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REV. NATHANIEL STRONG, D.D.

Pastor of the First Church, Hartford, Ct.

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MEMOIR OF THE REV. NATHAN STRONG, D. D.

PASTOR OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN HARTFORD, CT.

[By the Rev. SAMUEL H. RIDDEL, Hartford.]

NATHAN STRONG, D. D., the subject of the following sketch, was a son of the Rev. Nathan Strong, first minister of the North Congregational Church and Society in Coventry, Ct.* He was born on the 16th of October, 1748. His father was the son of Elnathan Strong, who was born August 20, 1686, and who lived at Woodbury, and died in middle life, leaving a young family. The father of Elnathan was Thomas Strong, who was the fourth child of Elder John Strong, who died at Northampton April 4, 1699, at the age of 94. For a more particular account of the genealogy of the Strong family, see American Quarterly Register, Vol. XII. pp. 9, 389.

We have no means of learning the personal history of the subject of this memoir, during any part of his childhood or youth, previous to his becoming a graduate of Yale College, in the year 1769; which was a few weeks before he had completed his twenty-first year. For several years after he was graduated, Mr. Strong remained at the college in the office of tutor, in which employment he was intimately associated, as he had been during his collegiate course, with his distinguished classmate Dr. Dwight, afterwards president of Yale College. Of the manner in which he had improved his opportunities for acquiring knowledge at this period, and evinced already the characteristics which afterwards became so prominent in his public life, something may be inferred from the remark of President Stiles, who is reported to have said, to the committee of the church in Hartford, in reply to their inquiries respecting Mr. Strong as a candidate for settlement, that "*he was the most universal scholar he had ever known.*" When we consider the high authority, on a point of this nature, from which this honorable testimony came, it will not seem improbable that it should have been received as a high encomium upon the intellectual endowments, as well as the systematic diligence of one, who, in his academic course, had been a competitor with such men as Dwight, Trumbull, Treadwell, Emmons, Lyman, and Charles Backus, who were among his cotemporaries in college.

Mr. Strong was graduated with the highest honors of the college. The following is from the Memoir of Dr. Dwight. "At the commencement

* The Rev. Joseph Strong, D. D., late of Norwich, Ct., was also a son, and a younger brother of Nathan.

but a single appointment was made from the class which received the degree of Bachelors. Before giving it out, the president sent for Dwight and Strong, and informed them that, in the view of the officers of college, they were at the head of the class, and equally deserving of the appointment; but, as Strong was the elder of the two, it would be given to him at that time, and to Dwight when the class entered on the degree of Masters." A writer in the *Christian Spectator* for September, 1833, in an article "on the character and writings of Dr. Strong," to which we shall have occasion somewhat largely to refer in compiling the facts to be embodied in the present memoir, thus pertinently remarks upon the mutual influence of this early emulation. "Whatever spirit of literary rivalry might, for a time, have actuated these two, perhaps the brightest ornaments of their class, we believe that while it did not impair their respect for each other's talents, it had the effect to increase in each those high qualifications, by which they were both so eminently fitted for public usefulness. As they came forward together in life, they were united in counsel and effort, in all the leading measures pursued for the advancement of the moral and religious welfare of the community. It is no mean praise to Dr. Strong, that he should have uniformly enjoyed the confidence, the cooperation, and the willing deference of such a man as President Dwight."

The same habits of diligence in the pursuit of every branch of knowledge which his acute and comprehensive mind could make subservient either immediately or remotely to the useful purposes of life, continued with Dr. Strong through his whole subsequent course; and as appears from the results of his public labors, and from the testimony of his cotemporaries, with the same success in active, professional life, which had been witnessed by his venerable instructor, and had rewarded his earlier efforts in classical literature. In a brief obituary notice of Dr. Strong, prepared as an announcement of his decease by the Rev. Thomas Robbins, at that time pastor of a church in East Windsor, Ct., this valuable feature of his character is thus recognized.

"Very diligent in the improvement of time, he rose early in the morning, and devoted all that could be spared from necessary avocations, the calls of company, and the active labors of his profession, to the duties of retirement and study. By thus cultivating a mind of the first class for activity and penetration, he became very eminent as a divine, and possessed of extensive erudition. His learning has not been duly appreciated, as it was never displayed in his public instructions, and but partially exhibited in his intercourse with his acquaintance. Yet his information extended to almost every subject. The state of the Christian world and the past history of the church seemed to be all open before him; the present condition of most countries, particularly in their moral and religious character, he possessed with great clearness; while none of his attainments in the abstract sciences appeared to have been lost. With a memory of great strength, he possessed an astonishing sagacity of mind, by which he would often be master of a subject, on which he had received but little information."

That Dr. Strong did not make a display of his erudition, as such, in his public instructions, is undoubtedly a fact; one which arose partly from the form in which his continual acquisitions of knowledge were incorporated into his general stock, and, still more, from the intellectual and moral dignity of his mind, and of the great purpose which influenced him in all his public labors. That his erudition was not duly appreciated, in the form of scholastic learning, by the great mass of men, was also, for the

same reasons, likely to be a fact; at the same time it is fully manifest that few men have been more distinctly recognised by the generation in which they lived, as men of preëminent knowledge, than Dr. Strong; or as capable by means of what they knew, of throwing a clearer illumination upon every subject of popular instruction. It may also be remarked, in this connection, that a very considerable part of what Dr. Strong wrote for the public eye, especially on miscellaneous subjects, was published anonymously at the time, and has never appeared in connection with his name. Few men appear to have thought less than he did of rearing a monument for fame.

