

Brief memoir of Dr. Thomas Bateman.

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Religious Tract Society (Great Britain)

Publication/Creation

London : Religious Tract Soc, [1830?]

Persistent URL

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No. 234. 6

BRIEF MEMOIR

OF

DR. THOMAS BATEMAN.

IN order to introduce to our readers the following interesting and useful Memoir, it is only necessary to state, for the sake of those of them who are unacquainted with the name of Dr. Bateman, that he was a physician of considerable eminence in London, and well known as the author of several medical works which we believe are held in high estimation in the profession; besides which, he conducted the medical department of Dr. Rees's Encyclopedia, and was joint editor of the Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal. His zeal and ability in superintending a Public Dispensary, and the House of Recovery or Fever Hospital, in London, were highly beneficial to those institutions, and to the public. He expired April 9, 1821, at Whitby, in Yorkshire, in the prime of life, at the age of 43 years.

The late Dr. Bateman settled in London soon after his graduation at Edinburgh in the year 1801; and his professional merits being very considerable, he was speedily elected Physician to two public institutions—a large Dispensary and the House of Recovery for Fever. He continued to distinguish himself, as he had done in Edinburgh, by his zeal and industry in the pursuit of science and literature; though he contrived to mix with his severer studies a large portion of the dissipations of gay society, and carried with him, into both these opposite pursuits, an energy of mind and of feeling which rendered him more than ordinarily susceptible of the enjoyments which either of them can afford. He always retained a high “sense of honour,” as it is called, and was strictly careful to avoid,

THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY, 56, PATERNOSTER-ROW,
INSTITUTED 1799.

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in all his conduct, every thing that the world esteems dis-
creditable. He lived, however, to see and to feel, what at
that time he had no conception of, how meagre a system
of morality is that which the world is satisfied with, com-
pared with the comprehensive morality of the New Testa-
ment—that Christian holiness without which “no man shall
see the Lord.” His habits of life thus concurring with the
natural corruption of the human heart, and estranging
him more and more from God, he soon became confirmed
in his leaning to the wretched doctrine of Materialism,
which he had been already tempted to adopt during the
pursuit of his anatomical and physiological studies at
Edinburgh. This lamentable tendency was strongly in-
creased by the society which he now fell into of some
men of considerable talent, who had already espoused all
the principles of that unphilosophical as well as unchris-
tian system; and though never able *fully* to embrace
those opinions himself, he was yet sufficiently influenced
by them to become sceptical respecting the truth of Divine
Revelation, and was therefore of course a stranger to the
hopes, as well as negligent of the duties, of Christianity.

In the summer of 1815, his health began to decline, and
in the following year a complaint in his eyes came on, which
threatened loss of sight, and precluded him from all his ac-
customed sources of occupation and amusement. Under
these circumstances, the writer of this memoir became his
constant companion and attendant; and for four years had
the misery of witnessing his total estrangement from God
and religion. His health continuing to decline, he left
London in July 1819, with an intention of trying the effect
of a sulphureous water at Middleton, in the county of
Durham, on his debilitated constitution. He was taken
ill on the road, and with difficulty reached a village near
Beverley, in Yorkshire; where he was obliged to remain
during the following winter; and finding, at length, that
his health required the sacrifice, he finally determined not
to attempt returning to London. He had for some time
been subject to attacks of the most alarming nervous lan-
guor, during which he was thought by all around him, as
well as by himself, to be dying; and these now returned
upon him continually, especially after using the least
bodily exertion. During the winter he was considerably

better; but on the return of warm weather, early in the spring of 1820, he had a severe attack of languor after a short ride. His dread of these attacks was so great, and they were brought on so frequently by the smallest fatigue, that he gradually relinquished all exertion, as he even believed that the exhaustion which would be produced by the effort of walking across a room, might prove fatal.

