truth and faithfulness might appear. Glory to God for what impression of Himself He has been pleased to allow me, both last night and this morning."

These fervent prayers were answered to the full, and Margaret Simson proved indeed a faithful, loving wife to him, and a tender mother to his children. Neither was this good man slack to acknowledge these blessings, and again we read—

"*June* 14, 1732.—I was made to bless the Lord for His goodness in providing me a wife whose temper was so pleasant and peaceable."

Again, "*Jan.* 1, 1734.—When sitting at break-

fast, Johnny not being well, I observed the care that my wife and her aunt took of him and the rest; and my heart blessed the Lord, that He from day to day provided, and I was helped to dependence on Him as a Heavenly Father."

Then we see how these two, bound together in the nearest of earthly ties, helped to strengthen and comfort one another. He writes thus:—"Last night I talked with my wife about the sacrament; and found she had been at a table that Mr Fisher served. She told me of the struggle she had before the event, and yet that she did not repent going, because she got Christ applied in communicating, but durst not speak with confidence of it." Again,—"This morning I had some edifying conversation with my wife, and in speaking to me I found her affected, and her eyes dropping tears. I spoke to her of our making Christ our refuge, how little we need to fear death, if the sting were removed; and how our stupidity, deadness, darkness, and other heart plagues, were so many reasons for our looking to the Lord Jesus for healing."

CHAPTER VIII.

DOMESTIC LIFE—CONTINUED.

"One that ruleth his own house, having his children in subjection, with all gravity.—1 TIMOTHY iii. 4.

WE have seen Mr Erskine in particular as a husband, but a few extracts from his journal will show him as a father—how he was especially distinguished for ardent, sanctified affection in that relation. We saw how anxious he was to secure for them a tender, loving mother, after they were left, by the death of his first wife, motherless. Before his second marriage, he has this entry:—"My heart was poured out before God on behalf of my children, fleeing with them to the covenant, which says, 'I will be thy God and the God of thy seed,' and to Jesus who said, 'Suffer little children to

come unto Me.' Are they left, said I, in my hand? Aye they are ruined and lost there, if those take not the charge of them; therefore I put them into the hand of God, into the hand of Christ."

Again,—"I plainly said to God that He knew I had no other ground to hope upon than His covenant and promise, or a "Thus saith the Lord;" and so I was made, with fervour and freedom, on the score of free sovereign grace manifested through Christ in the promise, to pray that He would be a God to Peggy, a God to Harry, a God to Johnny, a God to Ebie, and a God to Jamie."

His feelings of holy gratitude when he heard of the birth of a child are expressed thus:—

"*Tuesday*, Dec. 5, 1732.—After some rest, I was awakened by Mrs Spence telling me that my wife was delivered of a man child about six o'clock. I arose and praised the Lord for His goodness, and dedicated the child to God, pleading this deliverance might be a double deliverance to my wife, both inward and outward; in-

and spiritual, so that she might be delivered from all spiritual bands, and that her heart might be enlarged to magnify the Lord. Afterwards I gave the child to God, 'looking to the covenant (Gen. xvii. 7), as sealed with the blood of Christ, and as all my hope."

Then, "*Dec.* 12, 1732," we have next, "This morning, having read in my ordinary, namely, Jer. xxii., Psalm cvi., and Col. ii., there was something, particularly in that last chapter, which I thought suited my present circumstances, designing the baptism of my child this day; and upon this I prayed that my child might be buried with Christ in baptism and raised with Him; that he might be baptised with the Holy Ghost, that God might be to him, according to the promise, his God; and I was made, with sweet freedom, viewing the covenant of promise in Christ, to cast over the child upon God in Christ for the blessing of baptism, and for the washing in the blood of Christ.

"This evening my child Ralph was baptised by my colleague, Mr Wardlaw. Providence led

him to speak upon Gen. xvii. 7, 'I will establish my covenant between Me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee.' When he read that text it was like marrow to my bones, and made my flesh, in a manner, creep with surprise. I desired to bless the Lord for it, and heard with satisfaction many things said on it; and when I was standing up taking on the engagements, in which my colleague dealt very modestly, binding me to what I was accustomed to bind others to, and when he said, 'these things you promise through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,' my heart cordially went to it, and to the dedicating of the child to the Lord. Then after baptism and prayer, because night was coming on, he caused to be sung the last verse of Psalm cxliv.—

> 'Those people happy are who be
> In such a case as this;
> Yea, blessed all those people are
> Whose God Jehovah is.'

