

A

Biographical Sketch

OF THE

Life and Labours

OF THAT EMINENT MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL OF
JESUS CHRIST;

THE

REV. JAMES HALL D. D.

OF THE

UNITED SECESSION CHURCH,
BROUGHTON-PLACE MEETING-HOUSE,
EDINBURGH.



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1827.

Memoir
Of the Late

REV. JAMES HALL, D. D.
OF EDINBURGH.



The memoirs of departed saints are interesting to surviving Christians, as they tend to unfold the providence of God towards his people, the experimental work of Christianity in their hearts, and the influence of Divine grace on their characters and conduct, and thus add confirmation to the truth of the Gospel of Christ. This interest is increased, however, when they relate to such servants of the Lord, as have long held a distinguished place in the visible church. The following is a very brief sketch of the history and character of one who was an eminent saint, as well as an honored, influential, and useful minister of the Gospel, for the space of fifty years.

Dr. Hall was born at Cathcart-mill, on the 6th of January 1756, which is contiguous to Glasgow, and had been occupied by his ancestors for many generations. His parents, James Hall and Isabell Bulloch, were persons of decided piety, superior intelligence, and a good education. They were staunch Presbyterians, and zealously adhered to that secession from the Church of Scotland, which, about twenty years before, had originated with

some great and faithful men, in consequence of the errors in doctrine, remissness in discipline, and infringement, by patronage, of the liberty and rights of the Christian people, which were then, and are still tolerated by the general assembly of the Scotch Established Church. His father feued a site for the first secession church in Glasgow, and his mother, whose paternal property lay in the vicinity of Kirkintilloch, presented to the Seceders at that place, the ground on which their church is erected. And it appears worthy of notice, that no fewer than three churches were built for Dr. Hall, during the course of his ministry; one at Cumnock, and two in Edinburgh. He had three sisters and two brothers, four of whom were older than himself. When he was about five years of age, his father was removed to the better country, and the training of his mind devolved upon his mother,* whose instructions, prayers, and example, appear to have been eminently blessed to him, as well as to the rest of her family; for from his youth, he was well acquainted with the Scriptures, and exhibited a walk and conversation becoming a disciple of Christ.

At an early age he gave indications of a sprightly intellect, and distinguished himself at school as a very apt scholar. During his attending the grammar school of Glasgow, he one year gained the second prize, and in each of the three others, the first prize, in that eminent classical seminary. On leaving it, he entered the University of Glasgow, where he studied for five sessions, and went through a complete course of literary and philosophical education, characterized by uncommon assiduity,

* This good woman lived to see all her children respectably settled in life. The eldest son, his father's successor in the mill and farm; James and his younger brother, (now the Rev. Robert Hall, of Kelso,) ordained ministers in the Secession-Church; and all her three daughters, the wives of faithful and eminent clergymen, in the same connexion.

distinguished abilities, and the highest success. His mind was bright and well regulated, and the versatility of his talents was so strikingly conspicuous, that he was equally qualified for attaining eminence in any profession. The piety of his mind determined him to prosecute the study of Divinity. At this period, a gentleman of influence, to whom his merit was well known, and who admired his character and talents, gave him assurance of an excellent living, if he would pursue his theological studies in connexion with the Established Church. Being immoveably attached to the principles he had imbibed from his parents, and adopted from mature judgment, he politely and unhesitatingly declined the offer, and applied to the Associate Presbytery of Glasgow for admission into the list of its theological students, immediately obtained its approbation, and entered on a course of theological studies, under the Rev. John Brown, of Haddington, then Professor of Divinity to the Associate Synod. After attending the prelections of that eminent Divinity and honourably undergoing the usual course of preliminary trials, he was licenced to preach the everlasting Gospel early in the year 1776, when he had just completed the twentieth year of his age.

Before he had been many months a probationer, he received a unanimous call to become the minister of a new congregation at Cumnock, in Ayrshire and was ordained there in the following April, being then only twenty years of age. In the spring of 1780, he married Miss Maxwell, of Bogton, with whom he had been intimate from his childhood, and in whom he enjoyed an affectionate and valuable partner till the end of his life. They had several children, who all died before reaching the years of maturity, except one daughter, who still survives, with her widowed mother, to lament the irreparable loss of a beloved and affectionate father. About the same time, he was called to be the pastor of West

