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BIOGRAPHY

LIFE OF THE REV. WILLIAM TENNENT.

AMONG the duties which every generation owes to those which are to succeed it, we may reckon the careful delineation of the characters of those whose example deserves, and may invite imitation. Example speaks louder than precept, and living practical religion has a much greater effect on mankind than argument or eloquence. Hence, the lives of pious men become the most important sources of instruction and warning to posterity: while their exemplary conduct affords the best commentary on the religion they professed. But when such men have been remarkably favoured of God, with unusual degrees of light and knowledge, and have been honoured by the special and extraordinary influence of his Holy Spirit, and by the most manifest and wonderful interpositions of divine Providence in their behalf, it becomes a duty of more than common obligation, to hand down to posterity the principal events of their lives, together with such useful inferences as they naturally suggest. A neglect of this duty, even by persons who may be conscious of the want of abilities necessary for the complete biographer, is greatly culpable; for, if the strictest attention be paid to the truth of the facts related, and all exaggeration or partial representation be carefully avoided, the want of other furniture can be no excuse for burying in oblivion that conduct, which, if known, might edify and benefit the world.

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ESSAYS MORAL AND RELIGIOUS.

FOR THE VIRGINIA RELIGIOUS MAGAZINE.

VIVAX AND CONTUMAX—A DIALOGUE.

It will be recollected, that at the close of the dialogue between Paulinus and Vivax which appeared in Number 2, Vol. 2, of the Virginia Religious Magazine, Vivax appeared to entertain a favourable opinion, of the christian religion. He had for some time been convinced of the truth of the scriptures; but concealing his real sentiments he resisted the light and affected to treat the gospel, and its ordinances with contempt. He at length became unable to make any farther resistance. Like a servant who had known his masters will, and obstinately refused to obey it, he viewed himself justly exposed to many stripes. To expect relief from the anguish of a troubled spirit, in the haunts of vice and folly or from the speculations of *Philosophers*, to Vivax now appeared no better than madness. The *Philosophers* could not extract the dagger which sin had planted in his bosom; their remedies had no tendency to check the progress of the disease which preyed on his vitals. The voice of an accusing conscience could no longer be silenced, by the clamorous mirth of fools. Vivax is a sinner: the law of God condemns him as an *inexcusable* sinner. What can he do, or whether shall he fly to escape deserved vengeance. Behold he prayeth; and his prayer is expressed in the language of the humble Publican *God be merciful to me a sinner*. Prostrate in the dust, he presumes not to raise an eye towards heaven; he can scarcely hope to partake of the crumbs, which fall from the childrens table. But the Father beholds the returning prodigal afar off: God who looks with complacency on the contrite heart in an unexpected hour, surprised him with a discovery of the exceeding riches of his grace, in Christ Jesus. The kind invitation of the Saviour, sweetly calmed the tumult of his bosom, "Come unto me all

ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." To this invitation, with rapture he replied, in the words of Peter, 'Lord to whom shall I go but unto thee, thou hast the words of eternal life:' Life—Eternal life was what he sought; and from the Savior of sinners he obtained, the inestimable gift. Ah! what tears of penitential sorrow now flowed at the recollection of his former impiety? The reception of pardon for his accumulated offences, from the gracious Savior, whom he had so often reviled, shewed him the baseness of his conduct; and so effectually convinced him of his obligations to Christ, that his only ambition now, is to spend and be spent—to live and die in his service.

It soon appeared that Vivax would stand in need of all the wisdom and fortitude, which he had, in a short time, been endowed in the school of Christ. The news of his conversion quickly spread through the neighbourhood; and with unusual surprise and regret it was heard in every gay circle that 'Saul also was among the Prophets.' Returning one evening from a social meeting, which had been instituted by a few pious people, for their mutual edification, Vivax met with one of his former companions, by the name of Contumax. This man once appeared to be near the kingdom of heaven, but having long since apostatized; he now appears to be desirous to blot out the remembrance of his former prayers, and apparent devotion, by means well calculated to answer this purpose, and at the same time to sear the conscience and harden the heart.

Contumax having heard of his friend's conversion, accosted him in these words. Is it possible that this is my friend Vivax? *Upon my honour sir*, you are so much altered since our last interview that I scarcely knew you. I fear you are becoming melancholy. You certainly have not enjoyed your usual portion of health. Come Sir, I expect presently to meet with a number of jovial fellows, who have agreed to spend the even-

ing together, if you will consent to make one of the party, we will endeavour to restore you to your wonted good humour and cheerfulness.