And herein my heart joined, and I cordially co

mitted myself and family to the Lord. Glory to God for the blessing of this day."

Not only did Mr Erskine pray with his children during the stated times of domestic worship, but he made it his practice occasionally to take them separately, as well as collectively, and pray with, and give them appropriate advice.

At times we have a notice such as this—"The Lord pitied me this evening after the exercise. When I came home and my wife had sent the children, Peggy, Harry, Johnny, and Ebie to me —having heard of Harry and Johnny sometimes casting out in the school, I was helped very gravely to exhort and admonish them, and solemnly also at this time to call them to remembrance of their baptismal vows and engagements, which, being come to the years of capacity, they ought to consider and take upon themselves."

He takes notice repeatedly of his spiritual conversation with his sons alone, and also of his attention to their literary progress. "*Oct.* 12, 1735.—The sacrament was at Queensferry, eight days ago. Before this, my sons, Harry and

John, proposed that they might have liberty to go there, which I granted. Some days after that, I inquired if they had a mind to participate. I found Johnny more clear on that head. He gave me some account of the Lord's ways towards him."

The father's heart especially seems to have gone out to his surviving daughter, Margaret. Of her he writes—"*April* 14, 1732.—This day my daughter Peggy was sent to Stirling to my brother, to be further taught. I was sorry to part with her, finding her so careful still about me, which appeared partly that day I went to the Synod last week. When I was going off amid the rain, she dealt with me to stay, and the tear gushed in her eye. I noticed much of her mother's temper and careful disposition about her."

In the trials of his life he had the sympathy and help of his family, and so we read, when he was greatly exercised about leaving the church, that he appointed a family fast; and of this he writes:—"I called all my family together that

were capable, and spent the whole forenoon in prayer, singing, and reading in the Bible and Larger Catechism,—reading the duties required, and the sins forbidden, in every command; intermixing prayer and praise, confession and supplication. O may the Lord follow it with His especial blessing." Again—"*Monday, Jan.* 15, 1739.—I set apart this day forenoon with my family, because the praying societies were to meet, by the advice of the Associate Presbytery, for humiliation and prayer, for the Lord's ordering public concerns, now when a libel is forcing against us." His exercises of prayer and fasting he afterwards continued one day in the week, alone and with his family alternately. Two of Mr Erskine's children were visited with that fearful scourge, the small-pox, and of this event he writes—"*Sept.* 13, 1732.—My concern this morning about the children was, that I did not wish them to be spared unless it was for His glory, and that I would take His sparing, if He did so, as a token He would provide for them, bless them, and be their God." "*Sabbath,*

Sept. 15.—In the evening, Ralph became worse. I prayed with my wife, in prospect of his death." "*Sept.* 16.—This forenoon, my wife coming into my room, concerned in the views of Ralph's illness, who seemed to be dying, I went with her to my knees, and there devoted him to the Lord, craving it might be recorded in heaven, that we, the parents of the child, at Christ's call, came to bring the child to Him, that, whatever He did with the body, his soul might be blessed and saved to the praise of His glorious grace, and that he might be a part of *Heaven's plenishing.* . . . . After this I prayed beside the child and the company, and was therein helped to some exercise of the same kind in secret. About eight o'clock *my child Ralph died.* I endeavoured meantime to comfort my wife. . . . My heart was especially poured out and mightily melted, in praying for the blessing of this rod to my wife and me—that it might be a means of purging away my dross, and that it might be blessed to the family, particularly to the servant, Jean, who had waited carefully on the child."

"*Friday, Sept.* 20.—This day, about nine o'clock, I interred the body of my son Ralph in the place where my sister and five of my children were buried. Glory to God, for the ground of hope through Jesus Christ."

"*Friday, Jan.* 24, 1735.—The child Daniel grows still weaker. I was called to see him, and prayed for him with the family. *Wednesday.*—Early this morning *my son Daniel died.* I was helped to-day to look to the Lord, that He would bless this providence to my afflicted wife, when all the stock sprung of her body was cut off. I observed her many times greatly affected." "*Jan.* 30.—I buried the corpse of my young son Daniel beside the rest of my children."