street congregation, in London; but the Associate Synod, agreeably to his desire, continued him in Cumnock. After labouring there, however, with fidelity and success, for the space of nine years, he was translated to Edinburgh in the month of June, 1786, where he employed his splendid talents for the long period of forty years and four months, with increasing celebrity. He received a call, indeed, some years after to become the minister of a congregation in Manchester; but the Associate Synod to which he was subject, considering that his sphere of usefulness was equally extensive in Edinburgh, would not consent to his removal from it. As an evidence of his unambitious disposition, notwithstanding his unrivalled popularity, it may be mentioned to his honour that though the venerable Professor Beattie, in the College of Aberdeen, voluntarily undertook to procure for him the degree of Doctor in Divinity from that University, he modestly declined its acceptance, because none of his brethren in the Secession Church had, at that period, been dignified with the same honorary title. It is only about thirteen years since the College at Philadelphie unanimously conferred the degree upon him, and previous to that time, a similar honour had been awarded to some of his brethren by different Universities.

He was allowed to possess, in an eminent measure, the peculiar requisites of a Christian orator. His appearance, especially while young, was uncommonly interesting. His person was tall, handsome, and dignified. His voice, though not sonorous, was clear, extensive, & mellifluous—modulated with natural taste and impressive variety. His eye beamed with devotional ardour, and his countenance glowed with benignant emotions. His action was animated, graceful, and appropriate, and his whole demeanour dignified; with such an air of unaffected sanctity, that the writer, on beholding his earliest exhibitions in the pulpit, was forcibly impressed with the

idea, that "he moved with the easy grace of an angel, charged with the gracious behests of the Most High."

The style of his composition was lively, elegant, and perspicuous, frequently copious, but always replete with instructive sentiments. His subjects were selected with judgment—uniformly adapted to the circumstances of his auditory, the peculiar aspects of Providence, and the particular occasions on which they were elucidated. His divisions and subdivisions, though sometimes considerably numerous, were well calculated to illustrate his text, assist the memory of his hearers, and furnish them with topics of improving meditation. In all his discourses he was eloquent and interesting; but he consoling truths of religion, the peaceful sound of salvation, the good tidings of great joy, which were brought by the angel of the Lord to the highly-favoured shepherds of Bethlehem, were the themes on which he dilated with particular pleasure. He was well qualified, indeed, for rousing the careless, alarming the impenitent, and impelling the guilty to flee from the wrath to come; but while exhibiting the love of God, the unsearchable riches of Christ, and the astonishing wonders of redemption to poor, miserable, wrath-deserving sinners, he never failed to shine with surpassing lustre.

An extensive combination of attractive qualities entered in to the composition of his public character, which rendered his ministrations equally acceptable to persons of erudition and taste, and to ingenious minds that were total strangers to polite literature. He was blessed with a fascinating ease, energy, and earnestness of manner, a graceful facility of utterance, a compass of language which never allowed him to hesitate, or to return for a better word or a happier phrase—an amplitude of ideas which on all occasions rendered him rich and copious—a strength of imagination which supplied him with striking and instructive figures—a comprehensive knowledge of Christ

tian theology, which qualified him for bringing from the
 treasury of eternal truth, matter admirably adapted to e-
 very exigence; such a complete understanding of human
 nature and experimental religion, as made him adminis-
 ter to each individual a suitable portion of satisfactory
 food in the most appropriate season, an admirable apti-
 tude to strengthen weak hands and confirm feeble knees,
 to soothe the anguish of excessive grief, and comfort the
 diversified mourners in Zion—to establish the doubting
 or unconfirmed believer on the sure foundation which the
 Lord hath laid, restore back-sliders to the good course
 they had unhappily abandoned, allure diffident disciples
 to determined perseverance, excite slothful performers of
 duty to diligence and activity, and provoke all whom he
 immediately addressed, to the exercise of love, and the
 practice of good works, to run in the righteous ways of
 God with accelerated steps,—adorn the doctrine of God
 their Saviour in all things, live soberly, righteously, and
 and godly in the world, and look for the blessed hope,
 the glorious appearance of the great God, even their Sa-
 viour the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for them,
 that he might redeem them from all iniquity, and purify
 them to himself, as a peculiar people, zealous of good
 works. In short, though he sometimes found it neces-
 sary to assume the character of a Boanerges, he appear-
 ed to take much more pleasure in exhibiting himself as a
 son of consolation. When he ascended the pulpit, it
 might, with much propriety, be said concerning him:

“ There stands the messenger of truth; there stands
 The legate of the skies! his theme divine,
 His office sacred, his credentials clear.
 By him the violated law speaks out
 Its thunder; and by him, in strains as sweet
 As ange’s use, the Gospel whispers peace.
 He establishes the strong, restores the weak,
 Reclaims the wanderer, binds the broken heart,

And arm'd himself in panoply complete,
 Of heavenly temper, furnishes with arms,
 Bright as his own, and trains to glorious war
 By ev'ry ru'le of holy discipline,
 The sacramental host of God's elect."

