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MEMOIR OF DR. GODMAN:

BEING

AN INTRODUCTORY LECTURE,

DELIVERED NOVEMBER 1, 1830,

BY THOMAS SEWALL, M. D.,

*Professor of Anatomy and Physiology in the Columbian College,  
District of Columbia.*

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## MEMOIR OF DR. GODMAN.

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THERE are occasions, gentlemen, when it is proper,—when it is profitable, to pause in the career of life, not only to mark the progress of things, but to observe the character of men, and more especially of men distinguished for eminent success, or signal failure, that we may imitate the examples of the one, and shun the misfortunes of the other. The present is such an occasion; and if properly improved cannot fail to instruct as well as to gratify.

There has recently appeared among us a man so remarkable for the character of his mind, and for the qualities of his heart,—one whose life, though short, was attended with such brilliant displays of genius, with such distinguished success in the study of our profession, and the kindred sciences, that to pass him by without tracing the history of his career, and placing before you the prominent traits of his character as exhibited in the important events of his life, would alike be an act of injustice to the memory of eminent worth, and deprive you of one of the noblest examples of the age.

I refer to Professor Godman, whose death has been announced since we last assembled within these walls.

This remarkable man was born not far from us, in a place already renowned for having given birth to an unusual proportion of eminent men; the city of Annapolis, the metropolis of the ancient state of Maryland.

But few of the instances of Dr. Godman's childhood and youth have come to my knowledge. I have learned, however, that he was early deprived of the fostering care which flows from parental solicitude and affection. His mother died before he was a year old, and his father did not survive long. On the death of his mother he was placed under the care of an aunt, then residing at Wilmington, in the state of Delaware;—a lady who, from the superiority of her intellect and education, as well as the sweetness of her disposition, and her elevated piety, was eminently qualified to unfold, impress, and direct the youthful mind. Under such culture he received the first rudiments of his education and his earliest moral impressions. His alphabet was taught him upon the knee of his grand-



mother, and before he was two years old he was able to read in the Psalms.

At the age of four his aunt removed from Delaware to Chestertown, upon the eastern shore of Maryland, and here she first placed the interesting orphan at school. He had already become the idol of the family, but now he manifested such a precocity of intellect, such a fondness for books, and an aptitude to learn, and withal evinced so much sensibility, frankness, and sweetness of disposition, that he gained the affection and excited the admiration of all. His reverence for truth was such, even from his infancy, that he was never known to equivocate. At the age of six his aunt died, and he was left without any suitable protector or guide, exposed to the adversities of fortune, and the snares of an unfriendly world. It appears, however, that the moral and religious impressions which had already been made upon his mind, though obscured for a time, were never wholly obliterated. During his last illness he was often heard to speak in raptures of his aunt, and say, "If I have ever been led to do any good, it has been through the influence of her example, instruction, and prayers." His father had lost the greater part of his estate before his death, and that which remained never came into the hands of his children. Young Godman, therefore, was early taught to rely on his own talents and industry. In this situation he was indented an apprentice to a printer in the city of Baltimore; but the occupation was not congenial to his taste; and after a few years he left the business in disgust, and at the same time entered as a sailor on board the flotilla, which was then, the fall of 1814, stationed in the Chesapeake Bay. At the close of the war, having arrived at the age of fifteen, he was permitted to pursue the inclination of his own mind, and he immediately commenced the study of medicine. He first placed himself under the instruction of Dr. Luckey, of Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania, but soon removed to Baltimore, and entered the office of Dr. Davidge, at that time professor of anatomy in the University of Maryland.

Here he pursued his studies with such diligence and zeal as to furnish, even at that early period, strong indications of his future eminence. So indefatigable was he in the acquisition of knowledge, that he left no opportunity



of advancement unimproved, and, notwithstanding the deficiencies of his preparatory education, he pressed forward with an energy and perseverance that enabled him not only to rival, but to surpass all his fellows.

As an evidence of the distinguished attainments he had made, and of the confidence reposed in his abilities, he was called to the chair of anatomy in the university some time before he graduated, to supply the place of his preceptor, who was taken from the lectures in consequence of a fractured extremity. This situation he filled for several weeks with so much propriety,—he lectured with such enthusiasm and eloquence, his illustrations were so clear and happy, as to gain universal applause; and at the time he was examined for his degree, the superiority of his mind, as well as the extent and accuracy of his knowledge, were so apparent, that he was marked by the professors of the university as one destined at some future period to confer high honour upon the profession. Upon this occasion a prize medal was awarded him for the best Latin thesis.

After he graduated he settled at New-Holland, in Pennsylvania, but soon left this situation, and repaired to a small village in Anne-Arundel county, in his native state, and established himself as a practitioner of medicine. Here he entered on the active duties of the profession with the same energy and diligence which had distinguished him while a pupil, devoting all the hours he could spare to professional and other studies. It was at this time that he commenced the study of natural history, a science in which he became so distinguished an adept, and for which he ever after evinced so strong a passion. But the place was too limited for the exercise of his powers; and not finding those advantages which he wished for, the cultivation of his favourite pursuits, he removed to Baltimore, where he could enjoy more ample opportunities for the study of anatomy, which he justly regarded as the foundation of medical science.