Then there came a second little Ralph to gladden the parents' heart; but not long was he to be spared to them, for the Lord had need of him also in heaven, and so the poor father writes, during his illness:—"*Sabbath, April* 9, 1738.—This morning I was raised to see the child on whom the disease was continuing to increase. I prayed, in company with the rest,

and then retired to my room. I looked to the Lamb in the midst of the throne, and the blood of the Lamb sprinkling the mercy-seat, and sealing the covenant of promise; and on this ground my heart was made somewhat easy with respect to the child." "*Monday, April* 10.—This morning I was wakened to see the child die. Then I went to the room where he and the people were; and in prayer I was led to run to the name of the Lord, as a strong tower, and, under a gale of influence, to leave the child in the midst of the tower, expecting he would be saved for the sake of God's great name. A little after this, the child departed this life."

In his Gospel Sonnets, Ralph Erskine says, and he speaks from experience:—

"In heavenly choirs a question rose,
That stirred up strife will never close,—
What rank in all the ransomed race,
Owes highest praise to sovereign grace?

"Babes thither caught from womb and breast,
Claimed right to sing above the rest;
Because they found the happy shore
They never saw nor sought before."

But not only was the good man called to part with these little ones—he lived to mourn the loss of those who were his stay and comfort, and to whom his heart clung tenderly. He went and saw his daughter, the Peggy whom he had loved so well, and felt that it would be the last time, for the hand of death was upon her; and he writes to her on his return, for she had gone from the parents' roof to the home of her husband:—"However sorry I am to part with you so soon, I desire to be still, and know that He is God. I know not how soon my own departure may be at hand. Meantime it has pleased Him to bereave me; Ebie is not, Johnny is not; and if He be calling for you also, even He whose right is to give and to take as He pleases, O may He loose your heart wholly from this world, and enable you to take a *dead grip* of Christ, into whose hands I commend your spirit." And when she died, the bereaved father still blessed God, and confessed that He did all things well.

We saw, in the life of Ebenezer, what a kind and faithful brother he was to him. United

alike by the bonds of nature and grace, associated in the ministry of the Gospel, and residing not far from each other, theirs was a life-long friendship, without any difference. They rejoiced in each other's prosperity, and sympathised in each other's sorrows.

In like manner did his sisters share largely in his brotherly affection, and then his nephews and nieces, for all of whom he entertained the deepest regard, and many of his letters are addressed to them, on such occasions as their marriages, etc.

And in friendship he was as faithful and true. Communicative, generous, candid, he recommended himself, in no common degree, to all whom he favoured with a share of his regard. He entered into their circumstances and feelings with sincerity and warmth, and was ever ready to promote their true happiness by his prayers, counsels, and efforts.

CHAPTER IX.

DEATH AND CHARACTER.

"And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them."—Rev. xiv. 13.

MR ERSKINE, it may almost be said, died in harness. He preached on Sabbath, the 22nd of October 1752, and of this he remarks:—"I preached in the afternoon, and, when alone, I had some secret freedom in putting my name under the shadow of that name of the Lord that is my strong tower, and in seeking He might be with me till death, and in death, making his word my comfort and support."

Mrs Erskine having repeatedly expressed her

regret that his close application to study deprived her so much of his society, he told her one day that the work he intended for the press was finished, and "she might soon expect a little more of his company for some time (he had just finished his Scripture Songs), but it would not be long till she should be deprived of it altogether."

He persisted, however, in the active discharge of duty, until he was seized with his last illness, and died on Monday, 6th November 1752. Of this sad event, his son writes to a cousin, "The Lord liveth, blessed be our Rock. He has been pleased to visit us, in His holy providence, with the very awful and affecting stroke of my father's death. He died yesterday, a quarter after three in the afternoon, of a nervous fever, being the eighth day of the fever. He preached here last Sabbath save one, with very remarkable life and fervency. He spoke but little all the time, the disease did not evidently appear to be present death approaching, and the physicians had ordered care to be taken to keep him quiet. B·

after he had the remarkable and sudden change to the worse, which was not till Sabbath, he then spoke a great deal, but could not be understood; only, among his last words he was heard to say, "I will be for ever a debtor to free grace."