After leaving college, Mr. Strong devoted himself for a time to the study of law, probably with a design to engage in that profession. How long he continued his attention to that study we are not informed. But at length we are told that "having suddenly changed his purpose," he gave himself to the study of theology, and was soon licensed to preach.

At what period of his early life Mr. Strong became a hopeful subject of renewing grace, we have no means of ascertaining with exactness. The writer of the obituary notice above quoted, says: "Dr. Strong supposed he was made a subject of divine grace in his youth. From this we may probably conclude that his conversion took place before he entered college. It may have been, however, at a later period, in connection with his change of purpose in regard to a profession.

During the period of his residence at Yale College as a tutor, Mr. Strong received several invitations to preach as a candidate for settlement in important vacancies at a distance; but preferring a residence in his native State, he accepted an application from the First Society in Hartford, Ct., which had become vacant by the death of the Rev. Edward Dorr, in 1772. Mr. Strong commenced preaching to the people in Hartford sometime in the autumn of 1773; and on the 5th of January, 1774, his ordination took place. The sermon, on this occasion, was preached by the reverend father of the candidate, from 2 Tim. iv. 4: *But watch thou in all things; endure afflictions; do the work of an evangelist; make full proof of thy ministry.* This discourse was published, and is a production highly creditable to the author as a discriminating and sound divine, and as a clear and forcible writer. A single passage we may here quote, as evincing the manner in which the youthful preacher had been trained, by parental teaching and example, to understand the substance of the message with which the ambassadors of Christ are sent to their fellow men.

"To the great and fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion there should be close attention; such doctrines as these: eternal election, original sin, the imputation of Christ's righteousness, justification by faith alone, the necessity of special grace in conversion, the saint's perseverance in holiness unto eternal life. These doctrines are the principal basis and foundation on which the superstructure of our holy religion stands. These doctrines must therefore be opened, explained and defended from the sacred oracles, where they are abundantly asserted. God's sovereignty in the bestowment of his grace, the mediation, satisfaction and intercession of Christ, the only procuring cause of salvation, should be displayed with force and energy." Referring to Paul, he says: "We find a crucified Saviour and the doctrines of redemption almost universally the subjects of his preaching;—subjects sweet and agreeable!—the centre in which all the lines of divine truth meet."

In the conclusion, an address is made to the candidate, in which "all the affection and tender feelings of the father" are blended with the faithfulness and solemnity of the Christian bishop.

Mr. Strong was now introduced into an important field of labor, where, in accordance with the spirit of the age, he doubtless expected to spend the remainder of his days. At the period of his ordination, religion not only in Hartford, but in the country generally, was in a very low state. There were only fifteen male members in the church when he received the pastoral charge. During the previous and still continued agitations of the country, on account of our unsettled relations with Great Britain, and the many exciting and demoralizing influences which came in with the war, the minds of the people were engrossed with the cares of this life, and revivals of religion were comparatively rare. The standard of doctrine and discipline in the church, and of ministerial activity, had been greatly depressed. The spirit of French infidelity was growing rife, especially in the larger towns, and among the more influential classes; so that the religion of Christ and its ministers, were often the subject of open ridicule and contempt, even on the part of those who were regarded as being entitled to the first standing in society. Under these circumstances the office of a minister was a trying situation for a young man to assume. Mr. Strong, however, was not the man, even when young, to be baffled nor abashed by external difficulties of this nature; and, so far as his mental characteristics were concerned, he was fully competent to that part of the apostolic charge which directs, "Let no man despise thee." In this point of view, singular as the remark may seem, it is not without reason supposed, that his extraordinary native shrewdness and sarcastic wit, which enabled him infallibly to detect the drift of a sly assailant, and instantly to turn the missile, which was intended for himself, back whence it had been thrown, was a talent which, though often lamented by its possessor in subsequent life, was providentially turned to good account, in his intercourse with men at the commencement of his ministry; a period when, presuming upon the forbearance of Christian courtesy or modesty, many of the irreligious gloried in acting upon the specious maxim—"Ridicule is the test of truth."

Mr. Strong was not unfrequently attacked in public places by some of this class of persons, who, under the guise of a pleasant railery, sought to inflict a wound upon his feelings, and to sink him and his office in the dereliction of the thoughtless bystanders. They soon found, however, that it was always at their peril they attempted to get an advantage over him in this way. The writer in the *Christian Spectator*, before referred to, has remarked that "towards all who yielded him a suitable tribute of respect, he invariably manifested sufficient condescension and urbanity; giving due weight to their opinions and arguments, patiently listening to their inquiries, and making them entirely easy in his presence. But flies were never more easily brushed from a wall than the impertinent were rebuked and abashed by some sudden and confounding stroke of his wit; which he well knew how to charge with the keenest satire, and administer with unsparing effect."

