

MEMOIR OF WILLIAM MILLER.

WILLIAM MILLER was born at Pittsfield, Mass., Feb. 15, 1782. When he was four years of age, his father removed to the town of Hampton, Washington County, New York, the present residence of Mr. Miller. The country was then new, and his means of education, till nine years of age, were very small. His mother, however, taught him to read, so that when he was sent to the common school, he could read in the Bible, Psalter, and an old Hymn Book, which at that time constituted the whole of his father's library. After his ninth year, he was sent to school three months in the year, till he was fourteen. During this time, he was noted by his companions as a prodigy for learning, as they called it, particularly in the branches of spelling, reading, and writing. At the age of fourteen, he became anxious to obtain books to read. The first history he obtained was *Robinson Crusoe*; and the first novel he ever saw was *Robert Boyle*. He read them with avidity, and being so much interested in them, he read them many times over. He then became still more anxious to obtain books, especially histories and journals of travelers. A number of gentlemen in the vicinity of his father's residence, on being made acquainted with his love of reading, kindly offered him the privilege of their private libraries, which he accepted with much gratitude. From this time till he was twenty-one years of age, he was a most devoted student of ancient and modern history. The names of his benefactors ought to be given in this place, as they deserve to be honored for their liberality and love of learning. One of them was the *Hon. Matthew Lyon*, Representative to Congress from Vermont, from 1794 to 1798. The others were *Judge James Withereil*, afterwards judge of Michigan Territory; and *Alexander Cruikshanks, Esq.*, of Whitehall, formerly of Scotland. By the kindness of these gentlemen, he was enabled to store his mind with a vast collection of historical facts, which have since been of so much service to him in the illustration of the prophecies. Possessing a strong mind and a retentive memory, he appropriated the contents of those gentlemen's libraries to his own use; and even now, after a lapse of more than thirty years, it is astonishing to observe the correctness of his frequent references to these historical facts and dates in his extemporaneous lectures. p. 1, Para. 1, [MEMOIR].

At the age of twenty-two, he was married, and settled in

Poultney, Vt. Here, he was still favored with the privilege of pursuing his favorite study; having free access to a large public library. Here also he became acquainted with the deistical writings of Voltaire, Hume, Paine, Ethan Allen, and others. He studied them closely, and at length professedly became a Deist. The principal men in the village were Deists; but, as a class, they were good citizens, and as a general thing were moral, and of serious deportment. With these he was associated about twelve years, in the defense of deistical sentiments. p. 1, Para. 2, [MEMOIR].

In the last war with Great Britain, he received a captain's commission in the United States' service, and served in the army until the 25th of June, 1815, after peace was declared. He then moved to his present residence, Low Hampton, where the year following, 1816, he was converted from Deism to the Christian faith, and united with the regular Baptist church in that place, of which he is now a member in good standing. p. 2, Para. 1, [MEMOIR].

We gather the following facts relating to his past history and experience from his letters to us on this subject. The following connected account is made out from them, mostly in his own words: p. 2, Para. 2, [MEMOIR].

"In my youth, between the years of seven and ten, I was often concerned about the welfare of my soul; particularly in relation to its future destiny. I spent much time in trying to invent some plan, whereby I might please God, when brought into his immediate presence. Two ways suggested themselves to me, which I tried. One was, to be very good, to do nothing wrong, tell no lies, and obey my parents. But I found my resolutions were weak, and soon broken. The other was to sacrifice; by giving up the most cherished objects I possessed. But this also failed me; so that I was never settled and happy in mind, until I came to Jesus Christ. While I was a Deist, I believed in a God, but I could not, as I thought, believe the *Bible* was the *word of God*. The many contradictions, and inconsistencies, which I thought could be shown, made me suppose it to be a work of designing men, whose object was to enslave the mind of man; operate on their hopes and fears, with a view to aggrandize themselves. The history of religion as it had been presented to the world, and particularly by the historians of the eighteenth century, was but a history of blood, tyranny, and oppression; in which the common people

were the greatest sufferers. I viewed it as a system of *craft*, rather than of *truth*. Besides, the advocates of Christianity admitted that the Bible was so dark and intricate that no man could understand it. This always was to me an inconsistent idea of God; and even made the Bible appear more like the oracles of the heathen gods, than like the wisdom of the just and righteous God: To give us the Scriptures to teach us the way of eternal life, and at the same time clothe them in a mantle of mysticism, so that no man could understand them! Reveal his will, which we cannot understand, and then punish us for disobedience! How can such a being be called either wise or good? p. 3, Para. 1, [MEMOIR].