About this time he formed a connection by marriage; an event which contributed equally to his domestic happiness and literary advancement. Soon after his marriage he removed to Philadelphia, but had scarcely settled in that city when he received a pressing invitation to accept the professorship of anatomy in the Medical College of Ohio; an institution then recently established. During his western



tour he encountered difficulties which would have broken down a spirit less energetic than his own; but he bore up under his accumulated labours and privations with unshaken firmness and steady perseverance. He, however, remained but one year, and returned to Philadelphia;—and here commenced that career of research and discovery which laid the foundation of his future eminence.

More ambitious of fame, and more eager for the acquisition of knowledge, than the accumulation of wealth, Dr. Godman, on settling in Philadelphia, rather retired from the field of practice, that he might employ all his time, and exert all his powers, in scientific pursuits. He there found himself at once removed from the pitiful rivalries and jealousies of the profession, and placed in a situation in which he could enjoy the friendship without alarming the fears of his brethren.

His main object was to make himself a thorough anatomist, and to qualify himself for teaching the science. To this end he opened a room, under the patronage of the university, for giving private demonstrations; and the first winter he drew around him a class of seventy students. He now found himself occupying a field which furnished ample scope for the exertion of all his powers, as well as for the gratification of his highest ambition; and it was while engaged in the discharge of the duties of this situation, that the foundation was laid of that fatal disease of which he died; for so eager was he to acquire knowledge himself, as well as to impart it to those around him, that he would not only expose himself to the foul atmosphere of the dissecting room during the whole day, but often subject himself to the severest toil for a considerable part of the night; and the moments which were spared from his anatomical labours, instead of being spent in relaxation, or in exercise in the open air for the benefit of his health, were employed in composing papers for the medical journals, in copying the results of his anatomical and physiological investigations, in preparing parts of his natural history, or in carrying on other literary and scientific studies. It is impossible that a constitution, naturally delicate, could long remain unimpaired under such strenuous and unremitting exertion.

After Dr. Godman had prosecuted his anatomical studies



in Philadelphia for four or five years, his reputation as an anatomist became so generally known, his fame so widely extended, that the eyes of the profession were directed to him from every part of the country; and in 1826 he was called to fill the chair of anatomy in Rutger's Medical College, established in the city of New-York. There could scarcely have been a stronger testimony of the high estimation in which he was held, or of his reputation as a teacher of anatomy, than his appointment to this station; an institution around which several of the most eminent professors of the country had already rallied; and which was called into existence under circumstances of rivalry that demanded the highest qualifications in its instructors. This situation, as well as every other in which he had been placed, he sustained with a popularity almost unparalleled. He never exhibited in public but he gathered around him an admiring audience, who hung with delight upon his lips. But the duties of the chair, together with his other scientific pursuits, were too arduous, and the climate too rigorous for a constitution already subdued by labour, and broken by disease; and before he had completed his second course of lectures he was compelled to retire from the school, and seek a residence in a milder climate. He repaired with his family to one of the West India islands, and remained till the approach of summer, when he returned and settled in Germantown. In this place, and in Philadelphia, he spent the residue of his life.

From the time Dr. Godman left New-York his disease advanced with such a steady pace as to leave but little hope, either to himself or his friends, of his final recovery. He, however, continued almost to the last week of his life to toil in his literary and scientific employments; and this, too, with all that ardour and enthusiasm which distinguished the more youthful part of his career.

But for what purpose did he thus toil? Not for the acquisition of wealth, for this he could not enjoy; not for posthumous fame, for this he did not desire. It was, as he affectingly tells us, for the more noble purpose, the support of his family, and the good of his fellow creatures.

The productions of Dr. Godman's pen, and the fruits of his labour, are too numerous to be specified. Among them will be found "Anatomical Investigations, comprising



a Description of various Fasciæ of the Human Body;”—“An Account of some Irregularities of Structure and Morbid Anatomy;”—“Contributions to Physiological and Pathological Anatomy;”—“A System of Natural History of American Quadrupeds;”—“An Edition of Bell’s Anatomy, with Notes;”—“Rambles of a Naturalist.” Several articles on natural history for the American Encyclopædia, beside numerous papers which have appeared in the periodical journals of the day. At one time he was the principal editor of the “Philadelphia Journal of the Medical and Physical Sciences.” Some time before his death he published a volume of Addresses which he had delivered on different public occasions.

Most of these admired productions have been before the public for a considerable time; have been received with high approbation, and several of them been favourably noticed, and even republished in foreign countries.

Those of his works which are purely medical have been read with great interest by the profession, and contain much new and valuable information. His investigations of the fasciæ of the human body, and his description of the intricate part of the animal structure, while they disclose some important discoveries which he made, exhibit the whole subject in a manner so plain and simple as to divest it of its obscurity, and bring it to the comprehension of the youngest student;—a subject which, till his researches were made known, was but little understood even by the best anatomists. His contributions also to physiological and pathological anatomy, though but the scattered fragments of a great work which he had designed, contain discoveries and observations which will be read with the deepest interest by the inquirer after truth. Of his works not immediately connected with the profession, his Natural History of American Quadrupeds is the most elaborate, and is published in three volumes. This production will long remain a splendid monument of the genius and industry of its author, and be regarded as a model of composition for works of this description. It should have a place upon the table of every family, and be put into the hands of all the youths of our country. Among the latest productions of his pen are his essays entitled, *Rambles of a Naturalist*, which were written in the intervals of extreme pain and



debility. For strong, lively, and accurate description, they have scarcely been surpassed. He always came to his subject as an investigator of facts,—one who had nothing to learn, but every thing to discover; and, like the celebrated Buffon, never availed himself of the labour of others till he had exhausted his own resources. It was this spirit which enabled him to disclose so many new truths, and which gave to all his works the stamp of originality. The value which he placed on original observation, as well as the zeal with which he sought information from this source, may be learned from a single incident, “that in investigating the habits of the shrew mole, he walked many hundred miles.”

