



"You will know them by their fruits." Mt. 7:16

The Sanctification of John Fletcher

THE LIFE OF THE REV. JOHN WILLIAM DE LA FLECHERE

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CHAPTER II.

Account of his conversion.

1. NOTWITHSTANDING the early appearance of piety in Mr. Fletcher, it is evident that he continued, for a long time, a perfect stranger to the true nature of Christianity. He was naturally of a high and ambitious turn though his ambition was sufficiently refined for religious as well as scientific pursuits.

He aspired after rectitude, and was anxious to possess every moral perfection.

He counted much upon the dignity of human nature, and was ambitious to act in a manner becoming his exalted ideas of that dignity. And here he outstripped the multitude in an uncommon degree. He was rigidly just in his dealings, and inflexibly true to his word; he was a strict observer of his several duties in every relation of life; his sentiments were liberal, and his charity profuse; he was prudent in his conduct, and courteous in his deportment; he was a diligent inquirer after truth, and a strenuous advocate for virtue; he was frequent in sacred meditations, and was a regular attendant at public worship. Possessed of so many moral accomplishments, while he was admired by his friends, it is no wonder that he should cast a look of self-complacency upon his character, and consider himself, with respect to his attainments in virtue, abundantly superior to the common herd of mankind.

But while he was taken up in congratulating himself upon his own fancied eminence in piety, he was an absolute stranger to that unfeigned sorrow for sin which is the first step toward the kingdom of God. It was not till after he had resided some time in England that he became experimentally acquainted with the nature of true repentance. This, according to Mrs. Fletcher's account, was in the following manner:

2. Meeting with a person who asked him to go and hear the Methodists, he readily consented, and from that time became more and more conscious that a change of heart was necessary to make him happy. He now began to strive with the utmost diligence, according to the light he had, hoping, by *doing much*, to render himself acceptable to God. But one day hearing a sermon preached by a clergyman whose name was Green, he was convinced he did not understand the nature of saving *faith*. This conviction caused many reflections to arise in his mind. "Is it possible," thought he, "that I, who have always been accounted so religious, who have made divinity my study and received the premium of piety (so called) from the university for my writings on Divine subjects,—is it possible that I should yet be so ignorant as not to know what faith is?" But the more he examined himself, and considered the subject, the more he was convinced of the momentous truth. And beginning also to see his sinfulness and guilt, and the entire corruption and depravity of his whole nature, his hope of being able to reconcile himself to God by his own works began to die away. He sought, however, by the most rigorous austerities to conquer this evil nature, and bring into his soul a heaven-born peace. But alas! The more he strove, the more he saw and felt that all his soul was sin. And now he was entirely at a loss what to do, being conscious of his danger, and seeing no way to escape, till at last he discovered that nothing, except a revelation of the Lord Jesus to his heart, could make him a true believer.

3. But a few pages transcribed from a diary, written by his own hand, when he was about twenty-five years of age, will give the reader the best information on this subject.

"The 12th of January, 1755, I received the sacrament, though my heart was as hard as a flint. The following day, I felt the tyranny of sin more than ever, and an uncommon coldness in all religious duties. I felt the burden of my corruptions heavier than ever; there was no rest in my flesh. I called upon the Lord, but with such heaviness as made me fear it was lost labour. The more I prayed for victory over sin, the more I was conquered. Many a time did I take up the Bible to seek comfort, but not being able to read, I shut it again.

The thoughts which engrossed my mind were generally these: I am undone.

I have wandered from God more than ever. I have trampled under foot the frequent convictions which God was pleased to work in my heart. Instead of going straight to Christ, I have wasted my time in fighting against sin with the dim light of my reason, and the mere use of the means of grace; as if the means would do me good without the blessing and power of God. I fear my knowledge of Christ is only speculative, and does not reach my heart. *I never*

had faith; and without faith it is impossible to please God. Therefore, all my thoughts, words, and works, however specious before men, are utterly sinful before God. And if I am not washed and renewed before I go hence, I am lost to all eternity.