Being led here to make the above allusions to this brilliant faculty of Dr. Strong, we may, perhaps, with more propriety than in any other place, add what seems to be further requisite, in order to do justice to a feature of so much prominence and interest in his social character. And here the writer last referred to will speak in substantial accordance with what we learn from his living acquaintances.

"Dr. Strong," he says, "had an uncommonly strong sense of the ludicrous, and of those relations between opposite ideas which constitute wit, and it was difficult for him to subdue his almost irresistible propensity to disburthen his prolific imagination of the ideas which, whether delicate

or grotesque, rushed upon him with the rapidity and vividness of lightning. In the social circle he was too often facetious and sometimes even jocose. After leading in prayer in presence of the Legislature of the State, or the municipal courts, and bringing tears from many an eye by the solemnity and fervor of his manner, it was well if, in his way out of the house, he did not, by some sally of wit, either ludicrous or severe, occasion a burst of laughter on every side. From indulging in such habits, he came to be regarded too much as a champion in contests for preëminence in retort and sarcasm. As it was seldom that he was not able to parry the thrusts of the most adroit in the art, and utterly to disarm his antagonist, the consciousness of his own superior powers, together with an undue fondness for such excitement, was a constant temptation to the indulgence of his ruling propensity—a temptation by which, *notwithstanding all his struggles against it*, he was too often overcome." What the writer next adds, we would make particularly emphatic. "It was well, however, that he completely mastered himself in the pulpit. Not only did nothing proceed from his lips in the house of God, calculated to excite a ludicrous thought, or to awaken a vain smile, but there was scarcely a minister of the day, whose whole manner in conducting the services of the sanctuary, was more deeply solemn and impressive. His printed sermons exhibit not the least semblance of the quality which has now been mentioned, *and which entered into the very texture of his mind.*"

It should be observed that a pleasant indulgence in wit and repartee, in the social intercourse of life, was a much more prevalent custom at that period than at the present. Men had more leisure for social intercourse, and took their relaxation from severer pursuits more in this way. When they dropped their pen or their books, or left their shops or offices, their minds were in a good measure free from that endless tissue of cares and perplexities which is fast making all, but the real triflers of the present generation, grave, silent and absent-minded even at their own firesides and their meals. Not a few of the most distinguished men, and among them many of the most distinguished clergymen of that day, were men of extraordinary wit and humor. In Hartford, particularly, it will be recollected that some of the first men which New England has produced, in literary and civil life, who were cotemporaries and familiar friends of Dr. Strong, were justly celebrated for the possession of this talent, and for the effectual use to which they applied it in satirizing the errors and follies of the times. These facts may with propriety be suggested here, as having a tendency to make it appear less inexplicable, that Dr. Strong, "*notwithstanding all his struggles against it*," which were many and sincere, should have exhibited in the intercourse of life so much of a quality "*which entered into the very texture of his mind.*"

But in the pulpit, as has been stated, and in all the appropriate services of religion, his associations and habits of thought were entirely of a different cast. He was "a preacher such as Paul." The almost unexampled pathos and solemnity of his prayers and preaching were, on the same principle with the Apostle's, the manifest effect of a divine presence and of a distinct and sublime apprehension of eternal realities. The same characteristic of piety has been often remarked, in other cases, to have accompanied the possession of the native talent of wit, especially where grace has abounded as in the heart of this eminent man of God. The phenomenon, if duly noticed, might suggest an interesting clew to mental and moral inquiry; in the result of which it might possibly come to be seen, that the combination is neither so unnatural, nor, on the whole, so infelicitous, as has generally been supposed.

The period of Dr. Strong's ministry may be naturally divided into two great eras; having respect, in this distinction, to the different circumstances of the church, and the different degrees of success which appeared to crown his efforts. Dr. Hawes, in his Centennial Discourse, speaking of his venerable predecessor, says: "The former part of his ministry was not distinguished by any special tokens of success. It was a period of war and of great political excitement; and, though he did not neglect the proper duties of his office, it is but saying what he afterwards often confessed and lamented, that his mind was too much drawn off from his ministerial work by engagement in other pursuits. But during the last twenty years of his life he labored with great fidelity and diligence, and with most marked success. His preaching became more solemn and impressive, and was aimed more directly at the heart and conscience. The Holy Spirit set his seal to his labors, and great was the success which crowned the latter half of his ministry."

Mr. Strong was settled upon a stipulated salary of one hundred and thirty pounds. From this sum, however, there were so many subtractions and losses in consequence of the depreciations of the currency of the country, that it was often of little value, for the time being, as a means of support. At one time, we are informed, by a venerable citizen who took part in the transactions of that day, the society, on reckoning up the arrearages which had accrued in this way, found that they would be indebted to their minister to the amount of six hundred pounds, or that he had failed, by such a deficiency as this, of receiving the full value of his compensation. This being a subject of conversation in the society's meeting, there was considerable shrinking from the obligation to make good the loss. The validity of the minister's claim, by many seemed to be called in question. At this juncture, the Hon. Chief Justice Ellsworth, who was at that time a member of the congregation, interposed with a decision such as justice, in his view, demanded, and which was sufficient to put the question at rest. "Gentlemen," said he, "we owe this money honestly, and we must not refuse to pay it." The judge having convinced the meeting of the soundness of the position he had taken, no further objections were heard, and arrangements were made to meet the pecuniary responsibility.