The volume of his Public Addresses has been greatly admired for the pure and elevated sentiment they contain, as well as for their high-wrought eloquence, in which respect they rank among the finest compositions in our language.

But his published works constitute but a part of the labours of his pen; and many things which he sent forth were only fragments of a great system, or the commencement of future researches. He had formed vast plans for prosecuting new investigations in various departments of science, which he did not live to accomplish.

Though he wrote with great rapidity, and sometimes without much care, yet all his works bear the impress of a mind naturally vigorous, bold, and original, and much disposed to draw from its own resources; and most of them are written in a style of great elegance and beauty.

Dr. Godman's intellectual character was very extraordinary. He possessed, naturally, all the characteristic features of a mind of the highest order. Naturally bold, ardent, and enterprising, he never stopped to calculate consequences, so far as they regarded himself; but rushed forward with impetuosity to perform whatever he undertook. Great and lofty intellectual purposes seemed to be the natural element in which he lived. His perception was quick and accurate; his memory exceedingly retentive; and he possessed an uncommon facility of abstracting his attention from surrounding objects, and of concentrating all his powers upon the subject of his pursuit. It was this latter trait of mind, no doubt, which gave such effect to all his efforts: while he was indebted to the power of his



memory for the remarkable facility he possessed of acquiring languages; for although his early education had been exceedingly limited, he had acquired such a knowledge of the Latin, Greek, French, German, Danish, Spanish, and Italian languages, as to read and translate them with fluency, and to write several of them with elegance. His quick and discriminating powers of observation naturally inclined him to notice the habits and economy of animals, and gave him his taste for the study of natural history.

But the most striking character of his mind was undoubtedly philosophical imagination. It was this trait which conferred upon him such powers of description and illustration, and imparted freshness and splendour to every thing he touched. All his conceptions were strong, clear, and original, and he possessed the power of holding before him whatever object engaged his attention, till all its parts and relations were brought to view. By those who have listened to his extemporaneous discussions, it is said that, while he was speaking, a thousand images seemed to cluster around the subject, and that he had just time to select such as imparted beauty, or furnished the happiest illustration of the object he wished to explain. Yet, while he possessed all this richness and fertility of mind, taste and judgment ever controlled its operations.

He was a laborious and untiring student, and possessed in a high degree the requisites of all true intellectual greatness,—the habit of patient investigation, long continued attention, and a singular love of labour. "How often," says one, (to whom he unbosomed the secrets of his heart,) "have I entreated him, while poring half the night over his books and papers, which were to yield him nothing but empty honour,—how often have I begged him to consider his health; but his ambition and thirst for knowledge were such that, having commenced an investigation, or a language, no difficulty could stop him; and what he had no time to accomplish in the day he would do at night, instead of enjoying that rest of which he stood in so much need."

It has been truly and happily said by one who knew him intimately, that his eagerness in the pursuit of knowledge seemed like the impulse of gnawing hunger and an un-



quenchable thirst; which neither adversity nor disease could allay. Variety of occupations was the only relaxation which he sought for or desired.

He composed with rapidity, but not without a high degree of intellectual excitement, and the most abstracted attention. Under such an influence some of his best essays were sent to the press as they first came from his pen, without the smallest correction.

Considering the defects of his early education, his acquisitions, for his years, were astonishingly great. Indeed, there were but few subjects of general literature with which he was not, more or less, acquainted.

But it was his accurate knowledge of anatomy and physiology, and his uncommon power of teaching these branches of medicine, which gave him his strongest claims to our regard as a man of science; and had his life and health been prolonged so as to have directed the whole energy of his mind to the cultivation of this department of our profession, we have reason to believe that he would have laid open new sources of knowledge, discovered new laws, and reduced to order those scattered materials already known; and that the whole study would thus have been simplified and enriched by his labours.

His method of teaching anatomy was entirely analytical; and, in this respect, peculiar,—that he performed all his dissections in the presence of the class, demonstrating the different parts of the animal structure in succession, as they were unfolded by the knife. But this method, however well suited to a private class in the dissecting room, causes too much confusion and delay to be practised with success while lecturing by one less dexterous and skilful than its author himself.

Dr. Godman, in his manners, was plain, simple, and unostentatious; yet he possessed that warmth and affability which rendered him accessible to all, and the delight of the social circle. His feelings in every thing were ardent and decided. He was devotedly attached to his friends;—toward his enemies he was impatient, and felt keenly their revilings. In his conversation he was fluent, and, though unstudied, was often brilliant, and always full of point and power.

He was particularly distinguished for simplicity and



directness in uttering his thoughts, which always indicated to those he addressed the absence of selfishness and concealment. No enigmatical expressions, no innuendoes, were ever heard from his lips. Dark and distant insinuations were his utter abhorrence. In whatever he said, and in whatever he did, he put forth his whole soul. He was always cheerful, and apparently happy, even amid the deepest adversity and the keenest suffering.

When we consider the circumstances under which Dr. Godman made his way to the profession, and afterward prosecuted his studies, the multiplicity of objects which he carried forward, and the honour he conferred on every department of science which he touched;—when we consider the power of his intellect, the versatility of his genius, and the intensity of his application, we cannot but regard him as altogether an extraordinary personage,—such a one as has seldom been permitted to dwell among men, to share their sympathies, and mingle in their elevated pursuits.

