

deliverance: and his prayer that night was a song.'

He conducted at one stage a great mission of evangelization to the Syrian Christians of India. Here is a picture:

'The meetings were always an amazement. Besides the general meetings, there were separate gatherings for leaders; and women's meetings were arranged for other members of the party—curious women's meetings they appeared at first, for the mass of a thousand to fifteen hundred women was invariably fringed by a wide border of men—five thousand was the count one day.'

'To this audience thus prepared the speaker would come punctual to the second, for the evening

meetings always began in time. Quietly he would work his way through the packed masses to the wide, low platform; and then there would be a gradual hush, passing down from the platform to the far-out edge of the crowd while he knelt down, and once more stretched out his hands to the Unseen, and, as it seemed, received gifts for men. Then the address, broken by the interpretation sometimes twice or three times repeated by interpreters stationed at intervals through the great throng, and even so unspoiled—how describe it? Sometimes it was like hearing waters fall from high places, pure waters of refreshment; sometimes the eager sentences following hard the one upon the other were like leaping flames.'

## The Bookshelf by the Fire.

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### II.

#### Richard Baxter's Autobiography.

BOSWELL tells us that he once asked Johnson what works of Richard Baxter's he should read. 'Read any of them,' said Johnson; 'they are all good.' Johnson's appreciation of Baxter was intelligent and sincere, and it is the more noteworthy because of his general dislike of everything Puritan. Yet it may well be doubted if either he or any other son of man could speak with knowledge of 'all' Baxter's works. They number, it is said, no less than a hundred and sixty-eight separate publications; and though many of them, of course, were only sermons or pamphlets, others were of prodigious bulk. Altogether, it has been calculated, his writings would fill sixty octavo volumes of some thirty to forty thousand closely printed pages. When Judge Jeffreys sneered at Baxter as having written 'books enough to load a cart,' he was for once in a way not far from the truth. 'No more diligent student,' says the writer of the article on Baxter in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 'ever shut himself up with his books.' He had no amanuensis to whom he could dictate, he hardly knew what good health meant, yet, thanks to his indomitable industry and zeal, he became 'the creator of our

popular Christian literature,'<sup>1</sup> and the most voluminous theological writer in our language.

It is, however, but the tiniest fraction of the results of these vast labours which retains for us either interest or value. The rest have long ago—to borrow Mr. Hallam's phrase—ceased to belong to men, and have become the property of moths. When Dr. Grosart says that 'there never has been a day since 1649 that something by him was not in print,' he is probably right; but when he adds, 'his works have still a matchless circulation among the English-speaking race,'<sup>2</sup> one wonders if there is a bookseller in the land who would endorse his judgment. With one or two exceptions, such as *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*,<sup>3</sup> *A Call to the Un-*

<sup>1</sup> The phrase is Dr. Grosart's.

<sup>2</sup> In his article in *The Dictionary of National Biography*.

<sup>3</sup> Of this the most famous and, save one, the earliest of Baxter's works, there is an admirable edition (abridged) published by the Religious Tract Society. May I take the opportunity to quote Dr. Stalker's touching tribute: 'The young reader, across whose heart the shadows of disappointment have never yet fallen, opens the book and wonders where its charm can lie. But those who labour and are heavy laden, who have accompanied their dearest to the gates of

converted, and *The Reformed Pastor*, Baxter's works have vanished even from that last refuge of the poor author, the shelves and catalogues of the second-hand dealer. It is idle to lament or to protest. Every age must write its own books, and authors, like other men, must be content, when they have served their own generation, to fall on sleep. Nevertheless, if it be not already too late, there is at least one other book of Baxter's besides those which have been named that one would fain save from the dark waters of oblivion—I mean his *Autobiography*.

## I.

The full title of the book is as follows: *Reliquiæ Baxterianæ; or, Mr. Richard Baxter's Narrative of the Most Memorable Passages of his Life and Times*, faithfully published from his own original manuscript by Matthew Sylvester. It consists of three parts and an appendix, and was composed at various periods during the years following the Restoration and the close of Baxter's ministry in Kidderminster;<sup>1</sup> thus—

Part I., 'written for the most part in 1664.'

Part II., 'written in 1665.'

Part III., 'written for the most part in the year 1670; to which are subjoined additions of the years 1675, 1676, 1677, 1678, etc.'

The Appendix, consisting of letters and other documents.

The book was first published in a large folio volume of some eight hundred pages in 1696, five years after Baxter's death. Unfortunately it has never been reprinted. Calamy published an abridgement of it in 1702; Dr. Wordsworth an extract in the fifth volume of his *Ecclesiastical Biography* in 1810; S. T. Coleridge,

the unknown country and said the bitter farewell, those who have buried the impossible ambitions, and hopeless hopes of youth, those who have found out how difficult it is to know the most momentous things and how trivial are the things we know, those who have long endured the loathsome insistence of temptation and besetting sin—all these feel in the book the touch of a brother's hand and the throb of a heart which understands them. So long as the world is full of tears, and men still look for the star of hope to rise above it, this book may perhaps endure' (*The Evangelical Succession* lectures, second series).