Thus died Mr Ralph Erskine. His last words were, "Victory, victory, victory!"

His remains were interred in the churchyard of Dunfermline, on Thursday, November 9, by his surviving relatives and friends, in presence of a vast concourse of spectators. A stone, on which was inscribed a Latin epitaph, was placed over his grave.

In 1849 a monument was erected in front of the church, at Dunfermline, where he so long ministered. The figure, which is of large monumental size, represents Erskine in the dress of the period, namely, full-skirted, large-cuffed coat, breeches and stockings.

The extracts we have given from the diary of Mr Erskine, prove him to have been a man of piety and prayer. We see him through it *carefully observing the events of providence,*

watchful over his own spirit, minutely examining the state of his heart and character, very regular and attentive in the perusal of Scripture, and, above all, having strong faith in God, and deep and true zeal for His glory, and the good of souls. Other virtues, however, may be touched upon. He was very humble—indeed, clothed with humility; and, as an example of this, the following lines written on him may be quoted:—

> "An holy, humble course of life he steered,
> That all might see the doctrine which they heard;
> His presence grave did reverence great command,
> And crave profound respect from every hand.
> His very look could vanity declaim,
> His countenance put levity to shame."

This humility was shown in his readiness to do justice to the merits and popularity of other ministers, and to own when he himself failed. One instance of this is given, when both his brother and he preached on the Monday after the celebration of the Lord's Supper at Glasgow. Ebenezer delivered an excellent discourse; but Ralph

fell short of his usual fluency and fervour. On his brother noticing this, Ralph said, "True, brother; but if my poor sermon humble me, perhaps I shall reap greater advantage from it than your great sermon." Then he writes to Mr Whitefield,—"It refreshes me to hear that any of my poor writings in verse or prose have been and are blessed, in this or any other part of the earth. If I travel by pen as far as you do in person, and contribute my mite for spreading the Gospel light, I rejoice in it, and bless His name for it, who has ordered this beyond my view and expectation."

He had a gentle, forgiving spirit, and often a ready answer to disarm adversaries. One day, as he and Mr Willison of Dundee were talking about the joys of heaven, a lady present, who was warmly attached to the Established Church, remarked, "Aye, sir, there will be no Secession in heaven." "O, madam," he instantly replied "you are under a mistake; for in heaven there will be a complete secession from all sin and sorrow."

A traditional anecdote is told in Scotland. He was fond of music, and some of his more strait-laced hearers feeling scandalized by a report that he played on the violin, a deputation of grave elders was appointed to wait upon him. Ralph produced his violincello, and treated the elders to a solemn psalm tune, with which they were highly gratified, and assured the people that "the minister did not play on the *wee sinfu' fiddle* they had imagined."

His "Gospel Sonnets," once so popular, cannot be compared with master-pieces of lyric poetry, but here and there we find a pathos and dignity, from the greatness of his theme, which finds its way into every congenial heart. Take the following as an example:—

"HEAVEN DESIRED BY SAINTS ON EARTH."

"Happy the company that's gone
From cross to crown, from thrall to throne;
How loud they sing upon the shore,
To which they sailed in heart before!

"Blessed are the dead, yea, saith the Word,
That die in Christ the living Lord,

And, on the other side of death,
Thus joyful spend their praising breath:

"Death from all death has set us free,
And will our gain for ever be;
Death loosed the massy chain of woe,
To let the mournful captives go.

"Death is to us a sweet repose,
The bud was op'd to show the rose;
The cage was broke to let us fly,
And build our happy nest on high."

Another quotation from the Sonnets may be given, in which the Gospel is offered in all its freeness—

"Come down, Zaccheus, quickly come,
Salvation's brought into thy home;
In vain thou climb'st the legal tree,
Salvation freely comes to thee.

"Thou dream'st of coming up to terms—
Come down into My saving arms;
Down, down, and get a pardon free,
On terms already wrought by Me."

At length the controversy begun on earth is ended in heaven, each redeemed sinner endeavouring to excel the other in gratitude—

"Tis I," said one, "'bove all my race
Am debtor chief to glorious grace;"
"Nay," said another, "hark, I trow,
I'm more obliged to grace than thou."