4. "When I saw that all my endeavours availed nothing toward conquering sin, I almost gave up all hope, and resolved to sin on, and go to hell. But I remember there was a sort of sweetness even in the midst of these abominable thoughts. If I go to hell, said I, I will serve God there: and since I cannot be an instance of his mercy in heaven, I will be a monument of his justice in hell: and if I show forth his glory one way or the other, I am content. But I soon recovered my ground. I thought *Christ died for ALL*, therefore he died for me. He died to pluck such sinners as I am as brands out of the burning. And as I sincerely desire to be his, he will surely take me to himself—he will surely let me know, before I die, that he hath died for me, and will break asunder these chains wherewith I am bound. If he leave me for a little while in this dreadful state, it is only to show me the depth of the misery he will draw me out of. I must then humble myself under his mighty hand, and he will lift me up in his appointed time. But then I thought, this, perhaps, may not be till my dying hour—and must I sin on till then? How can I do this? But I thought again, my Saviour was about thirty-three years working out my salvation; let me wait for him as long, and then I may have some excuse for my impatience. Does God owe me any thing? Is he bound to time and place? Do I deserve any thing at his hands but damnation? I would here observe that anger in particular seemed to be one of the sins I could never overcome. So I went on, sinning and repenting, and sinning again; but still calling on God's mercy through Christ.

5. "I was now beat out of all my strong holds. I felt my helplessness, and lay at the feet of Christ. I cried, though *coldly*, yet I believe *sincerely*, 'Save me,' Lord, as a brand snatched out of the fire; give me justifying faith in thy blood; cleanse me from my sins; for the devil will surely reign over me, until thou shalt take me into thy hand. I shall only be an instrument in his hand to work wickedness, until thou shalt stretch forth thine almighty arm, and save thy lost creature by free unmerited grace.' I seldom went to private prayer, but this thought came into my mind: This may be the happy hour when thou wilt prevail with God; but still I was disappointed. I cried to God; but my heart was so hard that I feared it did not go with my lips. I strove, but it was so coldly that often I had fits of drowsiness even in my prayers. When overcome with heaviness, I went to bed, beseeching God to spare me till next day, that I might renew my wrestling with him till I should prevail.

6. "On Sunday the 19th, in the evening, I heard an excellent sermon on these words, 'Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.' I heard it attentively, but my heart was not moved in the least; I was only still more convinced that I was an unbeliever, that I was not justified by faith, and that till I was, I should never have peace with God. The hymn after the sermon suited the subject; but I could not join in singing it. So I sat mourning, while others rejoiced in God their Saviour. I went home, still resolving to wrestle with the Lord like Jacob, till I should become a prevailing Israel.

"I begged of God the following day to show me the wickedness of my heart, and to fit me for his pardoning mercy. I besought him to increase my convictions, for I was afraid I did not *mourn* enough for my sins. But I found relief in Mr. Wesley's Journal, where I learned that we should not build on what we feel; but go to Christ with all our sins, and all our hardness of heart.

On the 21st, I began to write part of what filled my heart, namely, a confession of my sins, misery, and helplessness, together with a resolution to seek Christ, even unto death. But my business calling me away, I had no heart to resume the subject. In the evening I read the Scriptures, and found a sort of pleasure in seeing a picture of my wickedness so exactly drawn in the third chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, and that of my condition in the seventh.

And now I felt some hope that God would carry on in me the work he had begun.

"I often wished to be acquainted with some one who had been just in my state, and resolved to seek for one to whom I might unbosom my whole soul, and apply for advice. As I had heard that mourners sometimes found comfort in reading over any particular text of Scripture they opened upon, I opened the Bible once for that purpose; but I found nothing that gave me comfort, and so I did it no more, for fear of tempting God.

7. "Thursday, my fast day, Satan beset me hard; I sinned, and grievously too. And now I almost gave up all hope. I mourned deeply, but with a heart as hard as ever. I was on the brink of despair, and continued, nevertheless, to fall into sin, as often as I was assaulted with temptation. But I must observe that all this while, though I had a clear sense of my wickedness, and of what I deserved; and though I often thought that hell would be my portion, if God did not soon pity me, yet I never was much afraid of it. Whether this was owing to a secret hope lodged in my mind, or to hardness of heart, I know not; but I was continually crying out, 'What stupidity! I see myself hanging as by a thread over hell! And yet I am not afraid—but sin on! O what is man without the grace of God? A very devil in wickedness, though inferior to him in experience and power.' In the evening I went to a friend, and told him something of my present state; he endeavoured to administer comfort, but it did not suit my case; there is no peace to a sinner unless it come from above.

