

Obituary.

MR. THOMAS NORTON.—The inspired oracle has declared that *the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance.* And we may rest assured that the faithfulness of God will provide with unfailling certainty for the accomplishment of His own promises. But notwithstanding this as even the omnipotent Jehovah condescends to effect His purposes by the employment of instruments and the use of means, it surely ought to be recognized as the duty of the church of Christ to use all legitimate means to place on permanent record the memory of her worthiest sons. It is under this impression that these lines are written. Nor is this all, for it might be readily shown that the lives of such as have been exemplary for piety, are worthy not only of being transmitted to posterity, but also of being made known far beyond the limited sphere in which they may have moved. In this way they may be rendered not only a lasting but an extensive blessing. It is hoped that a brief memorial of the subject of this sketch may not be without its use.

Mr. Thomas Norton, of Burton-on-Trent, was born in the year 1795, at Cauldwell, a small village in the southern extremity of Derbyshire. Probably at the time of Mr. Norton's birth, his native village owed its chief interest to the small but somewhat popular General Baptist chapel which it contained, and with which his parents were connected. Our deceased friend was a worthy member of a worthy family, several of whom have been ornaments to the denomination with which he was for nearly half a century identified. The writer has not the means of knowing many of the details of his friend's early life. It will, however, be sufficient to say that he acquired such an education as boys of his class were at that time accustomed to receive, and which served his purpose in after

days. When his brief period of schooling was completed, the youth was taught the trade of a shoe maker, and continued to work at it in his native village for several years. But when approaching thirty years of age he removed to Burton and opened a shoe warehouse, which is still continued. About the same time he was united in marriage to Elizabeth Hood, who through his whole aftercourse, was his faithful companion and still survives as his sorrowing widow. However, amidst all these secular and temporal arrangements, highly important as they were each in its own line, the young tradesman and husband, felt deeply as indeed he had long felt, that he had other interests besides the worldly and the temporal, superior in their importance, and prior in their claims. He was a Christian both in theory, experience, and profession, and he resolved consistently to carry out his religious principles. For several years before this period, Mr. Norton had been a member of the Baptist church at Cauldwell, and he now began to feel the loss of those religious privileges to which he had been accustomed, and which were not only most congenial to his feelings, but almost indispensable to his spiritual life. He therefore set his heart on endeavouring to establish a church of his own denomination in the town in which the providence of God had cast his lot. The result was the formation of a church, consisting of eleven members, on the 30th of January, 1825. The ministers who officiated on this occasion so deeply interesting to all the parties concerned, were brethren Pike of Derby, and Orton of Hugglescote. The first of these eleven names is that of our departed friend, and we believe it may be safely said, that from that day to the close of his life, his conduct as a member of this small and struggling com-

munity, accorded well with the position which he then took and ever afterwards maintained. During many years from the formation of the church, Mr. Norton was humanly speaking the life and stay of the cause. His attendance not only on public worship, but at prayer-meetings and church-meetings was constant, although he had continually pressing upon him the cares of business and the deep solitudes of a numerous family. Such continued to be his course until advancing years and failing health compelled him in some degree to relax in these respects. There were few modes of supporting and promoting the cause of Christ in connection with the church of which he was a member which he did not attempt. He superintended the Sunday-school, took a leading part in the prayer-meetings, and occasionally gave a word of exhortation. A few years before his death, a number of his friends invited him to meet them at a social gathering in the school-room, when they took the opportunity of presenting him with a beautifully bound copy of Spurgeon's 'Saint and his Saviour,' together with a pair of silver-mounted spectacles, as a small token of their esteem, and as an acknowledgment of his long and faithful labours in the Sunday-school. One department of service in which our friend was long useful was that of leader of the choir. For this he was well fitted as much by grace as by nature. He was gifted with a fine voice on the one hand, and with deep and fervent devotional feeling on the other. He sang with the spirit and with the understanding also. It must not be passed over that for many years the subject of this brief notice served the church in the office of deacon; and until within a few months of his decease was treasurer to the church. In fact he lived under the habitual sense of obligation to Christ. He felt that he owed everything to his Saviour, and he was desirous to consecrate himself and his best services to his

Great Benefactor, being fully conscious that at best he was but an unprofitable servant. Until beyond the period of middle age, Mr. Norton was favoured with sound health and with more than an average amount of vigour and activity which was indicated by an open and ruddy countenance, which lasted long and faded but slowly, even after his health had begun to decline, and his energy to abate. Some twenty years before his death, he was attacked with violent and distressing paroxysms of laborious breathing, which for a time appeared to defy the skill of the physician. In time, however, the complaint, whatsoever it might be, so far yielded to medical treatment that the attacks became both less frequent and less violent; yet it was never entirely eradicated, but showed itself at intervals through the whole of after life. Mentally our brother was respectable. He was neither brilliant nor profound, but sufficiently clear and solid to make him a competent tradesman, and a useful member of the church. Probably he would have been the better for somewhat more of early education, the lack of which he never had opportunity afterwards to supply. Still the good man's mind was far from being either unfurnished or unimproved. He was a thoughtful man, and he took care to provide material for thought. He was an habitual reader of the holy Scriptures, and he brought their ability to make wise unto salvation, to the test of his own experience. He most firmly confided alike in the divinity and the saving efficacy of the Gospel. His well worn copy of the Scriptures had its appointed place in the house near his usual seat, so that it could be readily taken up on the occurrence of an interval of leisure. Then there is good reason to believe that he was at once an attentive and a reflective hearer of the Word, not captious and critical on the one side, nor unenquiring on the other. He took heed both how he heard and what he heard. It was his want frequently