In view of his intellectual character, I cannot withhold the just and elegant tribute which fell from the pen of that distinguished scholar and gentleman, Robert Walsh, Esq., at the time of Dr. Godman's decease; one who, above most others, knew his worth.

"The tributes," says he, "which have been paid in the newspapers to the late Dr. Godman, were especially due to the memory of a man so variously gifted by nature, and so nobly distinguished by industry and zeal in the acquisition and advancement of science. He did not enjoy early opportunities of self-improvement, but he cultivated his talents, as he approached manhood, with a degree of ardour and success which supplied all deficiencies; and he finally became one of the most accomplished general scholars and linguists, acute and erudite naturalists, ready, pleasing, and instructive lecturers and writers of his country and era. The principal subject of his study was anatomy in its main branches, in which he excelled in every respect. His attention was much directed also to physiology, pathology, and natural history, with an aptitude and efficiency abundantly proved by the merits of his published works, which we need not enumerate.

"We do not now recollect to have known any individual who inspired us with more respect for his intellect and



heart than Dr. Godman; to whom knowledge and discovery appeared more abstractly precious; whose eye shed more of the lustre of generous and enlightened enthusiasm; whose heart remained more vivid and sympathetic amid professional labour and responsibility, always extremely severe and urgent. Considering the decline of his health, for a long period, and the pressure of adverse circumstances, which he too frequently experienced, he performed prodigies as a student, an author, and a teacher;—he prosecuted extensive and diversified researches; composed superior disquisitions and reviews, and large and valuable volumes; and in the great number of topics which he handled simultaneously, or in immediate succession, he touched none without doing himself credit, and producing some new developement of light, or happy forms of expression.

“He lingered for years under consumption of the lungs; understood fully the incurableness of his melancholy state; spoke and acted with an unfeigned and beautiful resignation; toiled at his desk to the last day of his thirty-two years, still glowing with the love of science and the domestic affections. The reputation, the writings, and the family of this victim of the most exalted ambition and refined propensities should be greatly and widely cherished.”

But there remains another view to be taken of Dr. Godman, to which I have made no allusion:—I refer to his moral and religious character; and though to some it may seem unsuited to the place and the occasion, I shall make no apology for exhibiting to the class a trait of his character so admirable, so strongly drawn, and so worthy of imitation,—and one which was his only solace in sickness, cheered him as he approached the valley of death, and shed light and immortality around his dying couch.

It had been the misfortune of Dr. Godman, as that of many of the eminent members of our profession before him, to form his philosophical and religious opinions after the model of the French naturalists of the last century; the most distinguished of whom were deists and atheists; and such is man in his natural, his fallen condition, that even while surrounded by the most magnificent displays of divine power and wisdom, and with his eyes directed to those very objects, and his attention arrested by those very



laws which proclaim the existence and the presence of an almighty Power, that he overlooks and passes by the evidences they furnish of the existence of a Deity; and this, often, under the specious, but delusive pretext of casting off the shackles of prejudice and superstition, and of giving the reins to free, enlightened, and philosophical inquiry. It was the case with Dr. Godman; for while assisted by such lights as these, and guided alone in his investigations by perverted reason, he became, as he tells us, an established infidel, rejecting revelation, and casting all the evidences of an existing God beneath his feet.

It was not till the winter of 1827, while engaged in his course of lectures in New-York, that he was arrested in his career, and brought to an experimental knowledge of the truth. At this time an incident occurred which led him to a candid perusal of the gospels, as contained in the New Testament. It was a visit to a deathbed; the deathbed of a Christian; the deathbed of a student of medicine. There he saw what reason could not explain, nor philosophy fathom. He opened his Bible, and the secret was unfolded. From this time he became a devoted student of the Scriptures. How far they were made the efficient cause of his conversion to Christianity will best appear from his own eloquent pen.

The following is an extract of a letter he addressed to a medical friend, Dr. Judson, of this city, a surgeon in the navy of the United States, who was at that time in the last stage of consumption:—

*“Germantown, Dec. 25, 1828.*

“In relation to dying, my dear friend, you talk like a sick man, and just as I used to do when very despondent. Death is a debt we all owe to nature, and must eventually ensue from a mere wearing out of the machine, if not from disease. The time when, makes no difference in the act of dying to the individual; for, after all, it terminates in corporeal insensibility, let the preceding anguish be never so severe. Nature certainly has a strong abhorrence to this cessation of corporeal action, and all animals have a dread of death who are conscious of its approach. A part of our dread of death is purely physical, and is avoidable only by a philosophical conviction of its necessity; but the greater part of our dread, and the terrors with which the avenues



to the grave are surrounded, are from another, and a more potent source. 'Tis conscience that makes cowards of us all,' and forces us by our terrors to confess that we dread something beyond physical dissolution, and that we are terrified, not at merely ceasing to breathe, but that we have not lived as we ought to have done, have not effected the good that was within the compass of our abilities, and neglected to exercise the talents we possessed to the greatest advantage. The only remedy for this fear of death is to be sought by approaching the Author of all things in the way prescribed by himself, and not according to our own foolish imaginations. Humiliation of pride, denial of self, subjection of evil tempers and dispositions, and an entire submission to his will for support and direction, are the best preparatives for such an approach. A perusal of the gospels, in a spirit of real inquiry, after a direction how to act, will certainly teach the way. In these gospels the Saviour himself has preached his own doctrines, and he who runs may read. He has prescribed the course; he shows how the approval and mercy of God may be won; he shows how awfully corrupt is man's nature, and how deadly his pride and stubbornness of heart, which cause him to try every subterfuge to avoid the humiliating confession of his own weakness, ignorance, and folly. But the same blessed hand has stripped death of all the terrors which brooded around the grave, and converted the gloomy receptacle of our mortal remains into the portal of life and light. O let me die the death of the righteous; let my last end and future state be like his!