It was on Sunday the 9th of April that he first spoke to me on the subject of religion. He had passed the whole of the day in a state of extraordinary suffering, from languor, and a variety of nervous feelings, which he always said it was impossible to describe, farther than that they were inconceivably painful and distressing: and he went to bed at night with a firm persuasion that he should never again quit it; and, in fact, he did confine himself to it for the following three weeks, from the mere apprehension of the consequences of exertion. Religion was a subject which, for many reasons, had never been discussed between us. Though the tenour of his life had made me but too well acquainted with the state of his mind, he had always avoided any declaration of his opinions, knowing the pain it would give me to hear them. He was habitually fond of argument, and skilled in it; and I knew that I was quite incompetent to argue with him. I considered too that the habit of disputing in favour of any opinion, only serves, in general, to rivet it more firmly in the mind; men commonly finding their own arguments more convincing than those of their adversaries. And, above all, I knew that this was a case in which mere argument must always be insufficient,—for “it is with the heart that man believeth unto righteousness:” and in most, if not all, cases of scepticism, the will and the affections need to be set right as well as the understanding.—On the evening of the day I have mentioned, Dr. Bateman had been expressing to me his conviction that he could not live much longer, and complaining of the dreadful nervous sensations which continually harassed him; and then he added, “But all these sufferings are a just punishment for my long scepticism, and neglect of God and religion.” This led to a conversation, in the course of which he observed, that medical men were very generally sceptical; and that the mischief arose from what

he considered a natural tendency of some of their studies to lead to materialism. I replied, that the mischief appeared to me to originate rather in their neglect to examine into the evidences of the truth of the Bible, *as an actual revelation from God*; because, if a firm conviction of that were once established, the authority of the Scriptures must be paramount; and the tendency of all inferior studies, in opposition to their declarations, could have no weight. He said, he believed I was right, and that he had in fact been intending to examine fully into the subject, when the complaint in his eyes came on, and shut him out from reading. Our conversation ended in his permitting me to read to him the first of Scott's "Essays on the most important Subjects in Religion," which treats of "The Divine Inspiration of the Scriptures." He listened with intense earnestness; and when it was concluded, exclaimed, "This is demonstration! complete demonstration!" He then asked me to read to him the account given in the New Testament of the resurrection of our Saviour; which I did from all the four Evangelists. I read also many other passages of Scripture, with some of which he was extremely struck; especially with that declaration, that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." 1 Cor. ii. 14.

For two or three days he showed increasing interest in the subject of religion; and I read to him continually the Scriptures, and other books which seemed to me best calculated to give him the information he thirsted for. When I went into his room a few mornings after, he said, "It is quite impossible to describe to you the change which has taken place in my mind: I feel as if a new world was opened to me, and all the interests and pursuits of *this* have faded into nothing in comparison with it. They seem so mean, and paltry, and insignificant, that my blindness, in living so long immersed in them, and devoted to them, is quite inconceivable and astonishing to myself." He often expressed in the strongest terms, and with many tears, his deep repentance, and his abhorrence of himself for his former sinful life and rebellion against God; but he seemed to have from the first so clear a view

of the all-sufficiency of the Saviour's atonement, and of the Christian scheme of salvation, as freed him at once from that distrust of forgiveness which is so apt to afflict persons at the first sight of their sins, and of the purity and holiness of Him "with whom they have to do." The self-abasing views which he entertained of himself necessarily enhanced his sense of the pardoning love and mercy of God in Christ Jesus, thus graciously extended to him; and which he felt so strongly, that he was filled with the liveliest emotions of gratitude and joy: in this happy state he continued for several days.

He soon, however, experienced an afflicting reverse of feeling. One evening I left him to visit a near relative, at that time confined to her room in a precarious state of health; and his mother, who had been in attendance upon her, took my place at the bed-side of her son. Dr. Bate man told her, that I had been reading to him various detached portions of Scripture, and that he now wished to hear the New Testament read regularly through from the beginning. She consequently began to read, and had proceeded as far as the tenth chapter of St. Matthew, when he suddenly exclaimed, that he could not believe in the miracles of the Saviour, and that therefore he must perish for ever. This suggestion of his spiritual enemy threw him into a state of the most dreadful anguish, and I was immediately sent for to his bed-side. On my arrival he had become a little more composed, but was still in great agitation; and was praying in agony to be saved, and not to be given up to this dreadful state of unbelief. To comfort his mind, we said what we could from Scripture, and from the experience of other Christians: and he was a little relieved by hearing some passages from an Essay in the volume before mentioned, "On the Warfare and Experience of Believers;" finding that his was not, as he had supposed, a case of new occurrence; but that the author of that work was already acquainted with its symptoms, and augured favourably of them, as often accompanying the progress of religion in the soul. Still the idea that his death was fast approaching, and that there was no hope of his mind being convinced before it arrived, quite overwhelmed him. Feeling ourselves to be very inadequate guides and comforters in these afflicting

