

Preface to Mr. Warburton's Last Days

THE following testimony to the lovingkindness and faithfulness of the Lord in supporting and comforting on the bed of languishing, and blessing with so glorious and triumphant a death, his son and servant, the late Mr. Warburton, has been put into my hands that I might arrange it for the press, and prefix to it a short preface.

My great esteem and affection for my departed friend, as well as my deep respect for him as so eminent a servant of God, made me at once accept the labour of love; and when I learnt that the little work would be published for the benefit of his bereaved widow and family. I felt a more than additional willingness to render any aid that lay in my power, had it even demanded ten times as much of my time and attention. Indeed, I consider it a very high honour put upon me to be allowed to aid in presenting the church of Christ with such a testimony, and to be but as a servant to place on the table what I hope may be to many dear saints of God, " A feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined." Light indeed has been my labour, for I have scarcely altered a word from beginning to end, and have made neither omission nor addition to these simple records. To have made the slightest alteration in the words which dropped from the dear man's lips would have been, in my eyes, and I think in those of most of the readers, little short of sacrilege; and the connecting links are so brief, so unassuming, and so much to the purpose, that any recasting of them would have but marred their original strength and simplicity.

As I have undertaken the task of presenting the following pages to the church of God, I trust I shall be excused if I advert for a few moments to the circumstances under which I first came to know and love Mr. Warburton, that I may offer some valid reason for showing this my last friendly mark of respect and affection to his memory.

I shall never forget my first interview with him, which was some time in the year 1833 or 1834. I was at that time a minister in the Church of England, and fellow of a college at Oxford, but was living in a little village in Oxfordshire, named Stadhampton, which was one of the parishes then under my care. When I first went to Stadhampton, in the year 1828, it was with the intention of riding backwards and forwards to Oxford, and thus maintaining my connection with the University, where I took pupils, and where I was looking for the highest offices in my College. But I soon found that there was no mixing together the things of God and man. Persecution from the heads of the College fell upon me, which much severed the tie, and broke to pieces the pleasing prospects I was indulging of worldly advancement. A great gulf seemed placed also in my feelings between my former

friends and myself; and one day in particular, in the year 1829, as I was sitting on my horse, near the College gates, it was so impressed on my mind that Oxford was no place for me, that I gladly turned my back upon it and went to reside permanently at Stadhampton. A long and trying illness in the year 1830, from which indeed I have never fully recovered, was also made a means of deepening a sense of my own sinfulness and opening up the truth more clearly and fully to my soul; and the solitude of a country village, with an entire seclusion from all worldly society, much favoured prayer, meditation, and reading the Scriptures. Powerful temptations also assailed my soul, and trials and sorrows of various kinds were spread in my path. I mention these things, not from any desire to dwell on personal matters, but to show how far my mind was prepared to break through those barriers of pride and prejudice which separate the Churchman, and more especially the Clergyman, from the Dissenter, and make me desirous of seeing and hearing a man of God, out of my own narrow pale.

It was then some time in the year 1833 or 1834 that Mr. Warburton came to Abingdon to preach at the chapel of my dear friend, Mr. Tiptaft, whom I had intimately known for some years previously as a brother clergyman, and whose secession a year or two before from the Establishment had not broken or impaired our union in mind and heart in the great things of God. I went over, therefore, to Abingdon, about eight miles distant, to see and hear Mr. Warburton. I was then, and had been for some time, a good deal exercised in my mind about eternal things, and went with many fears and under much bondage, both on account of my position in the Church of England, which I was then beginning to feel, and the state of my own soul, which was, as I have hinted, then passing through various trials. Though reared in the lap of learning, and instructed almost from childhood to consider mental attainments as the grand means of winning a position in the world, I had, some six or seven years before, been taught by the weight of eternal realities laid on my conscience, to value grace as the one thing needful; and the trials and temptations I was passing through in a lonely village, separated from all society but that of a few people who feared God, had deepened the feelings in my breast. Under these circumstances I went to Abingdon, feeling my own want of grace, and therefore with more fears than hopes, as about to see and hear a servant of God so eminently possessed of it, and anticipating rather a frown than a smile both in the pulpit and the parlour.

I afterwards learned that the poor dear man, having heard I was a man of great learning, was almost as much afraid of meeting the Oxford scholar as the Oxford scholar was of meeting him. But how much better grounded were my fears than his! and how much his grace outshone my learning!

He received me, however, with much kindness, and talked pleasantly and profitably on the weighty matters of the kingdom of God. I heard him very comfortably in the evening, and next morning after breakfast he would have me engage in prayer, which I did with a trembling heart, but seemed helped to express simply what I knew and felt. We afterwards went inside the coach together to Dorchester, about seven miles off, conversing the chief part of the way, and there we parted very affectionately. I do not wish to speak of myself, but I afterwards heard that my feeble lisplings had given me an abiding place in the dear man's heart, and laid a foundation for that friendship and union which have subsisted unbroken ever since between us.

In March, 1835, I was compelled, from the pressure upon my conscience, to secede from the Church of England, and was led by a singular providence, and in marked answer to a prayer by a friend on my behalf, to pitch my tent for a while at Allington, near Devizes. Wiltshire, where, in the following September, Mr. Warburton baptised me; and I shall never forget the power with which he preached that morning. Soon afterwards I went down to Trowbridge to supply his pulpit, and found there a gracious people, most of whom were his spiritual children. He several times supplied for me at Stamford and Oakham, after my lot was cast in those places; and there are those still there who can bear testimony to the power and savour with which he spoke. We have for many years generally met annually at the Calne anniversary, a well-known and remarkable gathering of the saints of God in that district of North Wilts, where we have been in the habit of preaching together, and I hope ever met and parted with renewed affection.

I have heard Mr. Gadsby preach as great, perhaps greater, sermons; but I never met with a minister whose prayer in the pulpit, or whose conversation out of it, was so weighty and savoury. Indeed, I never heard a man ever ask a blessing at the breakfast or dinner table like him. There was such a simplicity, such a reverence, and yet childlike approach unto God; such a savour in his few words, that it seemed to sanctify the meal in a peculiar way. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, have borne witness to the power and savour which rested on his ministry; but the blessing he has been made to the church of God will never be fully known until that day when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed.

The crowning testimony is given in the following pages, wherein we see the aged servant of God supported amidst all the languishing of disease, blessed with what he had always contended for- a feeling religion, enjoying the presence and power of his dear Lord, and favoured with a glorious and triumphant departure.

In life he stuck by a feeling religion, and in death a feeling religion stuck by him. His desire was, as a Christian, to experience the sweet inflowings of the love of God to his soul; and, as a minister, to debase the sinner, exalt the Saviour, and trace out the work of the Holy Ghost in the heart, from a feeling, living and daily experience of it in his own conscience.

As he lived, so he died, never wavering from the truth, never carried about with divers and strange doctrines, never venturing beyond his depth, never speculating or reasoning beyond what he knew and felt for himself; ever seeing more and more in himself to loathe and abhor, and ever more and more in the Lord Jesus to admire and love.

He has run his race, has fought a good fight, and finished his course with joy, and left us still to sigh and groan in the wilderness, but looking to the same Lord, and hoping in the same rich, sovereign and super-abounding grace.

But I am writing a preface, and will therefore no longer detain my readers from what is far more worthy of the perusal than anything which can drop from my pen.

May the God of all grace, the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, bless with the unction of the Holy Ghost, the testimony contained in these pages to the souls of His dear people and the manifestation of His own glory.

J. C. PHILPOT Stamford, May 5th, 1857