"This is all I know on the subject. I am no theologian, and have as great an aversion to priestcraft as one can entertain. I was once an infidel, as I told you in the West Indies. I became a Christian from conviction, produced by the candid inquiry recommended to you. I know of no other way in which death can be stripped of its terrors; certainly none better can be wished. Philosophy is a fool, and pride a madman. Many persons die with what is called *manly firmness*; that is, having acted a part all their lives according to their prideful creed, they must die *game*. They put on as smooth a face as they can, to impose on the spectators, and die *firmly*. But this is all deception; the true state of their minds at the very time, nine times



out of ten, is worse than the most horrible imaginings even of hell itself. Some who have led lives adapted to sear their conscience, and petrify all the moral sensibilities, die with a kind of indifference similar to that with which a hardened convict submits to a new infliction of disgraceful punishment. But the man who dies as a man ought to die is the humble minded, believing Christian; one who has tasted and enjoyed all the blessings of creation; who has had an enlightened view of the wisdom and glory of his Creator; who has felt the vanity of merely worldly pursuits and motives, and been permitted to know the mercies of a blessed Redeemer as he approaches the narrow house appointed for all the living.

“Physical death may cause his senses to shrink and fail at the trial; but his mind, sustained by the Rock of ages, is serene and unwavering. He relies not on his own righteousness, for that would be vain; but the arms of mercy are beneath him—the ministering spirits of the Omnipotent are around him. He does not die manfully, but he rests in Jesus; he blesses his friends, he casts his hope on One all powerful to sustain, and mighty to save; then sleeps in peace. He is dead—but liveth; for He who is the resurrection and the life has declared, ‘Whoso believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth, and believeth in me, shall never die.’” \* \* \*

This letter, which so truly contrasts the deathbed scene of the infidel with that of the Christian, so beautifully portrays the history of the change which had been effected in Dr. Godman’s own sentiments and affections, and so clearly points the benighted wanderer to the true source of life and light, was not lost upon his friend to whom it was addressed. It described his condition, and it reached his heart.

Dr. Judson, though religiously instructed when young, having a pious clergyman for his father, and another for his elder brother, [*Dr. Judson, the distinguished missionary, now in India,*] yet he had long since freed himself from what he called the prejudices of education, the shackles of priestcraft, and was ranging the fields of infidelity. He had acquired wealth and reputation; was an estimable man in all the domestic relations of life, and a highly respected member of our profession; but the self-denying doctrines of the Saviour were too humbling to his proud spirit, and



he could not submit to their influence. At the time he received Dr. Godman's letter, however, he was gloomy and despondent; looking forward with fearful forebodings to the period of his dissolution, which seemed not far distant. He had no confidence but that of the skeptic,—no hope but that of ceasing to be. Aware of the fatal nature of the disease under which he had lingered for years, he had long been arming himself to meet the king of terrors with composure, that he might die like a philosopher—"with manly firmness:" but, as he drew nearer to the grave, the clouds and darkness thickened around him, and he began to fear that there might be something beyond this narrow prison. He had hitherto refused all religious intercourse, but now his infidelity began to give way, and he inquired with solicitude, "Is there such a thing as the new birth, and if so, in what does it consist?" He was directed to the gospels for the answer. He at length consented to make the investigation recommended by Dr. Godman. He took up the New Testament, and read it in the spirit of candid inquiry. A conviction of the truth of its doctrines fastened upon him. He now solicited the advice and prayers of a pious clergyman. Yet he could not consent to relinquish the sentiments which he had so long cherished without the clearest proof; and he disputed every inch of ground with great acuteness and ability: but the truth was exhibited by this venerable divine [*the Rev. William Ryland*] with such force and simplicity, that it overcame every argument he could produce, and he saw clearly the folly of his skeptical opinions. The clouds were dissipated, light broke in upon his mind, and he was enabled to take hold of the promises. The remaining days of his life were devoted to fervent prayer, and the constant study of the Scriptures, which filled his soul with divine composure, and enabled him to rely with undoubting confidence on the infinite merits of his Redeemer, and with his last breath to cry "Peace, peace." If he did not die with "*manly firmness*," he "*rested in Jesus*."

The exercises of such a mind as Dr. Godman's, during a long period of affliction, cannot fail to be interesting, as well to the philosopher as to the Christian, and more especially as expressed by himself. I shall, therefore, present a few brief extracts from some of his correspondence at that period.



*"Philadelphia, Feb. 17, 1829.*

*My Dear Friend:*—Since my last to you, my health has suffered various and most afflicting changes. The unusual severity of the weather, and other scarcely perceptible causes, induced an attack of inflammation in the diseased lung, which in my enfeebled condition required more of depletion and reduction of diet than could be readily borne: hemorrhage ensued on the third or fourth day, which relieved the local affection considerably, and by the aid of blistering frequently, and perfect rest, I gradually amended. Still the great suffering caused by the mental and corporeal debility was beyond any thing ever before experienced by me, even after the active condition of disease was checked. But thanks to the mercies of Him who is alone able to save, the valley and shadow of death were stripped of their terrors, and the descent to the grave was smoothed before me. Relying on the mercies and infinite merits of the Saviour, had it pleased God to call me then, I believe I should have died in a peaceful, humble confidence. But I have been restored to a state of comparative health, perhaps nearly to the condition in which I was when I wrote to Dr. Judson; and I am again allowed to think of the education of my children, and the support of my family. \* \* \* \*

"Believe me truly your friend,

"PROFESSOR SEWALL.