These, and the like, were my arguments against the Bible. In the mean time, I continued my studies, storing my mind with historical knowledge. The more I read, the more dreadfully corrupt did the character of man appear. I could discern no bright spot in the history of the past. Those conquerors of the world, and heroes of history, were apparently but demons in human form. All the sorrow, suffering, and misery in the world, seemed to be increased in proportion to the power they obtained over their fellows. I began to feel very distrustful of all men. In this state of mind I entered the service of my country. I fondly cherished the idea, that I should find one bright spot at least in the human character, as a star of hope: a *love of country* - PATRIOTISM. But two years in the service was enough to convince me that I was in an error in this thing also. When I left the service I had become completely disgusted with man's public character. I retired from the busy scenes of public life, in which I had been engaged about ten years; and thought to seek for that happiness, which had always eluded my pursuit in my former occupations, in the domestic circle. For a little space, a care and burden was taken off from my mind; but after a while I felt the need of some more active employment. My life became too monotonous. I had lost all those pleasing prospects, which in youth I expected to enjoy in riper years. It appeared to me that there was nothing good on earth. Those things in which I expected to find some solid good had deceived me. I began to think man was no more than a brute, and the idea of hereafter was a dream; annihilation was a cold and chilling thought; and accountability was sure destruction to all. The heavens were as brass over my head, and the earth as iron under my feet. ETERNITY! *What was it? And death, why was it?* The

more I reasoned, the further I was from demonstration. The more I thought, the more scattered were my conclusions. I tried to stop thinking; but my thoughts would not be controlled. I was truly wretched;; but did not understand *the cause*. I murmured and complained, but knew not of whom.
p. 3, Para. 2, [MEMOIR].

I felt that there was a wrong, but knew not how, or where, to find the right. I mourned, but without hope. I continued in this state of mind for some months; at length, when brought almost to despair, God by his Holy Spirit opened my eyes. I saw Jesus as a friend, and my only help, and the word of God as the *perfect rule* of duty. Jesus Christ became to me the chiefest among ten thousand, and the Scriptures, which before were dark and contradictory, now became the lamp to my feet and light to my path. My mind became settled and satisfied. I found the Lord God to be a Rock in the midst of the ocean of life. The Bible now became my chief study; and I can truly say I searched it with great delight. I found the half was never told me. I wondered why I had not seen its beauty and glory before, and marvelled that I could ever have rejected it. I found everything revealed that my heart could desire, and a remedy for every disease of the soul. I lost all taste for other reading, and applied my heart to get wisdom from God.
p. 4, Para. 1, [MEMOIR].

"I laid by all commentaries, former views and prepossessions, and determined to read and try to understand for myself. I then began the reading of the Bible in a methodical manner; and by comparing scripture with scripture, and taking notice of the manner of prophesying, and how it was fulfilled, (so much as had received its accomplishment,) I found that prophecy had been literally fulfilled, after understanding the figures and metaphors by which God had more clearly illustrated the subjects conveyed in said prophecies. I found, on a close and careful examination of the Scriptures, that God had explained all the figures and metaphors in the Bible, or had given us rules for their explanation. And in so doing, I found, to my joy, and as I trust with everlasting gratitude to God, that the Bible contained a system of revealed truths, so clearly and simply given that the 'wayfaring man though a fool need not err therein.' And I discovered that God had in his word revealed '*times and seasons*;' and in every case where time had been revealed, every event was accomplished as predicted, (except the case

of Nineveh, in Jonah,) in the time and manner; therefore I believed all would be accomplished. p. 5, Para. 1, [MEMOIR].

"I found, in going through with the Bible, the end of all things was clearly and emphatically predicted, both as to time and manner. I believed; and immediately the duty to publish this doctrine, that the world might believe and get ready to meet the Judge and Bridegroom at his coming, was impressed upon my mind. I need not here go into a detailed account of my long and sore trials. Suffice it to say, that after a number of years, I was compelled by the Spirit of God, the power of truth and the love of souls, to take up my cross and proclaim these things to a dying and perishing world. p. 5, Para. 2, [MEMOIR].