COWPER.

He was also very attentive to the private duties of his office, while he continued able to perform them. In visiting the sick, his presence, his prayers, and his converse, were pecuniary acceptable and consolatory, not only among his own people, but also among strangers of different denominations. And no person could be better qualified for the ministerial visitation of his flock, for he was capable of sympathizing with distressed individuals in all situations, adapting his conversation to every variety of circumstance, and communicating suitable instruction in every particular condition. But, about ten years ago, he was afflicted with an inflammation of his liver, &c., by which his life was thought to be in imminent danger; and though he gradually regained a considerable share of health, he was ever afterwards subject to inward complaints, that rendered him unable to endure any great degree of fatigue: subsequently, he frequently appointed diets of visitation, and attempted to accomplish that interesting exercise; yet the seeds of disease were so deeply rooted in his constitution, that he found himself incapable of persevering, and was reluctantly obliged to desist. The unavoidable intermission of a duty so important was ascribed to false or conjectural causes, by the inconsiderate, the less sympathizing part of his people, such as were seldom subjected to affliction themselves, and too apt to judge unfavourably of others, without being furnished with proper grounds; and they were, unfortunately, instrumental in spreading discontent, and inducing others, along with themselves, to embrace the opportunity which presented itself, of deserting his ministry, and continuing in Rose street, when he removed

with the attached members of his congregation to Broughton-place. The fact is, while free from excessive pain, he was indisposed to make the nature of his sufferings known; in his conversation, he manifested so much cheerfulness and vivacity, and in his pulpit exhibited such liveliness and vigour, that those acquainted with him must have concluded that he enjoyed a measure of health equal to the energy of his animal spirits. But he must always have been sensible of his own situation, and his physicians (who, during his illness, did every thing within the reach of medical skill and assiduity,) expressed their surprise, after having completely learned the causes of his malady, that he had been able to undergo half the fatigue to which he had subjected himself. Men, alas! look only on the outward appearance, but the Lord knoweth the real condition of his creatures. Imperfect and insagacious mortals, therefore, should beware of rash censure or arrogant presumption, and pay particular attention to that inspired admonition—"Judge not, that ye be not judged; for with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."

As a member of ecclesiastical courts, his judgment was more than usually respected. He assumed no dictatorial airs, no superiority of discernment, no disposition to become the leader of a party; but his thorough acquaintance with the forms of business, his just understanding of the causes that came under discussion, his clear comprehension of the reasoning employed by parties concerned, and the tendency of arguments advanced by members of court; the deep interest he took in the concerns of the church, his impartiality in the weighing of evidence, and his unbiassed attachment to equity, justice, and the general interest of religion, enabled him to deliver his sentiments with a luminous precision, a pertinence of remark, and a fluency of unpremeditated expression, which were well calculated to produce convic-

tion, and carry the cause he undertook to advocate. It is true, he was not uniformly successful, but in such cases, the courts had sometimes cause to regret that they had not been governed by his views.

His conversational powers were of a superior description. His literary accomplishments, the extent of his information, the versatility of his talents, his quick comprehension of all that was said, and his admirable facility of expression, qualified him for conversing on all subjects, and with all characters, with almost equal aptitude, and in a manner which seldom failed to communicate pleasure, entertainment, and instruction. Hence it was said, by an eminent American Divine, with whom he had contracted a particular intimacy, while he was in this country, that he could not help admiring the talent of Dr. Hall, for he appeared to be equally qualified for conversing agreeably with a girl before entering her teens, a philosopher on his most abstract theories, a statesman on interesting topics of legislation, and a theologian on the most abstruse points of natural and revealed religion. But while he gave a peculiar zest to any convivial companies with which he associated, he was ever ready to check the smallest approach to moral impropriety, and to introduce subjects calculated to edify as well as entertain. His dignified demeanour and numerous accomplishments, recommended him to the notice and friendship of persons moving in the higher circles of society: and though he neither courted, nor appeared ostentatious of such a distinction, it gave him an opportunity of more extensive usefulness than he might otherwise have enjoyed; for he was generally employed to prepare and transmit addresses from the ecclesiastical courts with which he was connected, to the Secretary of State, or some other influential member of the British Parliament. And, on many occasions, his exertions were essentially serviceable to the Secession Church, in getting its civil concerns settled

on a firm foundation, securing religious privileges, of which it was in danger of being denuded, and procuring annual allowances from government for such of its clergymen as were to be placed in any of his Majesty's foreign dependencies.