circumstances, we gladly adopted a suggestion of a friend that we should request a neighbouring clergyman of piety and judgment to visit him. Dr. Bateman himself grasped eagerly at the proposal, and I wrote immediately to the clergyman in question; but he was from home, and was not expected to return for two or three weeks. A few days after this unwelcome intelligence, Dr. Bateman told me, he had no doubt this disappointment was for his good; and that it was better for him to be left to himself, as he did not think any thing could have convinced him so fully of *the efficacy of prayer*, as the sensible relief which he experienced from it during those conflicts of doubt and unbelief with which his mind continued to be harassed. He added, that he now spent whole nights in prayer. He felt perfectly assured that these doubts were the suggestions of the great adversary of souls, and remarked, that they were vividly and manifestly darted, as it were, into his mind, instead of arising from his own reflections, or resulting from any train of reasoning; and the absurdity of them in many instances, was so obvious, that his judgment detected it at once, though he still had not power to drive them from the hold they took on his imagination, or to banish them, for the time, from his thoughts.

These paroxysms of distress and conflict, which sometimes lasted many hours, he continued subject to for about a fortnight: but they gradually became shorter and less violent, and he experienced increasingly great relief from prayer during their continuance; till at length they subsided entirely, and left his mind satisfied on all those points which had before presented so many obstacles to his belief.

About this time, he received an unexpected visit from a medical friend, whose piety and truly Christian character distinguish him still more than his eminent abilities and professional skill. This gentleman, with great difficulty, succeeded in persuading him that he was by no means in that state of danger and debility which he had apprehended, and that he had the power of taking exercise, if he could but exert sufficient resolution to attempt it. Experiment convinced him that this opinion was correct.

he was prevailed upon to leave his bed, and, in a very few days, was able to be some hours daily in the open air, and to take considerable exercise; and it is remarkable, that from this time he had no return of languor after fatigue, except in one instance. Thus was he delivered, by the gracious providence of God, from those overwhelming apprehensions of immediate death which had been so instrumental in bringing him to Christ, as soon as they had effected that blessed purpose.

He now rarely spoke of the state of his mind and feelings; for such was the extreme reserve of his character, that it could only be overcome by deep and powerful emotions; and when no longer agitated by these, he returned to his natural habits, and was silent on the subject that most deeply interested him. Still it was abundantly evident that it *did* interest him. The avidity with which he listened to the word of God—his eagerness to attend public worship, (which for many years he had entirely neglected,) and the heartfelt and devout interest which he obviously took in the service—his enlarged and active benevolence—the change which had taken place in his tastes, inclinations, and pursuits—all testified that he was indeed “brought out of darkness into marvellous light:” “old things had passed away, and all things had become new.”

In the course of the summer his health and strength were considerably recruited; but towards the close of it, a little over-exertion in walking brought on an accession of fever, and a great aggravation of all the symptoms of his disorder; but still he continued able to take a little exercise. While he remained in the country he had much leisure, which was devoted entirely to religious reading; for every other subject had now become insipid and uninteresting to him; and never did the pursuits of science and literature afford him such vivid enjoyment as he now received from these hallowed studies. In November he removed to Whitby for the winter, and his health continued in much the same state till a short time before Christmas, when a walk, rather longer than usual, again produced increased fever and debility; and from that period his strength and appetite visibly declined, while his spirit was