"The first time I ever spake in public on this subject was in the year 1832. The Lord poured his grace on the congregation, and many believed to the salvation of their souls. From that day to this, doors have been opened to me, to proclaim this doctrine of the second coming of Christ, among almost all denominations, so that I have not been able to comply with but a small portion of the calls. p. 6, Para. 1, [MEMOIR].

"I have lectured in the states of New York, Vermont, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania, and Canada. In every place, I think, two good effects have been produced. The church has been awakened, and the Bible has been read with more interest. In many, and I might say almost in every place, a revival of religion has followed, which has lasted for months. Infidelity in many cases has been made to yield her iron grasp on the mind of many an individual. Deism has yielded to the truth of God's word, and many men of strong minds have acknowledged that the Scriptures must be of divine origin. The sandy foundation of Universalism, has been shaken in every place where it could be reached by an attendance on the whole course of lectures. And hundreds of men of sound minds and strong powers, have had their spider's web broken, and have got a more sure hope in an experimental knowledge of the justice of God, and the forgiveness of sin, through the blood and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. p. 6, Para. 2, [MEMOIR].

"As proof of the truth of the above facts, I would refer you to the many false reports which Universalists and

Infidels have industriously circulated in their periodicals and papers, concerning me and my views: the 'hundred years' mistake,' the 'refusal to sell my farm,' and the 'rail fence,' &c. &c. Stories too foolish for children to credit are promulgated as facts, sufficient to destroy the truth which is fairly proved by the word of God and history of ages past. Why use such false and weak arguments? Because the goddess Diana is in danger. It is evidence strong as holy writ, that when men use weak arguments and false productions, their cause is weak, and their foundation is trembling. p. 6, Para. 3, [MEMOIR].

"Furthermore. I have been fully convinced, that the effects of the promulgation of this doctrine on those who candidly hear, produce no little examination of the evidence of their hopes, founded upon the word of inspiration. The traditions of men too are brought before the public and tried by the unerring rule of God's word: such as a '*temporal millennium*,' the '*Jews' return*.' In one word, in a moral point of view, every effect is good; and if ever there is a '*midnight cry*' made, the effect must be similar to the one now produced, or it cannot have a scriptural fulfillment. 'Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps.' If this doctrine does not make men search the Scriptures, (lamp,) I cannot conceive what would. One more effect I will mention. In every place where I have been, the most pious, devoted, and living members of the churches do most readily embrace the views thus proclaimed; while the worldling professor, the pharisee, the bigot, the proud, haughty, and selfish, scoff at and ridicule the doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ. p. 7, Para. 1, [MEMOIR].

"And if ever God's word, in his second Epistle of Peter, can be fulfilled, surely it is so now: 'Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the creation.' Every word of this sign is literally fulfilled. In every place where I have been, the Infidel, the Universalist, and many who would be called teachers in our several sects of limitarians, before they are convicted, can all meet on the broad ground of scoffing, ridicule, and falsehood, to put down the doctrine which they are not prepared to meet; and even meet the Universalists on the ground that the judgment day was past at Jerusalem, rather than believe this

thrilling doctrine of immediate accountability. Mcknight thinks these scoffers will be in the church; how true is it so fulfilled. I have often blushed to see the hardihood of our priests who take the ground of 'my Lord delayeth his coming,' and publicly advocate the doctrine that it is a long while yet to come. 'And shall begin to smite his fellow-servants.' Hear them, calling all manner of names, 'false prophet,' 'visionary fanatic,' 'crazy old man,' &c. 'And to eat and drink with the drunken.' Join any other doctrine, however repugnant to their creeds, rather than consent to this. 'Pilate and Herod can make friends' against this doctrine of the coming of Christ. p. 7, Para. 2, [MEMOIR].

"In conclusion, although I have received scoffs from the worldly and profane, ridicule from the proud and haughty, contempt from the bigot and pharisee, and insult from the pulpit and press; yet I have one great consolation: God has never forsaken me, and their weapons have fallen harmless at my feet. Thousands have been brought to read their Bibles with more pleasure; hundreds have found faith in that word they once despised; false theories have been made to pass through a fiery ordeal; and undisputed errors have been searched out and exposed, and the 'word of God has mightily grown and multiplied.'" p. 8, Para. 1, [MEMOIR].