<sup>1</sup> It may be convenient to give the chief dates of Baxter's career: born, 1615; pastor of Kidderminster (with a brief interval during the Civil War), 1641–1660; farewell to the Church of England, 1662; trial before Judge Jeffreys, 1685; death, 1691.

in his *Notes on English Divines*, a considerable number of very short passages together with his own comments, in 1853; and more recently (1910) the Bishop of Chester (Dr. Jayne) has reprinted the closing pages of Part I., together with an introduction and notes, and the essay on Baxter by Sir James Stephen, under the title of *Richard Baxter's Self-Review*.<sup>2</sup> Unless, therefore, the reader has access to the rare and costly folio of 1696, he must meanwhile content himself as best he can with one or other of these fragmentary reprints. This is very greatly to be regretted, and it is no small reproach to English scholarship that a document of such priceless worth to the student of the seventeenth century still remains so inaccessible to the general reader. For, neglected as the book has been, it is no exaggeration to say that it is much the most permanently valuable of all the writings which we owe to Baxter's busy pen. His religious works, for the most part, speak to us in a language which is no longer ours, and have gone the way of the discarded theological moulds in which of necessity they were cast. To the *Reliquiæ* belongs the undying interest of every genuine transcript of a human life. Written throughout with absolute sincerity and truthfulness—'I could almost as soon doubt the Gospel verity,' said Coleridge, 'as his veracity'<sup>3</sup>—Baxter's *Autobiography* can be forgotten only when Englishmen have ceased to care about one of the most fruitful and formative periods of their national history.

## II.

Having said so much of the *Autobiography* as a whole, I shall limit myself, in what follows, to the brief excerpt to be found in the Bishop of Chester's volume already referred to. I do this partly because the excerpt, brief as it is, is much the most noteworthy section of the whole; partly because the Bishop's volume is within every one's reach, and also because the *Reliquiæ*, even if it were accessible, in its original form, is too big and heavy for our 'Bookshelf by the Fire.' But before going further, let us pause a moment longer to

<sup>2</sup> Longmans.

<sup>3</sup> *Notes on English Divines*, vol. ii. p. 68. Cp. Professor Dowden's judgment: 'Baxter's *Autobiography*,' he says, 'has one quality which is among the rarest in books of its kind, and which gives it a value almost unique—it is written with absolute sincerity' (*Puritan and Anglican*, p. 215).

note three striking tributes to this portion of Baxter's narrative.<sup>1</sup>

In the third of the lectures delivered in 1857 by Dean Stanley on the Study of Ecclesiastical History, which now form the introduction to his well-known *History of the Eastern Church*, he has the following: 'Take that admirable summary of mature Christian experience, which ought to be in the hands of every student of Ecclesiastical History—one might well add of every student of theology, of every English minister of religion—which is contained in Baxter's review of his own narrative of his life and times. See how he there corrects the narrowness, the sectarianism, the dogmatism of his youth, by the comprehensive wisdom acquired in long years of persecution of labour and devotion.' In 1875, when he unveiled Baxter's statue at Kidderminster, the Dean told the public how his attention was first drawn to Baxter's words: 'It is now many years ago since, on one of the few occasions when I had the pleasure of meeting the late Sir James Stephen, he recommended me, with his own peculiar solemnity, to read the last twenty-four pages of the first part of Baxter's *Narrative of his Own Life*. "Lose not a day in reading it," he said; "you will never repent it." That very night I followed his advice, and I have ever since publicly and privately advised every theological student to do the same.'<sup>2</sup>

From Stanley let us turn to Sir James Stephen himself. Writing of Baxter's Autobiography in the essay referred to above, he says: 'Towards the close of the first book occurs the passage which though often republished and familiar to most students of English literature,<sup>3</sup> must yet be noticed as the most impressive record in our own language, if not in any tongue, of the gradual ripening of a powerful mind under the culture of incessant study, wide experience, and anxious self-observation.'

