

Obituary.

On the 9th of March last, at his residence in Colmore-row, Birmingham, Mr. James Meredith departed this life, in the ninety-sixth year of his age. He was born on the 20th February, 1753, in the parish of Brampton-Brian, Herefordshire, and was the youngest of twelve children. In his early years he was watched over with tenderest care by a most affectionate mother, to whom throughout the remainder of his life, he felt, that under the Divine Providence, the deepest debt of gratitude was due. He was educated in the Free Grammar School of his native village, and his father admirably seconded the moral and religious instruction which he there received. The happy result of such an education was soon exemplified in his character, for when reason and freedom began to dawn, and assume their supremacy, he had acquired the love of reading, particularly such works as had a religious tendency, and was seriously impressed with the indispensable necessity of an orderly and good life,—of a life of piety, integrity, and morality, in a strict and conscientious obedience to the Divine precepts of revealed religion, as the only sure ground of solid prosperity in this world, and of enduring felicity in the world to come. At the age of twenty-one he came to reside in Birmingham, and, as might be supposed from his careful education and early predilections, he was strongly attached to the communion of the Established Church. He was constant in his attendance at the services, though he appears to have had no sectarian repugnance occasionally to visit other places of worship. In 1779 he was persuaded by a clergyman to read Newton's celebrated dissertation on the prophecies, which afforded him considerable pleasure. He was struck, however, more particularly with the good bishop's views of the Millennium, which led him to conclude, that a more glorious state of the church on earth was not only to be expected, but was certainly and soon to be realised. While under the influence of this impression, the first French Revolution was achieved, and it appeared to him so extraordinary an event, as to warrant the opinion, that it was probably the commencement of a cycle of great changes, designed to usher in

the new promised era. About twelve months afterwards, he was engaged in conversation with some intimate friends, when one of them, a clergyman, spoke of some very peculiar books recently introduced into the Birmingham Old Library, of which Mr. Meredith was a shareholder. One of these was described as a curious "Treatise on Heaven and Hell," written, it was said, by a visionary impostor of the name of Swedenborg. To this was added the usual foul calumnies which have been so industriously and so unworthily circulated respecting that truly venerable, learned, and pious author; circulated by such as shamelessly avow their ignorance of his writings, and as a species of pious, and as they imagine defensible fraud, to prevent them from being read. With them the contemptible end justifies the atrocious means; but how often, in the order of Providence, is such infamy defeated, and how certainly does it recoil on the head of the slanderer! In Mr. Meredith's case an intense desire was excited to peruse the wonderful but forbidden book. He embraced the earliest opportunity of obtaining it, but soon threw it aside under the bias he had received. Months rolled away, and yet there remained with him a lingering desire to become further acquainted with the mysterious subjects which had been presented to his notice. Several other works by the same author, together with a few others in harmony therewith, were in the library, and he was prompted to begin reading again. He was very soon truly astonished to find how superior, both on Scriptural grounds, and from rational considerations, were at least many of the views of religion presented in those works, to those that were commonly entertained. At this particular period business called him to Manchester, and entering into earnest conversation with a fellow-passenger, on the engrossing topics connected with the French Revolution, he spoke of Newton's "Dissertation" and the Millennial age, and expressed his opinion that the great and unexampled changes taking place might be the promised precursors to its speedy establishment. It was some time after that he was enabled clearly to perceive that the

great and rapid changes which then began to agitate the whole habitable world, and have been in operation ever since, were but the outward effects of the last judgment in the spiritual world, by which preparation is to be indeed made for fulfilment of prophecy,—in the grand events of the Lord's second Advent, not in person, but in the power and glory of his Word,—and the establishment on the earth of the Lord's last and best and universal dispensation of goodness and truth, to continue before him and accomplish his will for ever. Mr. Meredith's fellow-passenger seemed, therefore, to coincide with his views, and observed, that he had with him a few numbers of a very remarkable periodical then publishing in London (the "Magazine of Knowledge"), and begged him to accept a copy ; which, on examination, he found, to his utter surprise, treated of the very same important subjects which had so much attracted and commanded his attention in the works of Swedenborg. During the conversation, the passenger mentioned the name of a most excellent and intelligent clergyman of the Church of England, in Manchester, whom he was going to visit, stating that a volume of his admirable sermons had just issued from the press. Mr. Meredith immediately expressed a wish that his companion would, if possible, procure a copy for him, but that his own stay in Manchester would be very limited, and his time completely occupied. The coach arrived at its destination, and Mr. Meredith saw no more of the gentleman with whom he had been travelling, until the time for setting out on his return home, when to his astonishment, at half-past four o'clock in the morning, he appeared with radiant countenance at the coach door with the book in his hand, and not withstanding so brief an acquaintance, earnestly insisted that Mr. Meredith should accept it, as a token of affectionate respect, and as the pledge of a sincere desire to promote his eternal well-being. The gift was received with warmest acknowledgments, and on inquiring the name of the stranger-friend to whom he was so deeply indebted, was informed that it was Mr. Sturgeon,—a name well known to the New Church, and which will call to the remembrances of many, one of the most cordial receivers and zealous promoters of the heavenly doctrines.