J. D. GODMAN."

In answer to the suggestion which I made to him of the propriety of leaving behind him a memoir of his life, he says: "It has long been my intention, as my life has been a curious one, to put a short account of it together for the benefit of my children and others." \* \* \* \*

It appears, however, from some lines which he wrote at a later period of his life, that he never accomplished this object; for in a manuscript volume which he sent to a friend, and which he intended to fill with original pieces of his own composition, he writes as follows:—

"Did I not in all things feel most thoroughly convinced that the overruling of our plans by an all-wise Providence is always for good, I might regret that a part of my plan cannot be executed. This was to relate a few curious incidents from among the events of my most singularly guided life, which, in addition to mere novelty or peculiarity



of character, could not have failed practically to illustrate the importance of inculcating correct religious and moral principles, and imbuing the mind therewith from the very earliest dawn of intellect, from the very moment that the utter imbecility of infancy begins to disappear. May *His* holy will be done, who can raise up abler advocates to support the truth! This is my first attempt to write in my Token;—why may it not be the last? O! should it be, believe me that the will of God will be most acceptable. Notwithstanding the life of neglect, sinfulness, and perversion of heart, which I so long led before it pleased him to dash all my idols in the dust, I feel an humble hope in the boundless mercy of our blessed Lord and Saviour, who alone can save the soul from merited condemnation. May it be in the power of those who chance to read these lines to say, Into thy hands I commend my spirit, for thou hast redeemed me, O Lord! thou God of truth.”

On communicating to Dr. Godman an account of the last moments of his friend, Dr. Judson, he responds in the following feeling and beautiful manner:—

“*Germantown, May 21, 1829.*

“*My Dear Friend*:—I feel very grateful for your attention in sending me an account of our dear Judson’s last moments. After all his doubts, difficulties, and mental conflicts, to know that the Father of mercies was pleased to open his eyes to the truth, and shed abroad in his heart the love and salvation offered through the Redeemer, is to me a source of the purest gratification, and a cause of the most sincere rejoicing. The bare possibility of my having been even slightly instrumental in effecting the blessed change of mind he experienced, excites in me emotions of gratitude to the Source of all good which words cannot express.

“I am afraid you did not examine his lungs after death. It is much to be regretted that the body of any *physician* should be interred without examination. They owe the example to their surviving friends; and I should be far more grieved to think that *my* body should be buried without examination, than to know that it would be left in the open air without the rites of sepulture.”

That love of science, that professional ardour which dictated the foregoing sentiment, and which still continued



to burn with a vivid flame, it would seem neither lessened the sensibilities of his heart, nor diminished his dependence upon his Saviour. Indeed there was nothing of that monkish austerity, nothing of that gross materialism, in his belief which caused him to hover over the gloom of the grave, and to cling to the crumbling and lifeless tenement of the soul after the spirit has fled. His religion was too spiritual and elevated, his communion with his Saviour too intimate, and his assurance of a blessed immortality too strong, to permit him to indulge such degraded and narrow views. In the same letter he adds:—

“My health has been in a very poor condition since my last to you. My cough and expectoration have been generally bad, and my body is emaciated to a very great degree. The warm weather now appears to have set in, and possibly I may improve a little; otherwise it will not be long before I follow our lately departed friend. Let me participate in the prayers you offer for the sick and afflicted, and may God grant me strength to die to his honour and glory, in the hopes and constancy derived from the merits and atonement of the blessed Saviour. With my best wishes for your health and prosperity, I remain sincerely yours,

“PROFESSOR SEWALL.

J. D. GODMAN.”

“*Philadelphia, Oct. 6, 1829.*

“*My Dear Friend*:—My health is, as for a considerable time past, in a very tolerable condition; that is, I can sit up a great part of the day writing or reading without much injury. My emaciation is great, and, though not very rapid, is steady; so that the change in my strength takes place almost imperceptibly. On the whole, though I suffer greatly, compared with persons in health, yet so gently have the chastenings of the Lord fallen upon me, that I am hourly called upon for thankfulness and gratitude for his unfailing mercies. Equal cause have I had for rejoicing that I have learned to put my whole trust in him; as he has raised me up help and friends in circumstances which seemed to render even hope impossible; and has blessed me and mine with peace and content in the midst of all afflictions, trials, and adversity.

“Knowing experimentally the value of implicit submission of all thoughts and desires to his most holy will, it is no small source of distress to me to see how many of my



most valued friends live in the habitual neglect of a happiness so pure, so attainable, and admirable." \* \* \*

Dr. Godman's religious feelings, though ardent, were not bigoted. In him religion was not that cold, selfish, and narrow principle which shuts out from his confidence all not of his own faith; nor did it consist in a loud profession of a particular doctrine or creed. It was the religion of the heart, deep, sincere, and as comprehensive as the charity of Heaven; embracing all the humble, faithful, and really good of every sect and denomination of Christians.