as visibly ripening for heaven. His faith and patience were strengthened, his hope was increased, his charity enlarged; yet he was naturally so extremely reserved in the expression of his feelings, that he rarely spoke of them till within the last month of his life, when he rejoiced "with a joy unspeakable and full of glory," which bore down all opposition; for he experienced a happiness to which all the accumulated enjoyments of his whole previous life could bear no proportion or comparison, even that "peace of God" which "passeth all understanding," and which must be felt, or at least witnessed, in order to form any just conception of its nature and effects. What a striking example did our dying friend now exhibit to us! From his early youth he had devoted himself with delight and industry to the acquisition of knowledge, and the pursuits of literature and science; and he "*had his reward*" in the honour and reputation which his success had procured for him, a reward which he keenly enjoyed and very highly prized. Those who have known only the pleasures which arise from worldly gratifications, surely ought to recollect, that, being confessedly ignorant of those spiritual enjoyments which they despise, they cannot be competent to decide upon their reality or their value: it belongs only to those who have experienced *both*, to appreciate either. And how did Dr. Bateman appreciate them? In contrasting, as he frequently did, his present happiness with all that he had formerly enjoyed and *called* happiness, he seemed always at a loss to find words to express how poor, and mean, and despicable, all earthly gratifications appeared to him, when compared with that "joy and peace in believing," which now filled his soul; and "one particle of which," he sometimes said, "ten thousand worlds would not tempt him to part with." And it should be remembered, that this was not the evidence of a man disappointed in his worldly pursuits: he had already, as before observed, "*had his reward*" in this world—he had experienced the utmost success in the path which he had chosen—he had been keenly susceptible of intellectual pleasures; and of these, as well as of all inferior amusements, he had enjoyed more than a common portion; but when the only object that can satisfy the affections, and fill the capacities of a rational and immortal being was revealed to him—when he viewed

by the eye of faith that life and immortality which are brought to light by the gospel—earthly fame, and honour, and pleasure, sunk into the dust; and, in reflecting upon his past life, the only thing that gave him any satisfaction was the hope that his labours might have been beneficial to his fellow-creatures, for whom his charity had now become unbounded. He often said, that “the blessing of his conversion was never out of his mind day or night; that it was a theme of perpetual thanksgiving; and that he never awoke in the night without being overwhelmed with joy and gratitude in the recollection of it.” He always spoke of his long bodily afflictions with the most devout thankfulness, as having been instrumental in bringing him to God; and considered his almost total blindness as an especial mercy, because, by shutting out external objects, it had enabled him to devote his mind more entirely to spiritual things. Often, latterly, he expressed an ardent desire to “depart and to be with Christ;” but always added, that he was cheerfully willing to wait the Lord’s pleasure, certain that if he was continued in this world it was for his own good, and to make him more “meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light.”

He bore his bodily afflictions with the most exemplary patience, and even cheerfulness, and continually expressed his thankfulness that they were not greater; sometimes saying, “What a blessing it is to be allowed to slip gently and gradually out of life as I am doing!” He would not allow any one to speak of his *sufferings*, always saying, “they did not deserve a stronger name than inconveniences.” He neither complained himself, nor would permit others to complain for him. Once, when the nurse who attended him said, “Oh, that cough! how troublesome it is!” he replied, “Have a little patience, nurse; I shall soon be in a better world; and what a glorious change that will be!” Indeed, the joy of his mind seemed to have absorbed all sense of his physical sufferings. I once remarked to him, that he appeared to have experienced no intermission of these joyful feelings; and he answered, “For some months past *never*, and never the smallest rising of any thing like impatience or complaint.” His mind, naturally active and ardent, retained all its

powers in full vigour to the last moment of his life; and was never once clouded or debilitated, even in the most depressing nervous languors. Indeed, after the whole current of his tastes and affections had been turned into a new channel, its ardour and activity rather increased than diminished, from the deep conviction which he felt of the superiority of his present views and pursuits to all that had hitherto engrossed him. During the last week of his life, especially, the strength and clearness of his intellect and of his spiritual perceptions, were very remarkable; and on its being one day observed to him, that as his bodily powers decayed, those of his soul seemed to become more vigorous, he replied, "They do, exactly in an inverse ratio. I have been very sensible of it."