The insufficiency and uncertainty of his support during the early part of his ministry, was undoubtedly the inducement which led Mr. Strong to invest some funds, which came into his possession from the property of his father, in a mercantile establishment in Hartford. This step he had occasion afterwards to regret, not only because it proved disastrous in a few years in its pecuniary results, the concern being involved in bankruptcy, but because it was in some degree a hindrance to his ministerial success. The solicitude connected with it necessarily occupied his mind to some extent; and, what was more probable, it gave a public impression unfavorable to the singleness of his purpose as a laborer in the vineyard of his Master. The force of these considerations he felt deeply himself in after days, when, through the blessing of God upon his accumulated domestic afflictions, among which the loss of his property was indeed but one of the lightest, he was brought to look upon himself as crucified to the world and the world to him.

In the course of a few years after his settlement, Mr. Strong was called to part with a first and a second wife by death. His first wife, to whom he was united November 20, 1777, was the eldest daughter of Dr. Solomon Smith, a respectable apothecary in Hartford. With her he lived not quite

seven years. She died October 17, 1784, leaving two children, Anna, afterwards the wife, and now the widow of the Rev. David Perry, late of Sharon, Ct., and Nathan, who resided in Hartford as a physician, until his death, on the second of August, 1837. Mr. Strong was married a second time, on the 20th of June, 1787, to Anna M'Curdy, of Lyme, Ct., whose family connections were of the highest respectability. Of her he was bereaved on the 22d of March, 1789, and left with an infant son, whom he named John M'Curdy. During the remainder of his life, a period of nearly twenty-seven years, he lived a widower.

The effect of these repeated strokes of bereavement, together with other secular reverses, was so marked in the experience of Mr. Strong, in quickening his spiritual affections, and in leading him to make a more entire and ardent consecration of his noble powers to the duties of his sacred calling, that some were even led to infer that this was in reality the era of his conversion to God. This impression, we believe, went abroad to some extent; and it is not unlikely that it might have received a measure of confirmation from the manner in which Dr. Strong, through life, was accustomed to deplore the comparative unfruitfulness of his early ministry. It is by no means correct, however, to suppose that he ever entertained the view of his own experience, to which we have above referred. It is particularly recollected by some of his most intimate acquaintances, who still survive, that he has repeatedly said that, if he was ever a renewed person, it was previous to his entering the ministry.

There is one department of the labors and usefulness of Mr. Strong, during this period of his public life, of which we are now speaking, which demands our notice before passing to the events of his subsequent history.

"Dr. Strong," says Mr. Robbins, "warmly espoused the American cause in the arduous struggle between the Colonies and Great Britain, which came on in the early part of his ministry. Some of the best political essays published in this State during that eventful period, were from his pen. For a part of the time he was employed as a chaplain in the army."

The period in which Dr. Strong* lived, was rendered illustrious in Connecticut by the appearance of a constellation of lights of the first magnitude in the sphere of mind. The spirit which led to the American Revolution, and the energy, both in counsel and in action, demanded by that memorable crisis, (including in this era of the Republic not the war alone but also the establishment of the Federal Government,) were fitted to nourish and to bring out the strongest intellectual powers, and the noblest style of character, in those to whom the country looked up as men of commanding influence. The leading politicians of that day were men of a superior order. And all our citizens, especially those in public stations, whatever might be their particular profession, participated deeply in the general solicitude and excitement. Thus the benefits of a common intercourse, on a free and liberal scale, were extended promiscuously among all those who were in any degree qualified for it, by a similarity of genius and education. Many of the master spirits of that period, therefore, seemed to possess a sort of universal talent. They were allotted to their respective spheres of service, whether in the church or state, more by what they regarded as the providential calls of duty, than by their individual peculiarities. There were not a few among the distinguished civilians and jurists of Connecticut in those days, who wanted little else but a formal

* He received the honorary degree of Doctor in Divinity from the College of New Jersey in the year 1801.

investment with the sacerdotal functions, to have made them divines of the first rank; and many of the clergy, on the other hand, were not only ardent patriots in their spirit and influence, but also profound and high-minded statesmen in the scope of their views and reasonings on those matters of national moment about which every one was constrained to speak. Intimately associated as Dr. Strong was, in Hartford, with such men as Ellsworth, Trumbull, Goodrich and Hopkins, his talents were very naturally directed to some extent into this important channel. The several series of anonymous papers, which he sent to the press, were justly estimated to have exerted an extensive and salutary influence. This is especially true of one, running through some twenty numbers, which was published while the proposal for the adoption of the Federal Constitution was before the people of the United States; and which was designed to lead them to harmony of sentiment and action in regard to that critical and important measure. But the limits of this brief sketch forbid the introduction of many particulars in this place.