In the concluding part of the above letter, after speaking of the different religious denominations in terms of great liberality and candour, he says:—

"However, I find all *really religious* persons to be of one mind. Those who have drunk at the undefiled spring of truth, as set forth in the New Testament, without obscuration of human creeds or tradition, I have never found to differ in any respect that was of the slightest importance; and, therefore, with such persons, however called, I can always communicate advantageously.

"Sincerely your friend,

J. D. GODMAN."

"PROFESSOR SEWALL.

His strong and practical views of the authenticity of Christianity are clearly exhibited in the following extract which he wrote not long before his death:—

"Is proof wanting that these gospels are true? It is only necessary for an honest mind to read them candidly to be convinced. Every occurrence is stated clearly, simply, and unostentatiously. The narrations are not supported by asseverations of their truth, nor by parade of witnesses: the circumstances described took place in presence of vast multitudes, and are told in that downright, unpretending manner, which would have called forth innumerable positive contradictions had they been untrue. Mysteries are stated without attempt at explanation, because *explanation* is not necessary to establish the *existence* of facts, however mysterious. Miracles, also, attested by the presence of vast numbers, are stated in the plainest language of narration, in which the slightest working of imagination cannot be traced. This very simplicity, this unaffected sincerity, and quiet affirmation, have more force than a thousand witnesses,—more efficacy than



volumes of ambitious effort to support truth by dint of argumentation.

“What motive could the evangelists have to falsify? The Christian kingdom is not *of this world*, nor *in it*. Christianity teaches disregard of its vanities; depreciates its honours and enjoyments, and sternly declares that none can be Christians but those who escape from its vices and allurements. There is no call directed to ambition,—no gratification proposed to vanity:—the sacrifice of self,—the denial of all the propensities which relate to the gratification of passion or pride, with the most humble dependence upon God, are invariably taught, and most solemnly enjoined, under penalty of the most awful consequences! Is it then wonderful that such a system should find revilers? Is it surprising that skeptics should abound, when the slightest allowance of belief would force them to condemn all their actions? Or is it to be wondered at that a purity of life and conversation so repugnant to human passions, and a humility so offensive to human pride, should be opposed, rejected, and contemned? Such is the true secret of the opposition to *religion*,—such the cause inducing men who lead unchristian lives to array the frailties, errors, weakness, and vices of individuals, or sects, against *Christianity*, hoping to weaken or destroy the system by rendering ridiculous or contemptible those who *profess* to be governed by its influence, though their conduct shows them to be acting under an opposite spirit.

“What is the mode in which this most extraordinary doctrine of Christianity is to be diffused? By force—temporal power—temporal rewards—earthly triumphs? None of these. By earnest persuasion—gentle entreaty—brotherly love—paternal remonstrance. The dread resort of threatened punishment comes last—exhibited in sorrow, not in anger; told as a fearful truth, not denounced with vindictive exultation; while, to the last moment, the beamy shield of mercy is ready to be interposed for the saving of the endangered.

“Human doctrines are wavering and mutable: the doctrines of the blessed and adorable Jesus, our Saviour, are fixed and immutable. The traditions of men are dissimilar and inconsistent; the declarations of the gospel are harmonious, not only with each other, but with the acknow-



ledged attributes of the Deity, and the well known condition of human nature.

“What do skeptics propose to give us in exchange for this system of Christianity, with its ‘hidden mysteries,’ ‘miracles,’ ‘signs and wonders?’ Doubt, confusion, obscurity, annihilation! Life—without higher motive than selfishness;—death—without hope! Is it for this that their zeal is so warmly displayed in proselyting? Is such the gain to accrue for the relinquishment of our souls? In very deed this is the utmost they have to propose, and we can only account for their rancorous efforts to render others like themselves, by reflecting that misery loves company.”

In the last letter which I ever received from him he observes: “I have just concluded the publication of the translation of Levasseur’s account of Lafayette’s progress through the United States, which will appear next week.

“My health has for the last week or two been very good, for me; since, notwithstanding my rather excessive application during this time, I continue to do well. My cough and expectoration are sufficiently troublesome; but, by light diet, and avoiding all irritation, I have but very little trouble from night sweats, and generally sleep tolerably well. My emaciation does not appear to advance very rapidly, though there is no reason to believe it will cease.

“My time is so exceedingly occupied by the literary business I am engaged in, that it is with great difficulty that I can attend to any other affairs. However, I have always intended to leave behind me the sort of memoranda you wish for, which my friends may use at their discretion. I have to-day, as above mentioned, concluded one book, which leaves me at liberty to write some long deferred letters. To-morrow I must resume my pen to complete some articles of zoology for the *Encyclopædia Americana*, now preparing in Boston. It shall be my constant endeavour to husband my strength to the last; and by doing as much as is consistent with safety for the good of my fellow creatures, endeavour to discharge a mite of the immense debt I owe for the never failing bounties of Providence.”

He did husband his strength, and he toiled with his pen almost to the last hours of his life; and by thus doing has furnished us with a singular evidence of the possibility of



uniting the highest attainments in science, and the most ardent devotion to letters, with the firmest belief and the purest practice of the Christian. But the period of his dissolution was not distant : the summons arrived ; and conscious that the messenger who had been long in waiting could not be bribed to tarry, he commended his little family in a fervent prayer to Him who has promised to be the "Father of the fatherless, and the widow's God ;" and then with uplifted eyes and hands, and a face beaming with joy and confidence, resigned his spirit into the arms of his Redeemer, on the morning of the 17th of April, 1830, aged thirty-two years.