He conversed with the greatest animation all the day, and almost all the night, preceding his death, principally on the joys of heaven and the glorious change he was soon to experience; often exclaiming, "What a happy hour will the hour of death be!" He dwelt much on the description of the new Jerusalem in the Revelation of St. John, and listened with great delight to several passages from Baxter's "Saint's Rest," and to some of Watts's hymns on the same subject. Once in the night he said to his mother, "Surely you are not in tears! Mine is a case that calls for rejoicing, and not for sorrow. Only think what it will be to drop this poor, frail, perishing body, and to go to the glories that are set before me!" Not more than an hour before his death, when he had been expressing his faith and hope in very animated terms, I remarked that the uniformity of faith and of feeling expressed at different times, and in different places, by such as were evidently taught by "one and the selfsame Spirit" might justly be considered as an incontrovertible proof of the truth of the Bible, the promises and descriptions of which were so strikingly fulfilled and exemplified. He entered into the argument with his accustomed energy, and assented to its truth with delight.

It seemed remarkable, that though he had during his whole illness been very sensible of his increasing weakness, and had watched and marked accurately all its gradations, yet he spoke, in the last moments of his life,

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of going down stairs as usual, (he had been carried up and down for several days,) and said "it could not require more than a very few weeks now to wear him out;" not appearing to be at all aware that his end was so very near, till about half an hour before his death. Finding himself extremely languid, he took a little milk, and desired that air might be admitted into the room; and on being asked if he felt relieved at all, he said, "Very little; I can hardly distinguish, indeed, whether this is languor or drowsiness which has come over me; but it is a very agreeable feeling." Soon after, he said suddenly, "I surely must be going now, my strength sinks so fast;" and on my making some observation on the glorious prospect before him, he added, "Oh, yes! I am GLAD to go, if it be the Lord's will." He shut his eyes and lay quite composed, and by and by said, "What glory! the angels are waiting for me!" Then, after another short interval of quiet, he added, "Lord Jesus, receive my soul!" and to those who were about him, "Farewell!" These were the last words he spoke. He gradually and gently sunk away; and in about ten minutes breathed his last, calmly and without a struggle, at nine in the morning of the 9th of April 1821, the very day on which, twelve months before, his mind had been first awakened to the hopes and joys of the ever blessed gospel.

What a contrast did his actual departure form to what I had reason to apprehend, when I watched over his couch in London, expecting that every moment would be his last; and when, with a hard indifference and insensibility, he talked only of going to his "last sleep!" And how can I worthily acknowledge the goodness of Almighty God, who effected such a change in his state!

It appears that he preceded his revered, though unknown instructor, Mr. Scott, exactly one week. He never ceased to remember, with the deepest gratitude, his obligations to that excellent man. It was only the evening before his death, that he was recommending with great fervency to a young friend, whose mother, under affliction, was first beginning to inquire after religious truth, to engage her to read "Scott's Essays," acknowledging, with

fervent gratitude, the benefit he had himself received from that work, and concluding an animated eulogium, by saying, "How have I prayed for that man!" What a blessed meeting may we not suppose they have had in the world of glory!

The medical friend before alluded to has most justly remarked, that "the entire simplicity and sincerity of Dr. Bateman's natural character give additional value to all that fell from him. He never used a language that was *at all* at variance with his real feelings, and was in no degree given to vain imaginations." This testimony is very true; and this remarkable simplicity and sobriety of his natural character remained unaltered in the great revolution which took place in his principles and dispositions. He went into no exaggerations of feelings, or excesses of enthusiasm. And surely the merciful Providence which preserved his sound understanding, in all its integrity, to the last moment of his life, must silence the gainsayer and "the disputer of this world," who might strive to attribute the sacred influence of religion on his mind to the errors of an intellect impaired by long disease and suffering.



London: Printed by A. APPLGATH, Stamford-street, for the RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY; and sold by J. DAVIS, 56, Paternoster-row; at the Society's Depository, 15, Piccadilly, Manchester; by J. NISBET, 21, Berner's-street, Oxford-street; and by other Booksellers.

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