When we parted, he gave me some advice which suited my condition better; 'God (said he) is merciful; God loves you; and if he deny you any thing, it is for your good; you deserve nothing at his hands; wait then patiently for him, and *never* give up your *hope*.' I went home resolved to follow his advice, though I should stay till death.

8. "I had purposed to receive the Lord's Supper the following Sunday; I therefore returned to my room, and looked out a sacramental hymn. I learned it by heart, and prayed it over many times, sometimes with heaviness enough, at others with some devotion, intending to repeat it at the table. I then went to bed, commending myself to God with rather more hope and peace than I had felt for some time. But Satan waked while I slept. I dreamed I had committed grievous and abominable sins; I awoke amazed and confounded, and rising with a detestation of the corruption of my senses and imagination, I fell upon my knees, and prayed with more faith and less wanderings than usual; and afterward went about my business with an uncommon cheerfulness. It was not long before I was tempted by my besetting sin, but found myself a new creature. My soul was not even ruffled. I took not much notice of it at first; but having withstood two or three temptations, and feeling peace in my soul, through the whole of them, I began to think it was the Lord's doing. Afterward it was suggested to me that it was great presumption for such a sinner to hope for so great a mercy. However, I prayed I might not be permitted to fall into a delusion; but the more I prayed, the more I saw it was real. For though sin stirred all the day long, I always overcame it in the name of the Lord.
9. "In the evening I read the experience of some of God's children, and found my case agreed with theirs, and suited the sermon I had heard on justifying faith; so that my hope increased. I entreated the Lord to do to his servant according to his mercy, and take all the glory to himself. I prayed earnestly and with an humble assurance, though without great emotions of joy, that I might have dominion over sin, and peace with God; not doubting but that joy and a full assurance of faith would be imparted to me in God's good time. I continued calling upon the Lord for an increase of faith; for still I felt some fear of being in a delusion: and having continued my supplication till near one in the morning, I then opened my Bible on these words, Psa. Iv, 23, 'Cast thy burden on the Lord, and he shall sustain thee; he will not suffer the righteous to be moved.' Filled with joy, I fell again on my knees to beg of God that I might always cast my burden upon him. I took up my Bible again, and opened it on these words, Deut. Xxxi, 'I will be with thee, I will not fail thee, neither forsake thee; fear not, neither be dismayed.' My hope was now greatly increased; I thought I saw myself conqueror over sin, hell, and all manner of affliction.

"With this comfortable promise I shut up my Bible, being now perfectly satisfied. As I shut it, I cast my eye on that word, 'Whatsoever you shall ask in my name, I will do it.' So having asked grace of God to serve him till death, I went cheerfully to take my rest."

10. So far we have Mr. Fletcher's account, written with his own hand. To this I add what Mrs. Fletcher says she heard him speak concerning his experience at this time, viz., that he still continued to plead with the Lord to take more full possession of his heart, and sought with unwearied assiduity to receive a brighter manifestation of God's love to his soul: till one day, as he was in earnest prayer, lying prostrate on his face before the Lord, he had a view, by faith, of our Saviour hanging and bleeding on the cross, and at the same time these words were applied with power to his heart:—

“Seized by the rage of sinful men,
I see Christ bound, and bruised, and slain:
‘Tis done, the martyr dies!
His life to ransom ours, is given,
And lo! The fiercest fire of heaven
Consumes the sacrifice.

“He suffers both from men and God,
He bears the universal load
Of guilt and misery!

He suffers to reverse our doom,
And lo, my Lord is here become
The bread of life to me.”

Now all his bonds were broken: he breathed a purer air, and was able to say with confidence, “The life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” By means of this faith his soul was freed, and sin was put under his feet. Knowing in whom he had believed, he could triumph in the Lord, and praise the God of his salvation.

11. About this time Mr. Fletcher addressed an epistle to his brother, in which he gives a farther description of the change that had taken place in his own mind, in the following words:—

“I speak from experience. I have been successively deluded by all those desires which I here so sincerely reprobate, and sometimes I have been the sport of them all at once. This will appear incredible, except to those who have discovered that the heart of unregenerate man is nothing more than a chaos of obscurity, and a mass of contradictions. If you have any acquaintance with yourself, you will readily subscribe to this description of the human heart; and if you are without this acquaintance, then rest assured, my dear brother, that whatever your pursuit may be, you are as far from true happiness as the most wretched of men. The meteor you are following still flies before you; frequently it disappears, and never shows itself but to allure you to the brink of some unlooked-for precipice.