We have spoken of the times in which Dr. Strong came into public life, as exerting an influence in the production of much eminent talent in the civil community. The same tendency was perhaps scarcely less noticeable in the ecclesiastical community. The trying emergency of the American churches during much of that eventful period; the perils to which the cause of religion was exposed at one time from the influx of infidelity and licentiousness, and at another from speculative error and blind enthusiasm; and finally the powerful action into which the practical principles of Christianity were called by the shedding down of the Spirit of God; were circumstances which conspired to call out the energies of talent and piety in the ministry in an extraordinary degree. The names of the venerable men whom God raised up for this important crisis, and whom his Spirit endued and blessed in so remarkable a manner, are associated in every mind with the religious history of that period; and they will for ever remain enrolled as the heroic and powerful leaders in those conflicts and victories for the cause of truth and godliness, which prepared the way for the present comparative purity, prosperity and activity of the churches in this land. Such men were Smalley, Edwards the younger, Bellamy, Backus, Dwight and Strong. The relative place and influence which Dr. Strong held among this band of worthies, will be made sufficiently manifest, as we proceed to give some further extracts from the notices of his life and character in the *Christian Spectator*, selected with a view to illustrate the spirit and power of his ministry during the last twenty years of its continuance, and to exhibit his connection with some of the most important Christian enterprises of the day.

"It is confidently believed," says this writer, "that no person did more than Dr. Strong to prepare the way for the glorious revival which began to overspread a large portion of Connecticut, and some parts of Massachusetts, just before the close of the last century. His preaching was peculiarly fitted to make every hearer feel that religion is a personal and vital concern, and that no valid excuse can be given for the neglect of it a single moment. Laying aside the scholastic mode of sermonizing, which still prevailed to some extent, and adopting the most simple mode of discussion, as well as a style terse, direct and perspicuous, he made his auditors feel that theology, if it was not a new science, was at least invested with new charms, by being exhibited in an easy and intelligible manner.

"He particularly excelled in stating and proving the entire moral corruption of man, and in exhibiting the helplessness of the sinner in a

light peculiarly calculated to convince him that all his inability is voluntary, and therefore is the essence of all his guilt in the sight of God. These, and the topics which are naturally connected with them, are ably discussed in a volume of sermons which he published in the year 1798.—In the year 1800, Dr. Strong issued a second volume of sermons, not less strikingly adapted to the state of things in the revival then existing, than was the former volume to the office of preparing the way for that extensive work of grace.

“Soon after the commencement of the new religious era, Dr. Strong, well aware of the power of sacred poetry, as a means of spiritual instruction and impression, projected a work which was published in 1799, with the title of ‘Hartford Selection of Hymns.’ In preparing this compilation, he was assisted by Rev. Messrs. Steward and Flint. Several of the hymns were of his own composition, among which is the hundred and seventieth, one of the most interesting metrical compositions of the kind in our language. The book contains, indeed, a few indifferent pieces, but as a whole, is one of high excellence.

“We are now,” this writer continues, “to speak of one of the earliest religious periodicals which existed in the western world, and which, aiming at the same benevolent object as the volume of hymns, was established in July, 1800. We refer to the Connecticut Evangelical Magazine. The plan of this work originated with Dr. Strong, and the labor of conducting it devolved chiefly on him. It was continued fifteen years, and amounted to as many volumes. During the first seven years, some ten or twelve of the principal divines in different parts of the State, were associated with him in the editorial department; but the duty of procuring and revising the matter to be inserted was performed principally by himself. After the commencement of the new series, which, though the same work still, was called the Connecticut Evangelical Magazine and Religious Intelligencer, and extended to eight volumes, he had no regular editorial assistance, except during the last three years.—In speaking of the Connecticut Evangelical Magazine, we scarcely know which to admire most, the felicity of its plan, or the ability displayed in its execution. Its effects upon the community were great and salutary. It embraced much doctrinal discussion, a great variety of experimental and practical divinity, general religious intelligence, and interesting narratives of the numerous revivals which for several years continued to bless the churches.”

The second series of the Magazine was commenced by Dr. Strong on his own pecuniary responsibility. After the completion of the second volume, this responsibility was assumed by the publishers, and the editor received a stated salary for his services. No religious periodical was ever better sustained than this. Dr. Strong possessed eminent qualifications for the management of such a work. We are informed by one who had better opportunities to know the fact than perhaps any other beside the editor himself, that probably more than one half of the original matter with which its pages were so ably and judiciously supplied, was from the pen of Dr. Strong. Bold and original in his style of thought and expression, he had, at the same time, great versatility and fruitfulness of invention, which enabled him to sustain an extraordinary interest in the minds of his readers. “We know not,” says the writer just quoted, “that any subsequent religious periodical has enjoyed more ample patronage. The number of copies printed during the first five years, averaged 3,730 annually. All the net proceeds of the Magazine were sacredly devoted to the permanent fund of the Connecticut Missionary Society. The total avails paid over to the

Society amounted to 11,520 dollars.—The Magazine embraces more matter and more discussion adapted to the mass of the people, than almost any other similar publication of later date. None more abounds in plain disquisition; in grave and profitable anecdote; in a simple narration of interesting facts; or in an unstudied, easy, we had almost said graceful development of Christian experience. We have seen none preserved with more care, or more frequently re-perused with unabated relish, especially by those past the middle period of life, than the excellent magazine which owed its existence, and no small part of its uncommon excellence, to the ingenuity, industry and benevolence of Dr. Strong.”