A friend who was his constant companion during his sickness, and witnessed his last moments, writes me thus :—

"You ask me to give you an account of his last moments : they were such as have robbed me of all terror of death, and will afford me lasting comfort through life. The same self-composure and entire resignation which were so remarkable through his whole sickness, supported him to the end. O it was not death—it was a release from mortal misery to everlasting happiness ! Such calmness when he prayed for us all,—such a heavenly composure, even till the breath left him, you would have thought he was going only a short journey. During the day his sufferings had been almost beyond enduring. Frequently did he pray that the Lord would give him patience to endure all till the end, knowing that it could not be many hours ; and truly his prayers were heard. 'Lord Jesus, receive my soul,' were the last words he uttered ; and his countenance appeared as if he had a foretaste of heaven even before his spirit left this world."

I might enlarge, but I forbear. Allow me only to add, that there are those who feel that in the death of Dr. Godman the strongest ties of nature are torn asunder. While we mingle our sighs with theirs, let us delight to dwell upon those traits, and emulate those virtues, which we admired while he lived, and which death can never efface from the memory.

I cannot place before you, young gentlemen, in this, the commencement of your professional career, an example more worthy than the one we have been contemplating ;



but I admonish you, while you aspire to the honours he achieved, not to forget to mark the steps by which he reached the lofty eminence on which he stood. Keep constantly before you that thirst for knowledge, that ardent zeal, that stability and energy of purpose, that untiring industry, that ceaseless spirit of exertion which animated his bosom, and to the last urged him onward; and while you regret that a mind so active, ardent, and elevated, is no longer to impart its conceptions to others,—that the spirit-stirring voice which cheered the student, and guided his steps in the paths of science,—which delighted the social, and shed joy and gladness around the domestic circle, is silent in the grave,—cease not to emulate the noble love of truth, the simplicity of character, the honesty of intention, the piety and benevolence of heart which lighted up his pathway, and stripped the avenue to the grave of its terrors.



NOTE.—The rich imagination and deep-toned enthusiasm of Dr. Godman sometimes burst forth in impassioned poetry.

The following are specimens of his composition of this kind,—and present a picture of his meditations in view of his approaching dissolution :—

### A MIDNIGHT MEDITATION.

'Tis midnight's solemn hour ! now wide unfurl'd  
 Darkness expands her mantle o'er the world ;  
 The fire-fly's lamp has ceased its fitful gleam ;  
 The cricket's chirp is hush'd ; the boding scream  
 Of the gray owl is still'd ; the lofty trees  
 Scarce wave their summits to the failing breeze ;  
 All nature is at rest, or seems to sleep ;  
 'Tis thine alone, O man ! to watch and weep !  
 Thine 'tis to feel thy system's sad decay,  
 As flares the taper of thy life away  
 Beneath the influence of fell disease :—  
 Thine 'tis to *know* the want of mental ease  
 Springing from memory of time misspent ;  
 Of slighted blessings ; deepest discontent  
 And riotous rebellion 'gainst the laws  
 Of health, truth, heaven, to win the world's applause !

—Such was thy course, Eugenio, such thy harden'd heart,  
 Till mercy spoke, and death unsheath'd the dart,  
 'Twang'd his unerring bow, and drove the steel,  
 Too deep to be withdrawn, too wide the wound to heal :  
 Yet left of life a feeble, glimmering ray,  
 Slowly to sink and gently ebb away.

—And yet, how blest am I ?  
 While myriad others lie  
 In agony of fever or of pain,  
 With parching tongue and burning eye,  
 Or fiercely throbbing brain ;  
 My feeble frame, though spoil'd of rest,  
 Is not of comfort dispossess'd.  
 My mind awake, looks up to thee,  
 Father of mercy ! whose blest hand I see  
 In all things acting for our good,  
 Howe'er thy mercies be misunderstood.



—See where the waning moon  
 Slowly surmounts yon dark tree tops,  
 Her light increases steadily, and soon  
 The solemn night her stole of darkness drops ;  
 Thus to my sinking soul in hours of gloom  
 The cheering beams of hope resplendent come,  
 Thus the thick clouds which sin and sorrow rear  
 Are changed to brightness, or swift disappear.

Hark ! that shrill note proclaims approaching day ;  
 The distant east is streak'd with lines of gray ;  
 Faint warblings from the neighbouring groves arise,  
 The tuneful tribes salute the brightening skies.  
 Peace breathes around ; dim visions o'er me creep,  
 The weary night outwatch'd, thank God ! I too may  
 sleep.

*Lines written under a feeling of the immediate approach of death.*

The damps of death are on my brow,  
 The chill is in my heart,  
 My blood has almost ceased to flow,  
 My hopes of life depart ;

The valley and the shadow before me open wide ;  
 But thou, O Lord ! even there wilt be my guardian and my  
 guide,  
 For what is pain if thou art nigh its bitterness to quell ?  
 And where death's boasted victory, his last triumphant spell ?  
 O ! Saviour, in that hour when mortal strength is naught,  
 When nature's agony comes on, and every anguish'd thought  
 Springs in the breaking heart a source of darkest wo,  
 Be nigh unto my soul, nor permit the floods o'erflow.  
 To thee ! to thee alone, dare I raise my dying eyes ;  
 Thou didst for all atone, by thy wondrous sacrifice ;  
 O ! in thy mercy's richness extend thy smiles on me,  
 And let my soul outspcak thy praise throughout eternity !



THE SUMBUL.