These sermons engrossed the attention, and excited the interest of Mr. Meredith on his journey home. A few weeks afterwards the New Jerusalem Temple in Birmingham was opened, and he was among the number of those who attended the services. He was now more than ever alive to the New Church doctrines ; he became a regular attendant at worship ; and he was introduced to the minister (the Rev. J. Proud), who lent him books, answered his inquiries, and solved his difficulties. Notwithstanding the readiness, however, with which he appeared to accept the enlightened views of the New Dispensation, which were so peculiarly exhilarating to him, he was, at times, infested with many doubts as to their verity, and sometimes even questioned whether the whole effect upon his mind was not an arch delusion. But these painful states of vacillation and perplexity, arising chiefly from his previous education and intercourse, were at once, and for ever, dispelled by the publication of Hindmarsh's masterly defence of the New Church doctrines, in his unanswerable reply to the letters of Dr. Priestley. This work, too, he read on a journey, and from that time to the latest period of conscious existence on earth, he became immovably confirmed in his faith. He soon began to make himself useful in various ways, and always found special delight in the performance of any good work. In the year subsequent to that in which he read "Hindmarsh's Letters," he had the inexpressible satisfaction of being introduced to the Rev. John Clowes, M.A., the rector of St. John's Church, Manchester, and late Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, the author of the sermons which had interested him so much, and whom he ever afterwards regarded (as who that had the distinguished privilege of knowing him, did not?) with the greatest veneration and esteem. It was in company of Mr. Clowes, his highly-valued minister, Mr. Proud, and Mr. Salmon, in the year 1796, then on a visit to Dr. Mather, of Wolverhampton, that he was introduced to an acquaintance with Miss Mather, his future wife. He had lived to the age of forty-four a bachelor, not, as he has often said, that he was at all indifferent to the holy and honourable estate of matrimony, but that the Divine Providence of the Lord so over-ruled it for the

promotion of his best because his eternal interests, that he should not, at an earlier period, enter into the conjugal state. The nuptials were soon after celebrated with inmost satisfaction both to themselves and their friends. Their agreement in the things of religion, and the harmony of their mutual affection, were uninterrupted sources of unspeakable delight. After aiding him in the important and arduous duties of educating a numerous family, Mrs. Meredith's bodily frame sank under one of the most excruciating diseases to which in this mortal state we are liable. She bore her sufferings with Christian firmness and resignation, and on the 4th July, 1824, he bade her farewell for a time. It was on both sides, as it respected their natural feelings, a bitter separation, but, under the consoling influences of the heavenly doctrines, it was regarded in a spiritual point of view, as a great deliverance and a joyful event ; for they had the certain hope that the conjugal union they had enjoyed on earth was not broken, but, for inscrutable and wisest reasons, had only been interrupted for a brief period, in its outward form, to be renewed amid the changeless scenes and ineffable joys of the kingdom of God ; and that the very interruption of their earthly intercourse would be made subservient to spiritual association, and to states of ever-increasing purity and happiness. During the remainder of his life, Mr. Meredith was a most ardent and active promoter of all the institutions of the New Church ; though for some years previous to his removal from among us, he was confined entirely to his house, and his natural memory failing him by degrees, he had but little intercourse with his friends. He departed this life, like a child sinking to its tranquil slumber, without pain or fear, and in a state of perfect peace. He had long placed his full reliance on the gracious promises of Him who never forsakes those that put their trust in Him. He believed from the heart that the Lord Jesus Christ is the only true God of heaven and earth, in whose glorious person the fulness of the Godhead, or the Divine Trinity, is concentrated. He cherished to the last an unshaken faith in the doctrines of the New Jerusalem, as expounded in the works of the enlightened Swedenborg,—which works, next to the word of God, whence those doctrines are

deduced, he prized more highly than any other writings whatsoever, and the sacred truths of which he deemed the greatest blessing man can receive, or heaven bestow; since he was fully assured that there are none beside so eminently calculated to promote “the glory of God in the highest, peace on earth, and good-will towards men.” Of these doctrines he had been a devout receiver nearly sixty years. Amid many and various trials he had found them a sure consolation,—a manifestation of “the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” Nor was our dear friend a mere lip professor of them, for he practically exemplified their influence in his conduct. He was neither elated above Christian humility by prosperous circumstances, nor depressed in his hopes and energies by such as appeared adverse. He was a truly worthy man,—a real Christian in heart and life ; exemplary in all the social and domestic duties,—and deservedly distinguished for his benevolence, urbanity, integrity, and cheerful piety; and had the satisfaction of enjoying the sincere esteem of all who had the pleasure of forming his acquaintance. Over his removal we cannot mourn, for he was gathered to the harvest as a shock of corn fully ripe. Of him, indeed, it may with truth be said, that as far as human frailty would permit, he endeavoured to fulfil the divine requirements—“ To do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.” (Micah vi. 8.)
Birmingham. E. M.

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