He was a genuine philanthropist, a cordial supporter of benevolent institutions, some of which he had the honour to originate—a zealous prompter of such schemes as promised to ameliorate human misery, and extend the boundaries of Messiah's kingdom. He was particularly solicitous that pure and undefiled religion should become more obviously operative, and shine with increasing lustre in his own congregation, the city he inhabited, and his much loved country. Such, indeed, was the liberality of his sentiments, that if the end to which he aspired was obtained, the means or denominations of Christians employed in producing it, he considered as a matter of inferior consequence. Hence it was that evangelical clergymen, not only from England and Ireland, but from any other part of the world, when employed on embassies of beneficence, found a ready admission to his house, his purse, and his pulpit.

His temper was mild, open, ingenuous, and affectionate. He was ever ready to befriend the unfortunate—to favour them with sympathy, advice, and personal services—and to employ his influence in endeavouring to place the unprovided in circumstances of comfort, eligibility, or independence. To his relatives and friends, he manifested the most faithful, fraternal, and disinterested attachment; and towards all mankind he breathed the genuine spirit of Christian benevolence. It must be acknowledged, that he felt the edge of injurious treatment with the keenest sensibility, and expressed his sentiments concerning it with unreserved openness; but I am not aware that he ever was subject to sudden or excessive ebullitions of passion, that in any instance he entertain-

ee a rancorous or revengeful spirit, or that at any time he suffered the sun to go down on his wrath. On the contrary, I know that few were more ready to forgive their offenders, to act towards them in a kind and conciliatory manner, to overlook or obliterate the injury, to make considerable sacrifices for the sake of peace, and render essential services even to adversaries when providentially put in their power. In such situations he was sometimes called to perform an irksome office; but when he had satisfied himself that it was a necessary duty, he proceeded with promptitude to discharge it, without either listening to the dissuasions of his dearest friends, or selfishly consulting with flesh and blood.

It is by no means intended to represent Dr. Hall as a perfect or impeccable character; but while subject to the common infirmities of his species, it may with more than ordinary propriety be said concerning him, "that even his failings leaned to virtue's side." He was sometimes deceived, by thinking more favourably of certain characters than they deserved; and was more apt to entertain a good than a bad report, even of those of whom he had no more than a distant knowledge—to palliate rather than aggravate the charges exhibited against culprits, and to plead for the infliction of lenient rather than severe punishments, even on the guilty. He also listened too readily to plausible propositions, and was not sufficiently aware of their probable result, especially when they proceeded from unsuspected friends: hence he was led into secular engagements, which he did not imagine would interfere with the immediate duties of his sacred function, but which might, in the event of anticipated success, have given him an opportunity of extended usefulness. Instead of which, however, they involved him in pecuniary embarrassment, proved a source of severe trial, and exposed him to the rash censure of such as did not take the trouble to investigate his case. But his

correct statement of prominent facts, his ingenious exposure of the steps which immersed him in such a situation, and his willingness to make every sacrifice calculated to repair any injury which his failure had occasioned, proved perfectly satisfactory to all concerned, and enabled him to retain his respectability unimpaired, not only among his own people, and his brethren in the church but also among impartial public characters of every description. Indeed, it is now understood, that proposals, both of a civil and sacred nature, were made to him, which, had he been inclined to accede to them, would have placed him in circumstances far more eligible than he had previously enjoyed; but his piety, principles, and ideas of consistency, were too strong for allowing any worldly considerations to influence his conduct.