during the week to ruminate on the discourses of the preceding Lord's-day. What were his habits of private devotion and upon what rules he acted relative to them cannot here be told, because they were private, and he did not proclaim and emblazon them; but kept them between himself and his Heavenly Father who sees in secret and rewards openly. That this servant of God cultivated habitual piety, none who knew him will question. His prevailing state of mind was calm, yet firm, gentle, and cheerful. That he was the subject of human infirmity and imperfection perhaps no one was more sensible than himself. Yet it is certain that whatever might be his constitutional weakness or most easily besetting sins, they were so dealt with, that the subject of them was not very frequently betrayed into impropriety either in temper or conduct. Without doubt he was himself so far sensible of short-coming before a heart-searching God as to be constrained to walk humbly with Him. Notwithstanding it is readily admitted that the character now under review was far from absolute perfection, we are still bound in equity to say, that it would be well for the church, and indeed for the world too, if the generality of professing Christians approached as near it as he did. Brother Norton was one of those who follow after the things that make for peace, and who endeavour though they may not in every case succeed in their endeavours, to live peaceably with all men; and it must have been very rarely that he deviated from conciliatory counsels or pacific measures. Nevertheless, he could be firm, not only in the defence of a good cause, but in resistance of what he deemed an evil one. One instance in which this was shown may here be mentioned: he was fully satisfied in his own mind that church rates are an unjust and oppressive impost, inimical alike to the spirit and letter of christianity, he accordingly resolved not to pay them. The result

was that steps were taken to compel payment, and our friend firmly but patiently allowed a portion of his stock-in-trade to be sold by auction in open market to meet the demand. However, there was apparent in the temperament of our friend a much stronger tendency to yield than to resist in circumstances in which it could consistently be done. In some instances perhaps he was scarcely active and enterprising enough. As might be expected his habitual frame of feeling was tranquil and happy, and even in later years when feebleness and infirmity were evidently gaining ground upon him, he seldom appeared to suffer much from mental anxiety or depression of spirits. This could not have been the result of exemption from the cares of business, domestic solitudes, or personal trials, all who knew him must be aware that he had his full share of all these. But he knew whom he had believed, and felt that he had committed his all to Him who is able to keep it against that day; and there is good reason to conclude that he lived under the advantage of an abiding assurance of his interest in Christ and of his consequent acceptance with God. Hence the steadiness of his trust gave proportionate equanimity to his course. Mr. Norton, though a cheerful companion, was not loquacious, nor was he very communicative relative to what was strictly personal, so that usually he said but little, probably too little in some instances of his weal or his woe, his pains or his pleasures, his joys or his sorrows. It is doubtless sometimes a relief to the oppressed spirit, to disburden itself by free and confidential converse with a faithful and sympathizing friend. It will be easily seen that such a man as the subject of our remarks would be best understood and most fully appreciated by those whose acquaintance with him was somewhat close and extended; by such he was highly esteemed. Still he was generally respected and had a good report of them which are

without. However, his judgment is with the Lord before whom he walked. For a considerable period before his death it was but too evident that our brother was rapidly declining in health and strength, a fact which was observed with much anxiety by his family and friends. The keepers of the house trembled, and the strong man bowed himself. His last illness though painful was short. He was in his place at the Lord's-table on the first Sunday in October, 1863, for the last time. Shortly afterwards the writer and a friend from a distance made him a passing call. After leaving him the friend remarked how very feeble he appeared, a circumstance which I, being more familiar with him, had not particularly noticed. However, the very next day, he was seized with his fatal and final attack, which from the first left but slight hope of recovery. Its symptoms were such as to show that nature was so far exhausted as to be unable to rally. In the early part of his illness he seemed to suffer more from a general restlessness of the system, than from actual pain in any particular part, so that on one occasion he expressed himself as being almost tired out. Yet he did not repine, but in his patience possessed he his soul. It may be recorded as one of the most impressive and affecting scenes it was ever my lot to witness when his children came in succession to his dying bed, and he spoke to them like a departing patriarch, not

only in tones and terms of parental affection, but with the wisdom and faithfulness of a Christian, and in a manner suited to the case of each. The entire scene was most pathetic and fitted to touch the hearts of all, but especially of the parties more particularly concerned. That heart that could resist its influence must be hard indeed. May we not hope that though the fruit appears not as yet, it will one day spring forth and ripen in the salvation of those whose present and eternal welfare the dying parent so much desired. His language, half prayerful, half gratulatory, was *Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.* After this he said but little, but gradually became weaker and weaker until the weary wheels of life stood still, and he was absent from the body to be present with the Lord. The interment took place at Cauldwell, in the graveyard attached to the chapel, where many years before he had put on the Lord Jesus Christ by being baptized into Him. He is laid but a few yards from the spot where he drew his first breath, and where he awaits the hour when the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised. The solemn event was improved by the pastor of the church in the hearing of a large congregation, from Revelation xiv. 13. May survivors learn not to be slothful, but followers of them, *who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*

Intelligence.

CONFERENCES.

THE YORKSHIRE CONFERENCE was held at Bradford, Tetley-street, September 8th, 1863.

In the morning public service commenced at half-past ten o'clock, Rev. T. Gill, of Shore, read the Scriptures and prayed; and the

Rev. H. Wilkinson, Travelling Secretary of the Foreign Mission, preached.

The Conference for business assembled in the afternoon at two o'clock. Rev. C. Clark opened the meeting with prayer, and Rev. B. Wood, minister of the place presided. From many of the churches