

THE
VIRGINIA
EVANGELICAL AND LITERARY
MAGAZINE.

VOL. II.

DECEMBER, 1819.

No. XII.

LETTER FROM SAMUEL DAVIES TO A FRIEND IN LONDON.

Charlotte, 15th November, 1819.

[REVEREND SIR,

I think somewhere in your magazine you requested that all persons having in their possession any of Mr. Davies' letters, would favour you with them. In a pamphlet I have found among the old papers of a deceased relative, entitled, "A Compassionate Address to the Christian Negroes in Virginia, &c. by Benjamin Fawcet; there is a letter of Mr. Davies', which I do not recollect seeing published yet in the magazine. And it does not appear that Mr. Gillies had the advantage of it in his Historical Collections; for although Mr. Fawcet makes several extracts from Mr. Davies' letters found in that work; yet he does not refer the reader to that work for this, but only says it was written to a correspondent in London, in the same year, in which this address was written, as you will see in his own words.

He is speaking of Mr. Tennent and Davies.—"After these gentlemen had successfully finished the business of their late mission in this part of the world; Mr. Davies gave the following particulars to his correspondent in London, in a letter which he wrote in the spring of the present year, six weeks after his safe return to his family and friends."]

"The inhabitants of Virginia are computed to be about 300,000 men, the one half of which number are supposed to be negroes. The number of those who attend my ministry at particular times is uncertain; but generally about three hundred who give a stated attendance. And never have I been so much struck with the appearance of an assembly, as when I have glanced my eye to that part of the meeting-

“Permit me sir, to be an advocate with you, and by your means, with your generous friends in their behalf. The books I principally want for them, are Watts’ Psalms and Hymns and Bibles. The two first they cannot be supplied with any other way than by a collection, as they are not among the books which your society give away. I am the rather importunate for a good number of these, as I can not but observe, that the negroes, above all the human species that I ever knew, have an ear for music, and a kind of ecstatic delight in psalmody; and there are no books they learn so soon, or take so much pleasure in, as those used in that heavenly part of divine worship. Some gentlemen in London were pleased to make me a private present of these books for their use, and from the reception they met with, and their eagerness for more, I can easily foresee, how acceptable and useful a larger number would be among them. Indeed nothing would be a greater inducement to their industry to learn to read, than the hope of such a present; which they would consider both as a help and a reward for their diligence.—I hardly know of any modern institution which bears so favourable an aspect on the declining interest of religion as your society. They deserve the pleasure of hearing the happy effects of their generosity at the distance of 4000 miles, in these ends of the earth; and it is no small happiness to me, that the strictest veracity allows me to transmit so agreeable an account. Thus may the inhabitants of Great Britain receive blessings in answer to prayers put up for them in America; where I am sure, they have many affectionate intercessors, among whom he pleased to number your sincere and much obliged friend,

SAMUEL DAVIES.”

[As a farther specimen of Mr. Davies’s epistolary manner we insert two letters published in the Assembly’s Magazine in the year 1805; but we are well persuaded, new to almost the whole of our readers.]

An Original Letter, from the Rev. Samuel Davies, president of the College of New-Jersey.

DEAR SIR,

As I heartily condoled with Mrs. — and yourself, in your affliction, I now allow myself the pleasure to hope your health, the greatest blessing our mortal frames are capable of, is restored: and send you my sincere congratulations. Happy we! if in proportion to the daily augmentation of our

obligations to the Preserver of men, our pious gratitude also increases.

Though the hurry of your business may indispose you for speculation, yet, as I persuade myself it does not erase the impressions of friendship, your letters are always acceptable to me, however trifling they appear to yourself. 'Tis an information of no small importance to me that

“You eat, and drink, and sleep, and then
“You eat, and drink, and sleep again,”

especially seeing in this method you converse with me on a level, and pay me in my own coin: and indeed, unless you could condescend to trifle a little, you would soon be impatient of my correspondence. My thoughts often pursue my letters, and recollect a hundred silly things in them which afford me some uneasiness till I reflect that they were sent to a friend.

I would have sent you a cabinet of jewels (or, to do them justice, a cargo of poetical lumber) with this; but I was scrupulous of conveying such precious wares by I know not whom; and therefore 'tis likely I must reserve to myself the honour of enriching you when I have the pleasure of seeing you.

But, my dear sir, these awkward witticisms are really forced and unnatural at present; for the habitual levity of my mind is a little interrupted, and I am in a pretty serious mood. I have been taking a delightful garden walk this morning, where even my barren imagination could not but suggest a thousand instructive lessons from the blooming creation. The verdure of the vegetative tribes, the fragrance of the flowers, and the harmony of the aerial choir which in various forms were paying the tribute of praise to the great Source of life and beauty, reproached the languor of my heart in devotion, and the silence of my tongue in praise. The inanimate world seemed to importune me to express their dumb gratitude in human language, and be interpreter of the universal hallelujah; which suggested to me a stanza of *Herbert*, which wants nothing but a modern dress to render it truly poetical:

“Man is the world's high priest who doth refrain,
“Doth not refrain unto himself alone
“But robs a thousand who would praise thee fain,
“And so commits a world of sin in one:”

yet a consciousness of guilt abased my silly pride, and distressed me with the horrid charge of sacrilege. Alas! I am a fallen degenerate creature. In whatever way the degeneracy was conveyed, whether by Adam's representativeship

or some other, I have as glaring evidences that I deeply share of it as of my own existence. 'Tis truly astonishing, sir, that the candidates for eternity should confine their thoughts and projects so much to the trifles of time. Alas! the world is asleep; unapprehensive of the substantial realities which shall soon succeed to these fleeting vanities. Will the freedom of a friend be sufficient to excuse me if I here usurp the character of your serious monitor? O! dear sir, do not trust your eternal all on an implicit venture; do not suspend your everlasting state on a doubtful *perhaps*; but give all diligence to make your calling and election sure. A mere possibility of mistaking in this is more shocking than the certain expectation of any other misery. Remember, sir, that that plausible fashionable religion which the generality seem to rest in as sufficient, is not the religion of Jesus;

Therefore forsake the fashionable crowd;
And claim the honour to be singly good.

May those preludes of your final dissolution which have lately afflicted, if they do not now afflict your mortal frames, be happy excitements to a speedy preparation. If my prayers are heard on your behalf, you will be both heirs together of the grace of life. May Mrs. — be mindful of restoring mercy, and ripe for death whenever it may come! But oh! the world soon begins to charm us with its flattering allurements, and render us unmindful of the juster estimate we formed of them, when on the border of eternity.

Pardon, dear sir, pardon this "new-light cant;" for I should really offer violence to my mind should I write more ingeniously, or less solemnly. Pray, dear sir, write to me sense, nonsense, or what you please; for I am sure you do not know the pleasure your letters afford me. I am your's, &c.

S. D.

Original Letter from the Rev. Samuel Davies, formerly president of the college of New-Jersey.

MY VERY DEAR FRIEND,

I REDEEM a few nocturnal hours to breathe out my benevolent wishes for you, and to assure you of my peculiar regards. Human life is extremely precarious and uncertain; and, perhaps, at your return, I may be above the reach of your correspondence; or, perhaps, your voyage may end on the eternal shore. I, therefore, write to you, dear sir, in the last agonies of friendship, If I may use the expression. If,