“Every unconverted man must necessarily come under one or other of the following descriptions: he is either a *voluptuary*, a *worldly minded person*, or a *Pharisaical philosopher*; or, perhaps, like myself, he may be all of these at the same time: and, what is still more extraordinary, he may be so, not only without *believing*, but even without once *suspecting* it. Indeed, nothing is more common among men than an entire blindness to their own real characters. How long have I placed my happiness in mere chimeras! How often have I grounded my vain hopes upon imaginary foundations? I have been constantly employed in framing designs for my own felicity; but my disappointments have been as frequent and various as my projects. In the midst of my idle reveries, how often have I said to myself, ‘Drag thy weary feet but to the summit of yonder eminence,—a situation beyond which the world has nothing to present more adequate to thy wishes, and there thou shalt sit down in a state of repose.’ On my arrival, however, at the spot proposed, a sad discovery has taken place—the whole scene has appeared more barren than the valley I had quitted; and the point of happiness, which I lately imagined it possible to have touched with my finger, has presented itself at a greater distance than ever.

“If hitherto, my dear brother, you have beguiled yourself with prospects of the same visionary nature, never expect to be more successful in your future pursuits. One labour will only succeed another, making way for continual discontent and chagrin. Open your heart, and there you will discover the source of that painful inquietude, to which, by your own confession, you have been long a prey. Examine its secret recesses, and you will discover there sufficient proofs of the following truths: *The heart is deceitful above all things*, and desperately wicked. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. The thoughts of man’s heart are only evil, and that continually. The

natural man understandeth not the things of the Spirit of God. On the discovery of these and other important truths, you will be convinced that man is an apostate being, composed of a sensual, rebellious body, and a soul immersed in pride, self-love, and ignorance: nay, more, you will perceive it a physical impossibility that man should ever become truly happy till he is cast, as it were, into a new mould, and created a second time.

“For my own part, when I first began to know myself, I saw, I *felt*, that man is an undefinable animal, partly of a bestial, and partly of an infernal nature. This discovery shocked my self-love, and filled me with the utmost horror. I endeavoured for some time to throw a palliating disguise over the wretchedness of my condition; but the impression it had already made upon my heart was too deep to be erased. It was to no purpose that I reminded myself of the morality of my conduct. It was in vain that I recollected the many encomiums that had been passed upon my early piety and virtue. And it was to little avail, that I sought to cast a mist before my eyes by reasonings like these—if conversion implies a total change, who has been converted in these days? Why dost thou imagine thyself worse than thou really art? Thou art a believer in God and in Christ: thou art a Christian: thou hast injured no person: thou art neither a drunkard nor an adulterer: thou hast discharged thy duties, not only in a general way, but with more than ordinary exactness: thou art a strict attendant at church: thou art accustomed to pray more regularly than others, and frequently with a good degree of fervour. Make thyself perfectly easy. Moreover, Jesus Christ has suffered for thy sins, and his merit will supply every thing that is lacking on thy part.

“It was by reasonings of this nature that I endeavoured to conceal from myself the deplorable state of my heart: and I am ashamed, my dear brother; I repeat it, I am ashamed that I suffered myself so long to be deluded by the artifices of Satan, and the devices of my own heart. God himself has invited me, a cloud of apostles, prophets, and martyrs, have exhorted me, and my conscience, animated by those sparks of grace which are latent in every breast, has urged me to enter in at the strait gate, but notwithstanding all this, a subtle tempter, a deluding world, and a deceived heart, have constantly turned the balance, for above these twenty years, in favour of the broad way.

I have passed the most lovely part of my life in the service of these tyrannical masters, and am ready to declare in the face of the universe that all my reward has consisted in disquietude and remorse. Happy had I been if I had listened to the earliest invitations of grace, and broken their iron yoke from off my neck!”

12. From this time his hopes and fears, his desires and pursuits, were totally changed. (*Gilpin's Notes.*) From the heights of self-exaltation, he sunk into the depths of self-abhorrence: and from shining in the foremost ranks of the virtuous, he placed himself on a level with the chief of sinners.