MR. MILLER'S INFLUENCE UPON THE PEOPLE. p. 8, Para. 2, [MEMOIR].

MUCH has been said in the pulpit, and by the editors of public journals, about the evil tendency of Mr. Miller's lectures. An orthodox clergyman of Lynn, (Rev. Parsons Cook,) thinks they are more demoralizing than the *theatre!* A minister in Boston, of high standing, stated to one of his hearers, that he thought it as great a sin for church members to attend these lectures, as to visit the theatre! Indeed, most of the ministers and laity of different denominations, who have not heard Mr. Miller, have judged unfavorably of his labors. It is supposed that the people are *frightened - excited* by terrific scenes connected with the conflagration of the world. To place this matter in its true light, we shall give, as a general illustration of Mr. Miller as a speaker, and the influence of his labors on the community at large, the following account of his visit and labors in Portland, Me., in March last. p. 9, Para. 1, [MEMOIR].

"MR. MILLER IN PORTLAND. Mr. Miller has been in Portland, lecturing to crowded congregations in Casco-street church, on his favorite theme, the end of the world, or literal reign of Christ for 1000 years. As faithful chroniclers of passing events, it will be expected of us that we say something of the man, and his peculiar views. p. 9, Para. 2, [MEMOIR].

"Mr. Miller is about sixty years of age; a plain farmer from Hampton, in the state of New York. He is a member of the Baptist church in that place, from which he brings satisfactory testimonials of good standing, and a license to improve publicly. He has, we understand, numerous testimonials also from clergymen of different denominations favorable to his general character. We should think him a man of but common-school education; evidently possessing strong powers of mind, which for about fourteen years have been almost exclusively bent to the investigation of scripture prophecies. The last eight years of his life have been devoted to lecturing on this favorite subject. p. 9, Para. 3, [MEMOIR].

"In his public discourses he is self-possessed and ready; distinct in his utterance, and frequently quaint in his expressions. He succeeds in chaining the attention of his auditory for an hour and a half to two hours; and in the management of his subject discovers much tact, holding frequent colloquies with the objector and inquirer, supplying the questions and answers himself in a very natural manner; and although grave himself, sometimes producing a smile from a portion of his auditors. p. 9, Para. 4, [MEMOIR].

"Mr. Miller is a great stickler for literal interpretations; never admitting the figurative, unless absolutely required to make correct sense or meet the event which is intended to be pointed out. He doubtless believes, most unwaveringly, all he teaches to others. His lectures are interspersed with powerful admonitions to the wicked, and he handles Universalism with gloves of steel. p. 10, Para. 1, [MEMOIR].

"He is evidently disposed to make but little allowance for those who think differently from him on the millennium; dealing often in terrible denunciations against such as oppose his peculiar views on this point; as he fully believes they are crying peace and safety when sudden

destruction cometh. Judging from what we see and hear, we should think his lectures are making a decided impression on many minds, favorable to his theory." p. 10, Para. 2, [MEMOIR].

This account of Mr. Miller is from the Rev. Mr. Springer, of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and editor of the "Maine Wesleyan Journal," from which we copy it. Mr. Miller, on reading the account, exclaimed, "I have found one honest editor!" Mr. Springer, it will be observed, is not a partisan of Mr. Miller. We commend him for his candor. p. 10, Para. 3, [MEMOIR].

The following extracts of letters from Elder Fleming, the pastor of the Christian church in Casco St., where Mr. Miller delivered his lectures, will show the legitimate effects of his labors. p. 10, Para. 4, [MEMOIR].

Immediately after the lectures were closed, Mr. Fleming writes: "Things here are moving powerfully. Last evening about 200 requested prayers, and the interest seems constantly increasing. The whole city seems agitated. Br. Miller's lectures have not the least effect to affright; they are far from it. The *great alarm* is among those who did not come near. Many who stayed away and opposed seem excited, and perhaps alarmed. But those who candidly hear are far from excitement and alarm. p. 10, Para. 5, [MEMOIR].