V. I thank you Sir, for your concern for my welfare but must beg to be excused. As for bodily health or cheerfulness, I never enjoyed a greater portion of either of these blessings; and I suppose you have heard, that I have lately determined, to spend my social hours with people who are seriously disposed.

C. Yes Sir, I have been told but was unwilling to credit the information, that you had become very religious indeed,—quite pharisaical. Religion it seems, is your favorite topick in conversation, an evening of every week is spent with a set of enthusiasts, in prayer and praise and what you call religious conversation: It would grieve me to find these reports true.

V. They are strictly true Sir, I am just now on my return from one of those meetings, in which for the purpose of promoting our mutual edification, a few of us have agreed to unite in social prayer and praise, and religious conversation; And I assure you Sir, I now consider these exercises, among the most laudable in which we can possibly be engaged. The few hours which I have devoted to the service of God in this way, I reflect on with peculiar pleasure, and have only to regret that, so late in life I have experienced that which renders life desirable.

C. I am sorry to find you so egregiously mistaken. Can any thing be more evident than that religion is seated in the heart—that it consists in a secret intercourse between God and the soul, and consequently, that it neither can, nor ought to be known by any, except God and the creature that is under its influence. What has the world to do with my religion?

V. I should be sorry sir, if an explanation of the christian religion, or a defence of any of its peculiar doctrines or precepts was expected from me. I consider myself a Novice in these matters, and would willingly sit as a learner at the feet of

the weakest of Gods people. I cannot however, discover any thing very formidable in the objections, which you have stated, against my present practice. I am willing to agree with you, that religion has its seat in the heart—that the good man maintains a secret, spiritual intercourse with God; of which the world cannot have that certain knowledge which the pious man himself possesses. But I deny that a good man either can or ought to conceal his religion from the world.

C. Well Sir, I shall be glad to hear some of your new divinity; but if you will take the Bible for your guide, I suspect you will make but a weak defence, either of your practice, or of the opinions you have now expressed.

V. Pray Sir, what do you find in the Bible, so irreconcilable either to my sentiments or practice.

C. It is not to one, or a few passages I would direct your attention; but to the numerous reproofs, which were justly given, by Jesus Christ to the Pharisees; for their long public prayers, their fastings and particularly for their outward shew of religion. Were they not reprobated for these things, once and again as arrant hypocrites. Were not the most dreadful anathemas pronounced against them? And will you notwithstanding all this not only argue in favor of their procedure, but dare to immitate them in your meetings for prayer and religious conversation.

V. As you have appealed to the scriptures as the standard by which my sentiments and practice are to be tried, I consider myself bound to give its full weight to every argument drawn from that source; but I suppose you will agree that no construction ought to be put on any passage of scripture, which would contradict the general strain of the sacred volume, or the plain import of any other passage. You will agree I presume, that the scriptures shall explain themselves.

C. This rule must be admitted with regard to all writings.

V. Well sir admitting this rule, what will you do with such passages as these? Let your light so shine before men that

they may see your good works. Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together. For where two or three are met together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. He that confesseth me before men, him will I also confess before the angels of God; but he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God.' To explain these passages in such a way as to make it appear credible, that the Author of christianity intended that his disciples should pass through this world unnoticed or unknown, is impossible. No Sir, like a city erected on an eminence, the good man is to attract the notice of every passenger; not by an ostentatious display of his religion, nor by hypocritical pretensions to a greater degree of piety than he possesses, but by a uniform course of piety towards God, and charity to men. You certainly can not suppose, Sir, that the Pharisees were condemned, because they *prayed*, nor that the length nor publicity of their prayers was the procuring cause of the judgments denounced against them. Jesus Christ who condemned them, hath commanded us to 'pray one for another—to pray always with all manner of prayer.' No sir, *insincerity* was the evil for which the Pharisees were condemned; their avowed object was to please God; but their real design was to deceive men, and gratify their own pride and avarice. True religion, you have said, is seated in the heart; their only concern was to keep clean the outside of the cup. They fasted for strife, and made long prayers in the streets that they might appear to men, to be eminently pious, and thus gain an opportunity to devour widows houses, and commit other acts of secret villainy, without suspicion. The judgments of heaven were not inflicted on them for their fastings or their prayers; but for their hypocrisy, their pride, their avarice, and all the other vile tempers which they so carefully endeavoured to cover, with the cloak of religion.

C. Your opinion of these deceivers is certainly correct, they doubtless were a very hypocritical, designing set of men; and I wish the world may keep a jealous eye, on the crafty

imitators of these same hypocritical pharisees, who abound every where, and cease not to impose on the credulous multitude.