Convictions made way for unfeigned repentance, and repentance laid a solid foundation for *Christian piety*. His sorrow for sin was succeeded by a consciousness of the Almighty's favour, and the pangs of remorse gave way to the joys of remission. Believing on Jesus, as the Scripture hath said, he found in him a well of consolation *springing up into everlasting life*. All his wanderings were at once happily terminated, his doubts were removed, his tears were dried up, and he began to rejoice in hope of the glory of God. His conversion was not imaginary, but real. It not only influenced his sentiments, but extended to his conduct. Whom he had found a Saviour, he determined to follow as a guide: and so unalterable was this determination that from the very hour in which it was formed, it is not known that he ever cast a wishful look behind him. A cloud of witnesses are ready to testify that from his earliest acquaintance with the truths of the Gospel, he continued to walk worthy of his high vocation, *growing in grace*, and *adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things*.

13. From this period of his life he became truly exemplary for *Christian piety*. He walked cheerfully, as well as valiantly, in the ways of God. He closely followed his Master, denying himself and taking up his cross daily.

And thinking he had not leisure in the day for the great work which he had in hand, he made it an invariable rule to sit up two whole nights in a week.

These he dedicated to reading, meditation, and prayer, in order to enter more deeply into that communion with the Father and the Son which was his delight. Meantime he lived entirely on vegetable food, and for some time on bread, with milk and water. Indeed one reason of his doing this was, that being threatened with a consumption in his early days, he had been advised by a physician to live on vegetables, and he now the more readily complied with the advice, because, by this mean, he avoided dining with the company at Mr. Hill's table. Mrs. Fletcher observes that

beside watching the two whole nights every week just mentioned, his custom was never to sleep till he could no longer keep awake, and that therefore he always took a candle and book with him to bed. This imprudence had once almost cost him his life, if the calamity had stopped there, which it is probable it would not. For one night, being overcome with sleep before he put out his candle, he dreamed that his curtain, pillow, and cap, were all on fire, but went out without doing him any harm. And truly so it was. For in the morning, the curtain, pillow, and part of his cap, as also of the hymn book, in which he had been reading, were found burned. The hymn book, in part burned, Mrs. Fletcher has in her *possession* now. Not a hair, however, of his head was singed. A wonderful proof this, indeed, of God's care of his people, and that his angel encampeth around about them that fear him.

"None can doubt," as Mr. Wesley observes, "whether these austerities were well intended. But it seems they were not well judged. It is probable they gave the first wound to an excellent constitution, and laid the foundation of many infirmities, which nothing but death could cure." Indeed he seems afterward to have been fully apprized of his error in this respect, remarking once to Mrs. Fletcher, when conversing with her about mortification, that if he had that time to spend again, he would not act in the same manner either with regard to meat or sleep. "I have sometimes observed," added he, "that when the body is brought low, Satan gains an advantage over the soul. It is certainly our duty to take all the care we can of our health. But, at that time, I did not seem to feel the want of the sleep I deprived myself of."

The Life of Rev. John Fletcher

By an anonymous friend of Sabbath Schools

In Memory

Such was the death of this eminently holy, laborious, and useful pastor. He died in the vicarage at Madeley, on the evening of Sunday, August 14, 1786, in the fifty-sixth year of his age.

His remains were interred in Madeley church yard, on the 17th, amidst the tears and lamentations of thousands. The Rev. Mr. Hatton delivered an appropriate discourse on the occasion, from Hebrews xiii, 7.

The following sketch will be read with interest by such as wish to know something of his personal appearance. He was about the middle stature, strongly built, and well proportioned. The contour of his face was interesting and noble; his eye was active and penetrating; his nose was moderately aquiline [curved like an eagle's beak – DVM]; his whole countenance highly accorded with the extraordinary grace and elevation of his character. His deportment and manners were of the most engaging and courteous kind, and presented such a combination of gravity, condescension, and gentleness, as few have ever witnessed. Humility and dignity were so finely proportioned and adjusted in him, that while his superiority was discoverable in his air, carriage, and conversation, at the same time he evinced the meekness and simplicity of a child. His figure was fully adapted to all the sacred offices which he had to perform; but of his appearance in the pulpit, the liveliest fancy could not frame for any of the ancient saints, an aspect more venerable and apostolic.

If from the "account already given, any discerning person may with very little difficulty extract his character," still much reflection has convinced me, that while it is very easy to say much in relation to it, nevertheless, it is "extremely difficult to give a just idea of this great man." The following summary is merely an abridgment of a part of the several sketches of his character, by his biographers.