My third quotation is from Professor Dowden. After speaking of Jeremy Taylor's *Eirenicon*—'an Eirenicon which came from the victorious side, from the party in power, and in the hour of

triumph'<sup>4</sup>—he goes on to say that a still more remarkable and beautiful utterance of that spirit which is peaceable and pure came from the party that suffered persecution; and it is to be found in those 'memorable pages' in which Baxter tells us of the changes that came over his mind and temper and opinions with advancing years. 'When these pages were written, the close of Baxter's life was still remote, and he had much work as a Christian teacher, and a great Englishman, still to do. But he had already learnt the deepest lessons of life, and was ready to depart. "Ripeness," in Hamlet's phrase, "is all."<sup>4</sup>

### III.

It is time now to open the book itself. And no one, I think, on whichever side his sympathies may lie in the great struggle of the seventeenth century, can read in it long without feeling the strange attraction of the brave, honest, kindly nature which it everywhere reveals. Baxter was a Puritan, and Puritanism is still for many only another name for harsh censoriousness and spiritual pride; yet what could be more moving in its tenderness and humility than this: 'To have sinned while I preached and wrote against sin, and had such abundant and great obligations from God, and made so many promises against it, doth lay me very low: not so much in fear of hell, as in great displeasure against myself, and such self-abhorrence as would cause revenge upon myself, were it not forbidden. When God forgiveth me I cannot forgive myself; especially for any rash words or deeds, by which I have seemed injurious and less tender and kind, than I should have been to my near and dear relations, whose love abundantly obliged me. When such are dead, though we never differed in points of interest, on any great matter, every sour or cross provoking word which I gave them, maketh me almost unreconcilable to myself.' To others, again, Puritanism stands for a morbid self-concern, the finger always on the pulse, the eye always turned inward; yet here is Baxter preaching the gospel of 'healthy-mindedness' in a fashion that might have satisfied William James himself: 'I was once wont to meditate most on my own heart, and to dwell all at home, and look little higher: I was still poring either on my sins or wants, or examining my sincerity; but now, though I am greatly convinced

<sup>1</sup> In the paragraphs which immediately follow, the reference in each case is to that portion of the Autobiography contained in Bishop Jayne's reprint.

<sup>2</sup> *Macmillan's Magazine*, vol. xxxii. p. 390.

<sup>3</sup> Very polite this, no doubt, on Sir James's part, but also, one fears, very far from the truth.

<sup>4</sup> *Puritan and Anglican*, pp. 214-215, 230.

of the need of heart acquaintance and employment, yet I see more need of a higher work; and that I should look oftener upon Christ, and God, and heaven, than upon my own heart. At home I can find distempers to trouble me, and some evidences of my peace, but it is above that I must find matter of delight and joy, and love and peace itself. Therefore I would have one thought at home upon myself and sins, and many thoughts above upon the high and amiable and beatifying objects.' Again, Baxter was a controversialist, and no more eager champion ever entered the lists. It was, he says, his strong natural inclination 'to speak of every subject just as it is, and to call a spade a spade'; but he acknowledges 'some want of honour and love or tenderness to others . . . and therefore I repent of it, and wish all over-sharp passages were expunged from my writings, and desire forgiveness of God and man.'

Perhaps the most delightful surprise in these intimate self-revelations, at least for those whose former reading has not prepared them to look for it, is the mingled honesty and humility of Baxter's intellectual life. Formerly, he says, where any temptation to religious doubt assailed him, he was wont to cast it aside, 'as fitter to be abhorred than considered of; yet now,' he goes on, 'this would not give me satisfaction; but I was fain to dig to the very foundations, and seriously to examine the reasons of Christianity, and to give a hearing to all that could be said against it, that so my faith might be indeed my own. And at last I found that *nil tam certum quamquod ex dubio certum*; nothing is so firmly believed as that which hath been sometime doubted of.' Nor would he pretend to a certainty which was not his merely because it was held a dishonour to be less certain. 'Even of the mysteries of the Gospel,' he writes, 'I must needs say that whatever men may pretend, the subjective certainty cannot go beyond the objective evidence; for it is caused thereby as the print on the wax is caused by that on the seal.' And therefore, while some things are certain, others are less so, and others are not so at all; we can but bow our heads and say we do not know. Baxter had an almost pathetic confidence in the power of reasoning; much and very much he himself owed to the reasonings of others; but he came to see that when man has said his last word there still remain questions to which the only answer is that there is no answer. 'Heretofore,'

he says, 'I knew much less than now; and yet was not half so much acquainted with my ignorance. I had a great delight in the daily new discoveries which I made, and of the light which shined in upon me (like a man that cometh into a country where he never was before); but I little knew how imperfectly I understood those very points whose discovery so much delighted me, nor how much might be said against them; nor how many things I was yet a stranger to. But now I find far greater darkness upon all things, and perceive how very little it is that we know in comparison of that which we are ignorant of.' And, as it was with himself, so was it also with others to whom he looked for guidance: 'Experience hath constrained me against my will to know that reverend learned men are imperfect, and know but little as well as I; especially those that think themselves the wisest. And the better I am acquainted with them, the more I perceive that we are all yet in the dark.' *We are all yet in the dark*—this is not the Puritanism whose voice the world knows too well, harsh and strident, challenging heaven and earth with its confident solutions of the eternal mystery; this is Puritanism with bowed head, silent, humbly seeking for some one to guide it.