V. It is very probable, Sir, that men are still to be found in every part of the christian world, who are infected with the *leaven of the pharisees*, and they are certainly the pests of society, wherever they exist. But if, to be like a pharisee, a man must pray frequently, and publicly, and be conformed in all his deportment to the letter of the law, I suppose their imitators are not numerous amongst us. I apprehend that neither church nor state has any occasion to dread their crafty machinations.

C. But you gave it as your opinion, a while ago, that *a good man can not conceal his religion from the world*; I would be glad to hear a defence of this doctrine. We certainly on becoming religious, are not necessarily obliged to lay our hearts open to the inspection of mankind. Men may observe our actions, but you agree that religion exists in the heart; now, should it even be admitted, that a very great alteration is effected in the heart of a sinner, by what you call *grace*; it certainly cannot turn him inside outwards.

V. Tell me Contumax, is it not your opinion that there is a very great variety among mankind, as to morals? Are not some virtuous and others vicious?

C. I certainly entertain this opinion, otherwise I could not have condemned the Pharisees, ancient and modern, as I have just now done without hesitation.

V. Well sir, by what criterion do you judge when you approve or condemn your fellow-men? On what is your opinion founded, when you say this is a very religious, pious man; that is a hypocritical deceiver? You cannot discern the heart.

C. Undoubtedly the character of the man must be fixed by his conduct.

V. Very true. If therefore you should discover a professor of religion, exhibiting in his conduct the evidences of

pride, of avarice, or of a deceitful or malignant temper; I presume you would not hesitate in pronouncing him a bad man, whatever he might say respecting the goodness of his heart, or a secret friendly intercourse with the Deity.

C. No sir, the tree must be known by its fruits.

V. Well sir, keeping this in mind, suppose you were asked for your opinion of a professor of religion, who for many years had given the most satisfactory evidence of his christian character; who had been a shining example of piety, of patience, resignation, humility, justice, temperance, charity, and of every other amiable quality?

C. I would certainly pronounce him one of the best of men.

V. You conform strictly to my rule in practice, whilst in words you condemn it. You say the world has no business with a man's religion, because religion is a business of the heart, to which they can have no access: and yet you condemn without hesitation the professor of religion who does not exhibit in his conduct unequivocal evidence of the purity of his heart. In this instance you pass just sentence though by so doing you contradict the principle on which you set out, and acknowledge with me that *a good man cannot conceal his religion.*

C. Well admitting that a good man cannot, entirely conceal his character, I am nevertheless of the opinion, that he ought to pass through the world with as much secrecy as possible.

V. I am afraid Contumax, the good man would find it a difficult undertaking to accommodate his conduct entirely to your taste; is his conduct fair and upright? He is a pharisee. Does he pretend to purity of heart, whilst his conduct fails to justify these pretensions! He is a notorious hypocrite. Your scheme, like a two-edged sword, must slay the righteous, wherever he might fly for shelter.

C. Well sir, if my sentiments are condemned as entirely incorrect, will you give me your opinion on this interesting subject?

V. The opinion which I have lately adopted is, that there are two extremes which ought to be carefully avoided. One is an ostentatious display of religion; the language of which is *stand by thyself, I am holier than thou*: the other is, a neglect of the duties enjoined in the scriptures, whenever a discharge of these duties would fix the public attention on us as the followers of Christ. People who eventually fall into these different extremes, differ very much in their conduct as it respects religion; but it may be strongly suspected that the predominant dispositions of their hearts are not very dissimilar. The Pharisee displays his pride and his desire of human applause, in all his prayers, his fasting, and ritual worship; the man who desires to creep secretly into heaven, shews as clearly in a different way, that he is more anxious to obtain the praise of men, than the approbation of God. The man of true piety will, with equal caution, avoid each of these extremes. He will do nothing with a view to be thought righteous by men, nor will he leave any duty undone, through fear of reproach or the finger of scorn.

C. But sir, we will return, if you please, to your prayer meetings. Taking it for granted that a good man may be known by his fruits, I hope you will agree that a prayer is no infallible evidence of true piety, since it appears that hypocrites have rendered themselves conspicuous by the length and fervency of their prayers; and as it would be wrong to pronounce a man pious because he prays, must it not be equally rash to suspect a man's piety because he does not pray?