Mr. Fletcher was a most eminent Christian. The foundation for his piety was laid in a deep and thorough repentance for his sins; for notwithstanding his exemplary moral conduct in early life, and his general freedom from gross sins, yet when enlightened, he was fully convinced of his depravity, guiltiness, and danger. He sought to obtain justification by obedience to the law, but failed; he then sought peace of mind by mortification and bodily austerity but with no more success; he next sought and found peace with God through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. His

faith embraced Christ in his true and proper Divinity, and in all his offices, while it relied on him alone for pardon, acceptance, and salvation. Through faith he renounced the world, and chose to suffer afflictions with the people of God. By faith he received and held fast all the truths of Divine revelation, not as abstract truths, but as a communication of the mind and will of God, made with special reference to man's state and happiness. His was truly a life of faith; for he lived and walked by it to the end of his course.

He possessed the evidences of true faith and brought forth all its fruits in an unusual degree of plenty and richness. *His peace became like a river, and at times his joy was unspeakable and full of glory.* Having had much forgiven, he loved much. The love of God was abundantly shed abroad in his heart. He lived in its enjoyment, acted under its influence, was favored with its fulness, and *assimilated to its nature.* Few men since the days of John the beloved disciple, have enjoyed and evidenced so much of this God-like principle as Mr. Fletcher.

His love to God was scripturally evinced by a love to man, which in strength and fervor was only less than supreme. For the children of God he felt and cultivated the most devoted affection. It was a love which was unquenchable by the many waters of cold neglect, and personal abuse which at different times poured like torrents upon him. His Christian charity was of an enlarged and diffusive character: it overleaped denominational boundaries and sectional limits, and embraced in its arms all the children of God, of every name and nation. These he loved with an ardent brotherly attachment.

He desired their prosperity, and earnestly prayed for their union, usefulness, and happiness. His love to the poor was without bounds, and his exertions to relieve their necessities procured for the needy within his parish many valuable donations from his friends at a distance. His benevolence to them very frequently exhausted his purse; it unfurnished his house, impoverished his table, and at times almost emptied his wardrobe. He generally gave them nearly the whole amount which he received for his services as a minister. One of his almost dying expressions was, "O my poor! What will become of my poor!"

He was favored with a communion with God, which was much deeper and more free from interruption than is usually enjoyed even by eminent Christians. This grace he possessed in a *greater or less degree at all times, in all places, and through all the stages of his spiritual life.*

He ever endeavored to set God before him; to see his eye fixed upon him; and to think, speak, and act as in his presence. It was his consolation in adversity, and his joyful prosperity; it sustained him in temptation, and afforded him peace in the midst of trouble.

It would be difficult to mention any fruit of the Spirit, which was not plentifully brought forth in the life of this eminent Christian. He was a constellation of graces, an assemblage of the highest order of Christian excellencies. He promptly and constantly denied himself, took up his cross, and followed the footsteps of his Lord and Master. He might most fitly be styled a man of prayer. Prayer was the employment in which his soul delighted. Whether he was in his pulpit or his study; at home or abroad; alone or in company; conversing with those in health, or comforting the afflicted in the sick chamber; still his soul was either vocally or silently breathing out its fervent desires to the God of heaven. He was an example of patience under sufferings, and of meekness under provocations and injuries; he was courageous in the performance of duty even in the face of great danger, and fearless in the support and defense of the truth which he loved as he did his own soul; yet he was gentle and easy to be entreated. His religious character was strongly marked by firmness and stability. He had but one mind, one object to be gained. At the very outset he fixed his eye upon the crown of life, he did not lose sight of it; he fasted, he prayed, he labored, he suffered, he died, and through Christ he has gained it.

But the grace in which he most excelled, which crowned all others, and made them appear to the greatest advantage was his humility. He even entertained a low opinion of himself, both as a Christian and as a minister, and knew not that he shone in either of those characters. He not only did not seek the honor which comes from man, but truly delighted in preferring every one to himself, and in being regarded as the least of all saints. He would never suffer himself or his performances to be commended in his presence; if any attempted it, he immediately checked it with an air of severity which he never assumed but upon such occasions. He took as much pains to conceal his excellencies as others do to show theirs, and was continually on his guard lest any word should drop from his lips or pen which would tend to make any one think well of him; either on account of his family, learning, talents, or

usefulness.