Another, and a highly important branch of Dr. Strong’s public usefulness is to be contemplated in the agency he had in the institution, support and management of the Connecticut Missionary Society, which was formed in the year 1798, and had for its object the sending of missionaries to the destitute settlements at the north and west. We have no room to speak of this noble enterprise as it deserves, nor to do justice to the part which Dr. Strong performed in subservience to its objects. We have already seen how largely it was indebted to a correlative branch of his efforts, for its pecuniary support. “This institution,” says the Christian Spectator, “if it be dated from the incipient but not altogether inefficient stage of its being, has the honor to be the oldest missionary society in the land. And although Dr. Strong’s ‘record is on high,’ yet to what multitudes in the north, west and south, must his name be as ointment poured forth, when they duly consider the diversified blessing which heaven has shed on half the American States, by means of a society of which he was the parent; and which, while he lived, was more indebted to him than to any other man for the watchfulness and care, the wisdom and energy, with which its important concerns were managed.”

Besides the two volumes of sermons which have been referred to above, Dr. Strong, in 1796, gave to the public another elaborate work, which is entitled “*The Doctrine of Eternal Misery reconcilable with the Infinite Benevolence of God.*” This was called forth by a posthumous publication, from the pen of the Rev. Dr. Huntington of Coventry, Ct. But it was much more than an answer to that book. It amounts almost to a complete discussion and defence of the great points of Calvinistic theology. It holds a rank among the ablest and best productions of the age, in the department of polemic divinity.

Many of Dr. Strong’s occasional sermons, at different periods of his ministry, were given to the public. The following is an imperfect list. “The Reasons and Design of Public Punishments; a Discourse delivered at the execution of Moses Dunbar, who was condemned for high treason against the State of Connecticut, and executed March 17, 1777.” “A Sermon preached in Hartford, June 10, 1797, at the execution of Richard Doane, convicted of the murder of Daniel M’Iver.” “A Fast Sermon, April 6, 1798.” “Political Instruction from the Prophecies of God’s Word; a Sermon preached on the State Thanksgiving, November 29, 1798.” “A Discourse delivered on Friday, December 27, 1799, the day set apart by the citizens of Hartford to lament before God the death of Gen. George Washington.” “A Thanksgiving Sermon, delivered November 27, 1800.” “A Sermon, delivered at Hartford, January 6, 1807, at the Funeral of the Rev. James Cogswell, D. D.” “A Sermon, delivered at the Consecration of the New Brick Church in Hartford, December 3, 1807.”* “The

* This large and beautiful edifice is now occupied by the First Society, under the pastoral charge of the successor of Dr. Strong, the Rev. Joel Hawes, D. D.

Character of a virtuous and good Woman; a Sermon, delivered before the Female Beneficent Society in Hartford, October 4, 1809." "The Mutability of Human Life; a Sermon, preached March 10, 1811." "A Fast Sermon, July 23, 1812." "A Sermon on the use of Time, delivered January 10, 1813." "A Sermon, delivered in Hartford, at the Funeral of the Hon. Chauncey Goodrich, Lieutenant Governor of the State of Connecticut, who died August 18, 1815." "A Sermon, delivered January 7, 1816."

Although the talents of Dr. Strong could, by no means, be limited to the duties of a parochial minister, yet the measure of his diligence, devotedness and success in that important sphere, as filled by him for the last twenty years of his life, has seldom been surpassed. His ministry during that period was preëminently blessed. The following testimony, given by Mr. Robbins at the time of his death, is doubtless just.

"Though called to various and important duties as a minister of Christ, his first labors and cares were always devoted to the people of his charge. Seldom absent from home, he was ever anxious that no opportunity for their religious instruction and improvement should be lost. Their union and prosperity was the object of his unceasing care, whilst he carefully watched every event that might tend to their disadvantage. In return for his cares he had the happiness to receive from them the testimony of a grateful affection in a faithful observance of the means of grace, in liberal attention to all objects of charity which he recommended to their regard, and in a cheerful readiness to do all for him which he thought proper at any time to desire.

"His labors among his people were eminently blessed by the Holy Spirit of God. The greatest revival under his ministry was in the year 1799, in which a large number were made the hopeful subjects of divine grace, the most of whom made a public profession of religion. Previous to that time there had been frequent instances of individual subjects of divine grace, but no general attention among his people;—a period in which our country generally was remarkably destitute of revivals of religion. In 1808, and again in 1813, this people were favored with a signal work of the grace of God. In these revivals the pastor labored with great fervor and assiduity; his house was always open for religious meetings, his study was accessible to all who wished to converse on divine things; and those alone who enjoyed the privilege, can tell of the skill, the prudence, the affection with which he enlightened, guided and comforted the inquiring in the way to Christ. His public labors were very great. He often preached four or five times in a week. There is little danger of saying that for four years past, he has preached more than any other settled minister in the State. At the commencement of the last awakening, when he had become persuaded that the work of God was begun, his mind was so agitated with anxiety, hope, joy and fear, that, for a fortnight, as he has said, he did not have an hour of uninterrupted sleep at a time."