"Stay," said a third, "I deepest share
In owing praise beyond compare;
The chief of sinners you'll allow,
Must be the chief of singers now."

As we saw, Ralph Erskine died saying, "I will ever be a debtor to free grace."

It was remarked, in the beginning of Ebenezer Erskine's Life, that these men and that age were noted for long-fasting, much-reading, and deep-thinking theology, and we see a sample of such in the Erskines and their friends. Stately, strong, and thrilling, the Gospel spread over the land, and men's hearts became soft and plastic to receive it, and obey its every requirement, however hard to flesh and blood these might be. It was Britain's most earnest century, for the Puritans in England were embued with the same spirit as was seen in Baxter, Alleine, and Howe. It might be that, with the eye riveted on the future, the things of earth became too

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were once the favourite reading of the pious Scottish peasantry.

The late Dr John Mason, of New York, said, that "when ten years of age, he was the subject of deep religious impressions. He has often remarked, incidentally, that at that period he took Ralph Erskine's 'Faith's Plea upon God's Word' to the garret of his residence, and read, and wept, and prayed."

"Who do you think," asked an eminent London bookseller, last winter, "is the most popular religious writer at present?" "I cannot tell," was the answer. "It is Ralph Erskine," was the reply; "we sell more of his writings than of any other divine, Scotch or English."

If space permitted we could have liked to have given a few specimens of Mr Ralph Erskine's style as a preacher; we must content ourselves with one or two extracts from what is a remarkable discourse preached by him, at the ordination of a brother minister; it is called "Gospel Compulsion," and in this lukewarm age, it would be well if such a faithful che

to clergymen was showered by thousands over the land.

The text is from Luke xiv. 23, "Compel them to come in, that my house may be filled."

"The duty of ministers and their work. Their work is not only *driving* work, while they preach the law as the schoolmaster to lead to Christ; but it is also *drawing* work, while they preach the Gospel of Christ, who was lifted up to draw men to Him by His love and grace. Their work is *winning* work, seeking to win souls to Christ, *compelling them to come in*; and their work is *filling* work, that their Master's house may be filled; and that every corner, every seat, every chamber, every storey of His house may be filled. As long as the Gospel is preached, His house is filling; and as long as there is room in His house, there is work for the minister; his work is never over, so long as His Master's house is empty; *compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.*

"Further, their duty is (as the context points out),—1*st*, To go out into the wide world, "Go ye

into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." And as they must go out *to* the world, so they must go out *of* the world and out *of* themselves. 2*nd. To go out quickly,*—to lose no time, for sinners are in hazard of perishing eternally; and we must hasten to pluck them as brands out of the burning. *Now is the accepted time,* now is the spirit promised. 3*d.* To let them know *we are in earnest* for our Master, and endeavour not to tickle their fancy but to touch their heart; to compel them by importunity and to take no refusal. 4*th.* However many have come in, we are to tell them that *yet there is room for more,* and that Christ's heart is open, and His riches inexhaustible; and that, in His house there is bread enough and to spare. 5*th.* The zeal of His house must eat us up; for our concern must be that His house is filled; the number of the elect must be completed, and the rest left inexcusable. All that the Father hath given Me shall come to Him; yea, these He must bring and they shall hear His voice. . . .

"Our Master's house is like the New Jeru

salem that hath three gates to every airt, Rev. xxi. 13, '*On the east three gates, on the west three gates, on the south three gates, and on the north three gates.*' And all the gates of His house are open. Where dwell you, man, woman? in Scotland or England? in the east or in the west? in the north or in the south? O come in, come in; for the gates are open to you, Isa. xliii. 5, 'I *will bring thy seed from the east, and gather them from the west. I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Keep not back; bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth.*' If you, or any of you, go away thinking or saying that there was not a word said to you, I take all the four airts of heaven, east, west, north, and south, to witness that you are called in. . . . Oh, come in, poor sinner! let me compel you to come in to Jesus Christ, who is ready to welcome you to His house and heart, both at once. Come in now! O, come in believing, and if you cannot believe, come looking to the Author of faith, crying, '. I believe, help thou mine unbelief.' If

you would fain come and want my help, there is my hand. May the Lord Himself persuade you all, and *compel* you *to come in, that His house may be filled.*"

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