V. It will be readily granted that men have been, and still may be, induced by improper motives to assume a cloak of religion—that they may fast and pray and be thought pious by men, whilst their principles are an abomination to God. But will the insincerity and hypocrisy of some who pray, be thought sufficient to free others from an obligation to perform this duty? The question is, Hath God commanded us to pray unto him? If he has, then the man who refuses to pray is a

rebel: without a breach of charity, I do not say we may *suspect* the piety of such a man, but, that the word of God condemns him as a graceless sinner. There are a thousand things to which your observations would apply, as well, as to the duty of prayer. A bad man may feed the hungry—cloathe the naked—visit the fatherless and widows in their afflictions.—He may be just in his dealings—peaceable in his dispositions and a careful observer of all his relative duties, and may be a bad man still; destitute of the love of God, and of a sincere desire to please him, but would you therefore conclude, that we ought not to suspect the man to be destitute of piety who is unjust, unmerciful, destitute of charity and of natural affection, and a neglecter of all relative duties?

C. But you cannot suppose Vivax, that the Supreme Being is unacquainted with the wants of his creatures. Why therefore will you presume to give him information, as though he were ignorant?

V. You are greatly mistaken Sir, if you suppose that christians pray on the supposition that God is ignorant of their wants: They approach him as the Omniscient searcher of hearts, under the joint influence of his command, and kind invitation, that they may obtain the blessings which he knows to be necessary for them, in a way calculated to remind them of their dependance, and to dispose them carefully to improve the favours bestowed.

C. But God either intends to afford us the blessings we desire, or he does not. If these blessings are destined for us, we shall doubtless receive them whether we pray or not; if they are not intended for us, we shall not obtain them by our entreaties. God is of one mind, and his purposes change not.

V. I certainly believe, Sir, that we shall receive the favors which are destined for us; and likewise, that these blessings will be received in the manner in which God hath determined to bestow them. Now, that God should have determined that

certain favors should be received by his creatures, who would humbly bow before him, acknowledge their dependance on him, and ask for these favors as a gracious gift ; which should not be received by the prayerless sinner, must, I think, have appeared probable, without the information given in his word. It is certainly analogous to his dealings with mankind in other respects. The husbandman might say, If God hath determined that I shall have a crop, it must be so, whether I cultivate and sow my fields or not ; but that he may be thankful for the precious grain with which his barns are filled ;—that he may be disposed to cultivate the habits of industry, temperance and frugality, he is convinced by daily experience, that no secret determination of the supreme Being—no fertilizing influence of the involving sun, or of the descending rain, will fill the barns of the sluggard with plenty.

C. But can you suppose that the Supreme Being is perpetually altering his plan in compliance with the requests of his creatures ? Or that any new or unforeseen event can take place, to change his determination ? I presume you would shudder at the impious supposition.

V. No such supposition is necessary on the plan for which I contend. If God hath assured us that if we ask for any thing agreeable to his will, he will hear us ; and that we shall receive the blessings for which we ask : it requires no alteration in the divine plan to bestow these favours ; it was foreknown and intended that we should receive them, and that they should be bestowed in answer to our prayers.

C. Well Vivax, if you must pray, why will you not confine your prayers to your own closet ? What benefit can you expect to derive from social prayer, which might not be obtained, in an equal degree at home without exposing yourself to the derision of all your respectable friends, by associating with a set of praying enthusiasts ?

V. I would not willingly be deprived of the advantages of private devotion, or neglect the duties of the closet, nor am I more willing to forsake the assemblies of the saints, or live destitute of the advantages of publick worship. We, whom you are pleased to stigmatize as enthusiasts, gladly associate as one family, to ask our common Father, for blessings which we need in common to pray with and for each other. Our distresses, our fears, our enemies are the same, and we approach with one heart and one voice *to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.* We bear one another's burdens—sympathize with each other in affliction—mingle our tears together; and our joys by being mutual, are redoubled. Believe me Sir, in our little assembly we sometimes receive an antipast of heaven. There the happy throng unite, without a discordant heart, in acts of praise and adoration; here we attempt, in our humble forms, to imitate their strains; and are happy to find that the attempt is not made in vain. *They that wait on the Lord renew their strength, they mount up on wings like an eagle; they run and are not weary—they walk and faint not.*

C. Well Vivax, I do suppose it would be possible to gain admittance into heaven (if there is such a place) without all this reading and praying, and toil. Why, my dear Sir, you appear to have committed the greater part of the Bible to memory since our last interview, notwithstanding the large portion of your time, which must have been wasted in hearing two or three sermons in the week, attending prayer meetings, engaging in religious conversation, and in acts of private devotion. Certainly future happiness is attainable without all this drudgery.

V. A punctual performance of religious duties, would doubtless prove an irksome task, to an irregenerate sinner. He has no relish for this employment. But let his heart be changed by divine grace—let him feel the constraining influence of the love of Christ; and it will be no longer a disagreeable task to read the scriptures, to pray to God, or to praise

him. No? the ways of wisdom are pleasant to the renewed soul, and all her paths are peace.