The interest which Dr. Strong felt in the scenes of a revival of religion was most lively and intense; and it continued increasing to the day of his death. It may be said without exaggeration, and without disparagement to any of the other great and useful objects which he accomplished, that he had labored unceasingly for the promotion of pure, evangelical revivals of religion, by the practical aim with which in his preaching, he directed all the arrows of divine truth, and by the character and influence which he gave to the *Evangelical Magazine*, as a great and leading object of his ministry. The revival in Hartford which commenced in 1813, continued steadily for two

years ; and the spirit of it never departed from Dr. Strong. He could never speak of the withdrawal of the Spirit of God from his people, after that season of gracious visitation, without being in a measure overcome by the strength of his emotions. That remarkable insight into the characters and motives of men, which was one of the most striking qualities of his mind, and which served him for so many valuable purposes through life, fitted him to be eminently skillful, in dealing with individuals who were the subjects of awakening and conviction. He had a wonderful knowledge of the human heart, especially under the operation of divine truth, and could discriminate cases with great precision. His comprehension of the great points of evangelical doctrine was clear and scriptural in a high degree, and he considered his principal business as an ambassador of Christ to sinners, to consist in making an earnest application of these great truths to the heart and conscience. "As a divine," says Mr. Robbins, "he possessed an almost intuitive knowledge of the Christian system."—"He usually contemplated the truths of revelation as a great scheme of divine wisdom and mercy, designed for the honor of God and the restoration of lost man to holy blessedness. As a writer of sermons he was not exceeded by any preacher in this country. He had the talent, which very few have ever possessed, of treating all gospel truths in a practical manner ; exhibiting the danger of the wicked, the necessity of holy obedience, and the safety of righteousness. The leading truths in his preaching were the purity and perpetual obligation of the divine law ; the equal necessity of the atonement of Christ and the sanctification of the divine Spirit ; the unalterable connection between holiness and happiness, sin and misery ; and the uniform presence of God as a witness of all human conduct. It may be said with safety, that no sermons ever preached in this country are better adapted to be read in religious meetings than his."

Powerful and impressive as were the written sermons of Dr. Strong, they were equalled and often surpassed by the simple, soul-stirring eloquence of his more familiar exercises in the conference room. Here he always spoke extemporaneously, with the aid of a few memoranda ; but with the same lucid order of thought, and unstudied precision and force of expression, as when he had a written discourse before him. As a writer, indeed, so far as style is concerned, his habits were in a great measure extemporaneous. "He usually wrote rapidly," we are told, "and never reviewed what he had written." Hence his language was never labored, nor his periods polished. These were qualities on which he bestowed little attention.

Dr. Strong was remarkable for bringing his hearers into the immediate presence of God. This is emphatically referred to by Mr. Robbins, in the foregoing extract. It was not by rhetorical artifice, however, but by unconscious moral effect ; resulting from sympathy on their part with his own solemn and deep emotions, and from the leading aspect in which he loved to present all the truths of the Bible, as distinctly related to the counsel and government of the Most High. Whoever reads the sermons of Dr. Strong, or the Connecticut Evangelical Magazine, will perceive how much he relied on a clear exhibition of the wisdom, righteousness, mercy and sovereignty of God, for the increase and the purity of revivals of religion. Says a clergyman, who speaks of his acquaintance with Dr. Strong from the year 1800 until the time of his death as being "most constant and intimate,"—"The substance and strength of Strong's theology were the sovereignty, holiness and mercy of Jehovah in the purpose and work of redemption ; the total native and desperate depravity and sinfulness, the

vileness, folly and guilt of man, with his absolute and universal dependence upon God for justification and sanctification. In his sermon, which is entitled *The gospel of Christ is not after man*, he says: "Whoever understands the gospel scheme of salvation must be sensible that it stands wholly upon divine sovereignty. God is represented as acting sovereignly in determining that any shall be saved, in appointing to whom he will extend his grace, in the manner and time when this shall be done, and in defining the obligation of creatures and the duties they shall perform. Submission to absolute sovereignty, even in God himself, is the last thing which a sinful heart yields."* The same writer observes: "I believe I may declare with truth and safety, that I have known of no revivals in any age or part of the world, that were more rational and scriptural in their commencement, more powerful and glorious in their progress, and more permanent and beneficial in their effects, than those by which Hartford was so greatly blessed under the ministry of Dr. Strong."

Thus "powerful, through God" were the weapons of divine truth in the hands of this veteran soldier of the cross; and thus rich and precious were the blessings conferred on the people of his charge through his instrumentality. The church at the time of his death had become the largest in the State, embracing about four hundred communicants.

We have not space to dwell upon the personal, social and domestic traits in the character of Dr. Strong. Mr. Robbins says: "This great man possessed a mind eminently susceptible of the endearments of domestic life. As a son, a brother, a husband, a parent, he was tender and affectionate, and faithfully attentive to the duties arising from these relations. By his relatives and domestics he was no less beloved than respected."

In person he was tall and straight, with a well proportioned and commanding figure. His countenance, which was finely expressive, is considered as well represented in the family portrait, from which the engraving accompanying this memoir, has been taken.

It pleased God, about ten years before his death, to send upon Dr. Strong another severe and sudden stroke of domestic affliction. His youngest son, and only child by his second marriage, had been graduated at Yale College, at the commencement in 1806, with high reputation as a scholar, and had just entered upon the study of law with his uncle, Lieutenant Governor Goodrich; when in crossing the ferry on his return to the city from a short absence, he was thrown into the river by the restiveness of his horse, and drowned.† By this dispensation, which excited general grief, the father's "heart was almost broke;" and, although he experienced great support from his habitual confidence in the divine goodness, the affliction seemed ever afterwards to exert a chastening and subduing influence upon his spirits.