"The interest awakened by his lectures is of the most deliberate and dispassionate kind, and though it is the greatest revival I ever saw, yet there is the least passionate excitement. It seems to take the greatest hold on the *male* part of community. What produces the effect is this - Brother Miller simply takes the sword of the Spirit, unsheathed and naked, and lays its sharp edge on the naked heart, and it cuts! that is all. Before the edge of this mighty weapon, infidelity falls, and Universalism withers. False foundations vanish, and Babel's merchants wonder. It seems to me that this must be a little the nearest like apostolic revivals of anything modern times have witnessed." p. 11, Para. 1, [MEMOIR].

A short time after, he wrote again, as follows: "There has probably never been so much religious interest among the inhabitants of this place generally as at present; and Mr. Miller must be regarded, directly or indirectly, as the

instrument, although many, no doubt, will deny it; as some are very unwilling to admit that a good work of God can follow his labors; and yet we have the most indubitable evidence that this is the work of the Lord. It is worthy of note, that in the present interest there has been comparatively nothing like mechanical effort. There has been nothing like passionate excitement. If there has been excitement, it has been out of doors, among such as did not attend Br. Miller's lectures. p. 11, Para. 2, [MEMOIR].

"At some of our meetings since Br. Miller left, as many as 250, it has been estimated, have expressed a desire for religion, by coming forward for prayers; and probably between one and two hundred have professed conversion at our meeting; and now the fire is being kindled through this whole city, and all the adjacent country. A number of rum-sellers have turned their shops into meeting-rooms, and those places that were once devoted to intemperance and revelry, are now devoted to prayer and praise. Others have abandoned the traffic entirely, and are become converted to God. One or two gambling establishments, I am informed, are entirely broken up. *Infidels, Deists, Universalists,* and the most abandoned *profligates*, have been converted; some who had not been to the house of worship for years. Prayer-meetings have been established in every part of the city by the different denominations, or by individuals, and at almost every hour. Being down in the business part of our city, I was conducted into a room over one of the banks, where I found about thirty or forty men, of different denominations, engaged with one accord in prayer, at about eleven o'clock in the day-time! In short, it would be almost impossible to give an adequate idea of the interest now felt in this city. There is nothing like extravagant excitement, but an almost universal solemnity on the minds of all the people. One of the principal booksellers informed me that he had sold more Bibles in *one month*, since Br. Miller came here, than he had in any four months previous. A member of an orthodox church informed me that if Mr. Miller could now return, he could probably be admitted into any of the orthodox houses of worship, and he expressed a strong desire for his return to our city." p. 11, Para. 3, [MEMOIR].

Similar accounts might be given from most of the places where he has given a *full course of lectures*, to a society; the minister and church co-operating with him. We could name Boston, Cambridgeport, Watertown, and numerous places;

but we will refer to one more, viz., Portsmouth, N. H. The same glorious effects followed his labors in this place, as at Portland. We simply wish to give the testimony of the Unitarian minister of that town, relating to the *character of the revival*. We are the more particular on this point, because the advocates of revivals have charged Mr. Miller with getting up "*fanatical excitements*." Now we have an impartial witness on this point. Hear him; he says: p. 12, Para. 1, [MEMOIR].

"If I am rightly informed, the present season of religious excitement has been to a great degree free from what, I confess, has always made me dread such times, I mean those excesses and extravagances, which wound religion in the house of its friends, and cause its enemies to blaspheme. I most cheerfully express my opinion, that there will be in the fruits of the present excitement far less to regret, and much more for the friends of God to rejoice in, much more to be recorded in the book of eternal life, than in any similar series of religious exercises, which I have ever had the opportunity of watching." [*] p. 12, Para. 2, [MEMOIR].

Will the Rev. Parsons Cooke join with the editor of the "Trumpet" in ridiculing such revivals as these? Will he now pronounce these lectures "more demoralizing than the theatre?" *These* are the legitimate fruits of Mr. Miller's labors. Let his accusers beware, lest they be found fighting against God. [**] p. 13, Para. 1, [MEMOIR].

[[*] Sermon on Revivals, by Rev. A. P. Peabody.] p. 13, Para. 2, [MEMOIR].

[[**] The above testimony to the salutary influence of Mr. Miller's labors must suffice. If it were necessary, we could add a volume of similar testimony from ministers of almost all denominations.] p. 13, Para. 3, [MEMOIR].