C. It may be as you say Vivax. But what objections can you have, to unbend your mind occasionally with a little innocent mirth, or harmless amusement? Come Sir, there is no religion in being mopish. Would you consent once more to resume your seat in our club, I am persuaded you would return to your devotional exercises, with much more life and energy.

V. What you denominate *innocent mirth* or *harmless amusements*, to me may not appear equally inoffensive. If your entertainments are of the same kind now as formerly: if they are enjoyed at the expense of the reputation of other people, or of a man's own fortune, health, reputation, or religion; they must not be called innocent. If the mirth of your club, is excited now, as it was formerly; by that which calls for lamentation and weeping; by the scurrilous remarks of hardened infidels respecting certain portions of the sacred writings; or by the imperfections, real or pretended, of some who bear the christian name; I assure you Sir, I would make an awkward figure in your assembly. A participation of these pleasures would not invigorate me for the duties of the church or closet. Ah! no, I have not yet forgotten *the wormwood and the gall*. But, as I have stated some of the advantages which result from the exercises of social worship, in which we engage in our weekly meetings; will you be so obliging as to contrast with these, some of the advantages expected from your social meetings. Come Sir, I would be glad to compare notes with you. Convince me, that by forsaking the assemblies of the saints, and associating with the members of your club, or of any other, I can obtain blessings superior to those I have stated, and I will consent to accompany you this evening, and never fail hereafter to make one of your party.

C. It is not necessary to inform you Vivax, of the beneficial effects of our institution, as you have so often been an eye-

witness of them. How often have you seen the members assemble, with downcast eyes and gloomy countenances, like a pack of insolvent debtors? And have you not as often been surprised and delighted at the sudden change? On their arrival at the place of rendezvous, how quickly their countenances brighten—their foreheads are smoothed—their eyes sparkle, and before a separation takes place, all are as happy as kings. There—the wise man, and the fool, the honest man, and the knave, are equally welcome. There is found a sovereign antidote against every anxious care; a short and easy method to shake off the fears of death and judgment: the remedy has succeeded in a hundred cases where preaching and praying have proved ineffectual. Who ever saw a member of our society take leave of his companions with a heavy heart? In short, Sir, I have made up my mind—you have talked of religion and quoted scripture until I feel chilled to the heart. I cannot relish *your* enjoyments and therefore wish not to partake of them. Were I even persuaded, that important advantages would result from devotional exercises, I cannot, *will not pray.*

As Contumax uttered these words a dreadful peal of thunder issued from an angry cloud which had collected unobserved, while they were engaged in conversation, and now threatened to burst upon them. They soon despaired of reaching any place of refuge, the rain descended in torrents—the earth seemed to tremble to its centre, and the sturdy oaks in every direction were smote by the lightning and shivered into splinters. Contumax turned pale; for a time he endeavoured to conceal his terrors and to follow Vivax with a firm step. He at length fell prostrate on the earth, as if touched by the hand which arrested Saul of Tarsus, and exclaimed, “*Lord have mercy—have mercy on me, a miserable sinner: Pray for me—O pray for me, Vivax.*” Thus he continued to manifest the tumult of his soul, by earnest cries for mercy, and by piteous lamentations, until the violence of the storm abated. The

wind at length sprung up from the west and a bright rainbow formed by the beams of the setting sun announced fair weather, and put an end to the fears and prayers of Contumax. After entreating Vivax with the most earnest importunity not to publish his weakness, and at any rate, not to inform any of his companions that he had prayed; they separated, and Vivax closed the business of the day in his closet, but Contumax, anxious to obtain relief from some unwelcome sensations, which had been excited by the conversation and the storm, made haste to join his companions, and by the potent influence of a flowing bowl obtained the relief desired. The Club rose at a late hour, Contumax, for certain reasons, was left by his comrades. He awoke the next day in a remote part of the town, stripped of his coat, his hat, his money and watch: nothing was left to comfort him unless it was the reflection, that he had not spent the preceding night at a prayer meeting. S.



FOR THE VIRGINIA RELIGIOUS MAGAZINE.

True Riches, No. II.

LYSANDER is a gentleman of figure and fashion. It was the aim of his pious mother to bring him up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, in the knowledge and practice of genuine religion. Her early instructions have never wholly lost their effect on the morals of Lysander: but they were in the main defeated by the licentious opinions and corrupting example of his father, who seemed to imagine himself created for no other purpose than to amass money and to gratify his appetites. Lysander was sent early to college but instead of improving his mind, he spent his time in idleness and dissipation. Furnished by his imprudent parent with large and frequent supplies of money, he rapidly acquired habits of expensive amusement and vicious indulgence. The