A number of months previous to his death, Dr. Strong experienced a severe attack of disease, by which he was brought to the verge of the eternal world. This, especially, was his own view of the case. He fully expected that he should never return to his labors on earth. But the event was otherwise ordered. He recovered his strength and was enabled to preach as usual for a considerable time. It was observed, however, that his face was

* Centennial Sermon on the revival of religion A. D. 1740. Inscribed to the memory of Rev. Nathan Strong, D. D. By Rev. Thomas Williams.

† This event occurred during twilight. The body was soon found, but life was extinct, and the means used for restoration were unavailing. Between the hours of 10 and 11, the body was borne to the house of the bereaved parent, accompanied by a great collection of sympathizing citizens. Instead of being overwhelmed by his private grief, he came to the door and addressed the assembled multitude in a speech of such power and pathos that it produced a salutary and lasting impression upon the hearers.

henceforward set towards his heavenly home. The strain of his preaching indicated that his thoughts, both in respect to himself and his people, were deeply engrossed with the scenes of the future world, and with the solemn relations of this life to eternity. He would often read the hymn beginning with the following stanza :

“On Jordan’s rugged banks I stand,
And cast a wishful eye
To Canaan’s fair and happy land,
Where my possessious lie.”

The last hymn which he gave out to be sung by the choir, was that beautiful one by Dr. Watts,

“There is a land of pure delight,
Where saints immortal reign,” &c.

The sentiment was in accordance with the subjects of his discourses through the day. The coincidence between the tenor of these two last sermons of Dr. Strong, and the event of his decease, which, although he was then in tolerable health, took place after but one Sabbath had intervened, was thought so interesting, that his successor, a few years afterwards, procured their publication, with a statement of the circumstance, in the *Christian Spectator*. They are contained in the numbers for July, 1824, and February, 1825. One is founded on Hebrews ix. 27,—*It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment,*—and sets forth in a tender and solemn manner the great subjects of anxiety which will crowd upon the mind of an individual in the hour of death. The other discourse is from the words of Paul, *Philippians i. 23, 24,—For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. It was confined to the consideration of those views of the gospel which enable the Christian “to triumph over death and desire to depart.”* The conclusion is as follows :

“The Christian triumphing over death, and desiring to depart, exhibits a phenomenon the ungodly cannot solve; for they never felt it, nor the cause by which it is produced. Unassisted reason cannot explain it, nor can philosophy fortify the soul against its terrors. Where reason and philosophy fail, love and faith prevail, enabling the dying saint to say : *For me to die is gain; I have a desire to depart that I may be with Christ.*

“Ye who trust in any other defence against the fear of death, will find yourselves overwhelmed with awful apprehensions by the solemn event of its approach.

“Ye who believe, still feeling yourselves partially under its bondage; pray for increase of faith and love. As these grow in strength, you will be enabled to tread the world under your feet, and feel yourselves joyfully drawn into the presence of Christ, your Redeemer and God. Amen.”

Such was the impression upon the congregation, from the spirit and manner of Dr. Strong in the delivery of these two discourses, that some, even at the time, felt an indefinable apprehension that they were listening to the last address from the lips of their beloved and venerated pastor.

The last sickness of Dr. Strong was short and painful; but during his conflict with mortality, he was preserved in the clear exercise of his intellectual faculties, and was comforted in the near prospect of death by “the testimonies of his Saviour’s love.” When speaking, in conversation

with a friend, of the little which he knew, or could know while in the present state, of the exact nature of future scenes, he added in a manner perfectly characteristic of his exalted piety: "*But I trust I am going where God is; and that is all I desire!*"

This blessed consummation of his prayers and hopes he realized on the 25th day of December, Anno Domini 1816; being in the sixty-ninth year of his age and the forty-third of his ministry.—It was a period rendered mournfully memorable by the almost cotemporaneous departure of three of the most distinguished lights of the American church. Dr. Strong was the first. Dr. Azel Backus, President of Hamilton College, died on the evening of the next day; and President Dwight, of Yale College, on the 11th of January following.

A numerous collection of the clergy and a great concourse of people attended the funeral of Dr. Strong, "attesting by their solemn deportment their great respect for the deceased." The sermon on the occasion was preached by Rev. Dr. Perkins of West Hartford, and was afterwards published. It contains a brief but just estimate of the talents and character of Dr. Strong.

The people so long and so richly blessed in the ministry of this eminent servant of Christ, in testimony of their esteem, caused to be erected over his grave an expensive and beautiful monument, in the form of a sarcophagus, which bears on one of its sides the following inscription:

BENEATH THIS MONUMENT ARE DEPOSITED THE REMAINS OF THE

REV. NATHAN STRONG, D. D.

PASTOR OF THE CHURCH IN THE FIRST ECCLESIASTICAL SOCIETY IN HARTFORD.

Endowed with rare talents and eminent for learning and eloquence, he zealously devoted himself to the cause of religion; and after many years of faithful services, approved and blessed by the Holy Spirit, he fell asleep in Jesus, deeply lamented by his friends, the people of his charge, and the church of Christ.

Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, for they rest from their labors.