He continued to discharge his public duties pretty regularly, and with great acceptability, till about a year and three quarters before his death, when he was again seriously seized by his former complaint, which confined him nearly three months; after which he occasionally reappeared in the pulpit, and was heard by his people with strong sensations of joy. Indeed, his discourses then as well as during the whole preceding course of his ministry, were so salutary and seasonable, so replete with the richest marrow of the Gospel, and so strikingly adapted to the condition of his auditory, that scarcely any substitute that appeared in his room was nearly so acceptable; for, notwithstanding the duration and nature of his malady, there was nothing in his public appearances that seemed to indicate either the existence of disease, or the imbecility of age—no whine, drawl, inaudibility, or want of attention to the usual requisites, by which he had been accustomed to produce a pleasing and profitable effect. His last sermon was preached from Matthew xxii. 11, 12—“And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wed-

ding garment, and he saith unto him, Friend, how comest thou in hither, not having on a wedding garment? and he was speechless." He showed that the marriage feast represents all the blessings which were purchased by the death of Christ, adapted his discourse to the circumstances of his congregation, in which the Lord's Supper was to be dispensed on the succeeding Sabbath, and pourtrayed, in impressive colours, the sad condition of those who come to the sacramental table without the wedding garment. He intended to preach on the communion Sabbath, from Isaiah x. 21—"The remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob, to to the mighty God!" but on the morning of that day, he found himself so ill, that he was obliged to request an assisting clergyman to occupy his place, and in less than ten days afterwards, he retired from the exercises of the sanctuary below, to join in those that unceasingly engage the general assembly and church of the first born, in the temple above. He died a few minutes before eight, on the morning of November 28, in the seventy-first year of his age, and fiftieth of his ministry. He suffered much during the continuance of his trouble; but he bore his apparently excessive pain with an exemplary fortitude, unmurmuring resignation, and a patience which appeared to have produced its perfect work. He departed in the firm faith of those important truths he had been accustomed to preach, in a full dependance on the faithfulness of that God who cannot lie, and in the complete possession of that consolation which peculiarly belongs to the heirs of promise, who, like him, have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope that is set before them. His death was deeply regretted, as a sad obscuration of that burning and shining light, in which many for a season had exceedingly rejoiced. The interest it excited was obvious at his funeral and especially at the appropriate sermon preached in his church on the subsequent Sabbath, by

the Rev. John Brown, (who had succeeded him in Rose-street,) when at least two-thirds of the vast multitude that appeared solicitous to hear it, were incapable of gaining admission into the house; but which being now published, must amply gratify the serious reader, by the excellence of its matter, the able delineation it contains of the doctors character, and such interesting specimens of his death-bed exercises as are exhibited in the following extracts:—

“On Tuesday morning, eight days before he died, he summoned his family to his bed-side, and prayed. The members of his family, with his brother and sister, he committed by name to the protection of God; but the burden of his supplication was the session and congregation of Broughton-place, for whom he prayed, that they might individually be blessed, and that the Holy Ghost might be poured out upon them, and that God would, in due time, give them a pastor, taught by his spirit, who should preach the Gospel in purity and be well acquainted with his Bible.

“On Wednesday evening, when informed of the solicitude and dejection of some friends on account of his affliction, and of his elders’ meetings for prayer on his behalf, he remarked, ‘Aye—I live in the hearts of my friends and my people, and they live in mine.’

“Early on Thursday morning, while stretched back in his sick-chair, and labouring under severe pain, he made the following remarks at intervals: ‘I find that the same spiritual processes, the same processes of spiritual reasoning, and the same hopes which go on and animate us in health, when we are well, go on when we are ill; and encourage, support, and delight us more abundantly in the hour of sickness, and in the prospect of death.’ During the uttering of this sentence, he was more than once interrupted by excessive difficulty of breathing. After a little interval, with his eyes bent upwards, he pro-

ceeded—‘Thou hast redeemed us! Thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood!—that is the song of the great company who surround the throne. Thou hast redeemed us!—that is the song of the saints on earth. Thou hast redeemed us;—that is the song and joy of my heart.’ In the same posture, after another short interval, he said, ‘I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.’ ‘I know in whom I have believed, and that what I have committed to him he will preserve against that day.’ ‘The Lord is my light, and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord liveth, and blessed be my Rock, and let the God of my salvation be exalted.’ ‘I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day.’ ‘Lord Jesus receive my spirit!’

“On another occasion, he said, ‘The cords that bind me to this world are numerous and very tender, but they must all be cut, and that very soon.’ And, putting his hand to his chest, ‘That is a true saying of David’s—*my heart faileth*. Yes, my flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.’ One of his last injunctions was, ‘Give my love to my congregation—to every one of them.’”

Let us unite with the pious author of the Funeral Sermon—“that surely, after hearing these things, we do not feel as we ought to do, if, amid all our regrets, we are not disposed to say, ‘Thanks be to God who hath given him the victory.’”

FINIS.