The Head of the Church enriched Mr. Fletcher with many natural talents which were calculated to render him eminent and useful in his service. To these his providence added extensive and various learning, embracing whatever of science was desirable to qualify him for the great work in which he intended to employ him. To all these qualifications was added the indispensable preparation of an experimental knowledge of God; and subsequently he was distinguished by an extensive acquaintance with the deep things of God. He long hesitated between a sense of duty and an humbling sense of his own weakness and insufficiency; but when he entered the sacred office, he did it with a single eye to the glory of God.

Whether we regard him as preacher, or as a pastor, zeal for God and love to God and souls, will appear to be the ruling principles of his heart and life. In the discharge of his public and private duties, he was conscientious, diligent, and faithful. He sought, not to secure the fleece, but to serve the flock. He never entered the sacred desk, nor exerted himself while in it, to gain the applause of men: his whole aim while in this awful place, was, to glorify God and save souls. He boldly and yet affectionately declared the whole counsel of God. He clearly exhibited the doctrines, duties, and privileges of the Christian religion. His labors for the salvation of the souls of his charge were very great. It is the least of all that can be said of him, that he was a popular preacher. The large congregations who heard him in England, Ireland, France, and Switzerland, bore evidence of his deep piety and uncommon talents: while from each of those countries some jewels shall be gathered, who will be stars in the crown of his rejoicing.

As a writer of polemical theology, he justly sustains a high rank among those who have been set for the defense of the gospel. His style is somewhat diffuse and florid [elaborate, complex – DVM]; yet he exhibits the principal doctrines of the Christian system in a judicious, lucid, and interesting manner. His illustrations are original and appropriate, and in many instances very striking. His defense of those doctrines which were assailed and vilified by some of his opponents, discovers a discriminating and comprehensive mind, which was capable of embracing the whole analogy of faith, and of assigning to each doctrine its real importance and relative influence. His arguments are numerous, various, and cogent. In one important point, his works are unrivaled; they breathe throughout a most pious and amiable temper, and show that their author possessed an affectionate and catholic spirit. The following high compliment was paid to his “Checks” by a pious clergyman who was resolved to live and die in his own opinion. On being pressed to read them, he replied, “No; I will never read Mr. Fletcher’s Checks: for if I did, I should be of his mind.” They will long be read and admired by the friends of the benevolent Gospel of Christ.

The following character of Mr. Fletcher was given in a periodical within a few days after his death: --

“On the 14th instant, departed this life, the Rev. John Fletcher, Vicar of Madeley, to the inexpressible grief and concern of his parishioners, and of all who had the happiness of knowing him. If we speak of him as a man, and as a gentleman, he was possessed of every virtue and of every accomplishment which adorns and dignifies human nature. If we attempt to speak of him as a minister of the Gospel, it will be exceedingly difficult to give the world a just idea of this great man.

His deep learning, his exalted piety, his unceasing labors to perform the important duty of his function, together with the abilities and good effect with which he discharged those duties, are best known and will never be forgotten in that vineyard in which he labored. His charity, his universal benevolence, his meekness, and exemplary goodness, are scarcely equaled among the sons of men.

Anxious to discharge the sacred duties of his office to the last moments of his life, he performed the service of the Church and administered the holy sacrament, to upward of two hundred communicants, the Sunday preceding his death, confiding in that Almighty power which had given him life, and resigning that life into the hands of Him who gave it, with that composure of mind and those joyful hopes of a happy resurrection, which accompany the last moments of the just.”

Let my last days be like his!

EPITAPH OF REV. J. FLETCHER

Here lies the body of
The Rev. JOHN WILLIAM de la FLECHERE
Vicar of Madeley,
Who was born at Nyon, in Switzerland, September the 12th, 1729,
And finished his course, August the 14th, 1785,

In this village;
Where his unexampled labours
Will long be remembered.
He exercised his ministry for the space of
Twenty-five years
In this parish,
With uncommon zeal and ability.

Many believed his report, and became
His joy and crown of rejoicing;
While others constrained him to take up
The lamentation of the prophet,
'All the day long have I stretched out my hands
Unto a disobedient and gainsaying people:
Yet surely my judgment is with the Lord,
And my work with my God."

"He, being dead, yet speaketh."

THE END.

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