It is here that we see Baxter at his best. This is the temper which has won for him the title of 'The great Catholic of Puritanism.' 'I had rather,' he said, 'be a martyr for love than for any other article of the Christian creed.' And with that noble saying his whole life was in accord. He was all for charity and comprehension. He knew his own mind; he was ready at all times earnestly to contend for the faith, as he understood it; yet he made it his aim always to 'bear with them that Christ will bear with.' 'I am not for narrowing the Church,' he wrote, 'more than Christ Himself alloweth us; nor for robbing Him of any of His flock.' And so we find him lamenting that the writings of 'the ancient schismatics and heretics (as they were called)' have not survived, for then he thinks it would have been manifest that 'few of them were so bad as their adversaries made them.' Neither will he pass 'a peremptory sentence of damnation upon all that never heard of Christ; having some more reason than I knew of before to think that God's dealing with such is much unknown to us.' So, too, in regard to the Papists: once he thought it well proved that a

Papist could not go beyond a reprobate; 'but now I doubt not but that God hath many sanctified ones among them who have received the true doctrine of Christianity so practically that their contradictory errors prevail not against them to hinder their love of God and their salvation.'

It costs nothing to say these things to-day; they have long since become the commonplace, and almost the cant, of the street; the veriest trifler gives them his lazy assent. But it was otherwise in the seventeenth century. In those days Truth's boundaries were traced with a firm and unwavering

hand, and woe to him who dared to transgress them! That God had His portion in the Puritans, His inheritance in the Reformed Churches of the Continent, no man of Baxter's way of thinking had any doubt; but what concord could He have with the Man of Sin whose seat was on the seven hills of Rome? That Baxter with his sturdy Protestantism and inborn love of disputation should yet have been able so far to break through the trammels of his age and serve himself heir to the great Catholic traditions of the centuries is perhaps the strongest of his many claims to the attention and goodwill of the reader to-day.

## Contributions and Comments.

### 1 Timothy i. 14.

ST. PAUL'S use of superlatives, to which Mr. Martin Pope recalls attention, has been often commented on. It is much more than a linguistic peculiarity: it always reveals a struggle to give adequate expression to deep emotion. He coins or intensifies words because familiar words cannot express the fulness of his heart. The coining of *ὑπερπλέονάζω* in 1 Ti 1<sup>14</sup> is a striking example of this. Undoubtedly the experience which the apostle is here recalling is his conversion at Damascus; and it gets light and gives light when it is read along with Ac 9<sup>9-19</sup> and 22<sup>11-16</sup> (the narrative in Ac 26 is not so distinctively personal). He is telling what he found in his experience of the grace of the Lord for encouragement of all who had been even as he. Grace overwhelmed him with its graciousness. What was the ideal in his mind when thus striving to describe the exuberance of divine grace? Some take it as an intensified equivalent for 'exceeding abundance'; Mr. Pope seems to regard the figurative word as suggesting an 'overflowing stream.' Surely the apostle's thought was rather of the ocean's fulness—the incoming of the resistless flood-tide from the deep. That is the familiar emblem of the O.T. A river is in flood but for a time, the fathomless depth of the sea is eternal. So psalmists and prophets used it, as the apostle does, as the fit emblem of the infinitude of mercy—in its depths the vilest sins were buried from remembrance for

ever. The grace of the Lord came over the soul of the praying penitent in Damascus as the full flood-tide which rises and overwhelms him it overtakes. St. Paul was familiar with the sea. He spent a night and a day *ἐν τῷ βυθῷ*. (Note his use of *βάθος*, Ro 8<sup>89</sup> 11<sup>83</sup>, 1 Co 2<sup>10</sup>, Eph 3<sup>18</sup>.) Such a passage as Is 60<sup>5</sup> may have been in his mind: 'Then thou shalt see and be radiant, and thy heart shall throb, and grow large; for there shall be turned upon thee the sea's flood-tide, and the wealth of the nations shall come to thee.' So George Adam Smith translates, and adds: 'It is liquid light,—light that ripples and sparkles, the light which a face catches from sparkling water. . . . The stately mother of her people. . . . stands upon some great beach, with the sea in front,—the sea that casts up all heaven's light upon her face and drifts all earth's wealth to her feet' (*Book of Isaiah*, ii. p. 430).

Could there be a more perfect emblem of the experience of Saul when the grace of the Lord broke over his soul and he looked up on Ananias, its messenger? To the blind penitent he had said, 'The Lord, *even* Jesus who appeared unto thee in the way which thou camest, hath sent me that thou mayest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost' (*πλησθῆς Πνεύματος Ἁγίου*). Even such words of grace did not tell all that they meant to the apostle as he looked back on that day. The fulness was not after his measure to receive, but the fulness of God to bestow—*ἡ χάρις τοῦ Κυρίου ὑπερπλέονασε*.