

A PURITAN IDYLL, OR, THE REV. RICHARD BAXTER'S LOVE STORY.¹

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THE story I am going to tell will not be found in Baxter's Autobiography called "Reliquiæ Baxterianæ"; nor in Calamy's abridgment of that amorphous folio; nor in any of Baxter's contemporaries; nor at all fully in Orme, his modern biographer. We may assume, then, that the story is not a familiar one. Most people are aware that Baxter was a great and vivid figure in the greatest of all English centuries, the seventeenth. They know the titles of one or two of his books, such as "The Saints' Everlasting Rest" and "The Call to the Unconverted"; and, perhaps, that he was the most voluminous writer of his age. They have heard, too, of his extraordinary success as a parish minister in Kidderminster, and of his immense popularity as a Puritan preacher. And they have seen, no doubt, what is called his true portrait (*vera effigies*)—with its lean cheeks, its high Roman nose, its firm thin lips, its full ample brow partly concealed by a close-fitting velvet skull-cap from which the hair hangs down upon his ministerial white band and black silk robe. But it may be news to them that the owner of that grave and severe face² married at the age of forty-seven a lady, Margaret Charlton, twenty-five years younger than himself; and that, after a

¹ An elaboration of the Lecture delivered in the John Rylands Library on March 14, 1917.

² There is another portrait—similar in outline but evidently taken at an earlier date—now in possession of Mr. John W. Standerwick, of Ilminster. It was painted for his ancestor Wm. Standerwick by an unknown artist; and is milder as well as younger in expression. Baxter's friend and biographer Matt. Sylvester supplements the portrait when he says: "His Person was tall and slender, and stooped much; His Countenance composed and grave, somewhat inclining to smile, and, he had a piercing eye"—Funeral Sermon, p. 16 (at end of R.B.).

wedded life of nearly nineteen years, he survived her for ten years—her age at death being forty-two and his seventy-seven.

But such is the fact ; and the story forms a human document of no small interest. Mrs. Baxter died on June 14th, 1681 ; and within the next six weeks her husband showed what it is to have the pen of a ready writer. For during that time he wrote *four* biographies, not very brief, though he calls them 'Breviates'.

The first was one of his wife ; the second was one of his step-mother ;¹ the third, one of his old friend and housekeeper ;² and the fourth, one of Mrs. Baxter's mother—who had been dead twenty years. Acting on the advice of friends he cast them all aside except his wife's ; and this alas ! he greatly curtailed. He speaks of his friends as wise, and perhaps in general they were ; but one is sorry he listened to them in this particular case. For what he left out included "the occasions and inducements of" his marriage—or just its most piquant passages. One would give up much of the rest to recover these ; and I had hopes of recovering them from the Baxter MSS. in Dr. Williams's Library. But neither there nor among those of the British Museum has been found any trace of them. We are obliged, therefore, to make the best of the narrative as it stands.

Baxter tells us that he wrote the memorial to his wife "under the power of melting grief". He was a great, or, to say the least, an erudite Theologian. His study of theological questions was incessant. There might seem to be no room in his mind or heart for anything else. But after all he was no 'dry-as-dust'. However arid and abstract the terms or topics of his theology they did not lessen his humanity. He remained always what he was naturally, 'a man of feeling'. His popular appeal as a preacher—an appeal of such wonderful attractiveness to all classes of hearers—was due far less to the intellectual than to the emotional elements of his sermons. In the

¹ A daughter of Sir Thomas Hunks. She died 'the same year' as his wife—aged ninety-six or ninety-seven ; and so the statement in N.D.B. (sub. R. Baxter) that she long survived her stepson is incorrect. "She was"—says Baxter—"one of the most humble, mortified, holy persons that ever I knew." Baxter's own mother was an Adeny.

² Jane Matthews—died about a month or six weeks before Mrs. Baxter, aged seventy-six or seventy-seven, of "mere decay". A "pious, humble virgin of eminent worth". She must have attended him from Kidderminster.

pulpit passion, though usually under firm restraint, vibrated through every sentence. "When he spoke of Weighty Soul-Concerns you might find his very Spirit Drench'd therein"—says his editor and colleague Sylvester.¹ And he defends the exercise of passion.

"Reason is a sleepy half-useless thing till some passion excite it; and learning to a man asleep is no better for that time than ignorance. . . . I confess, when God awakeneth in me those passions which I account rational and holy, I am so far from condemning them, that I think I was half a fool before, and have small comfort in sleepy reason. Lay by all the passionate parts of love and joy, and it will be hard to have any pleasant thoughts of Heaven."² We must bear this in mind if we are inclined to wonder how a face like that of Baxter's traditional portrait could be the face of an ardent lover. There is no need to wonder. The traditional portrait is a mask. The real man was the most sensitive of personalities. I cannot say whether he had any 'heart-affairs' in his youth. He makes no reference to any, and he soon passed into a state of mind which would pronounce judgment upon them as a sin in his case. But I should not be surprised to learn that he had. At any rate, it is certain that he loved Margaret Charlton. He may not have done so at once; and there is clear evidence that he did not yield to the sweet attraction without a struggle. The point is, however, that he yielded; and that his love took possession of him, and swept away all the obstacles erected

¹ "Elijah's cry after Elijah's God," p. 14 (at end of the "Reliquiæ Baxterianæ"). "He had a moving *παθος* and useful Acrimony in his words, neither did his Expressions want their Emphatical Accent, as the Matter did require."

At the same time there was no 'gush'. He was "a Man of clear, deep, fixed thoughts; a Man of copious and well-digested Reading". "Rational Learning he most valued and was an extraordinary Master of" (*id.*, p. 17).

² "Poetical Fragments"—Epistle to the Reader. Of these 'Fragments'—dated "London, at the door of Eternity, August 7th, 1681," he says: "As they were mostly written in various passions, so passion hath now thrust them out into the world. God having taken away the dear companion of the last nineteen years of my life, as her sorrows and sufferings long ago gave being to some of these Poems (for reasons which the world is not concerned to know) so my grief for her removal, and the revived sense of former things, have prevailed with me to be passionate in the open sight of all." In the original title they are described as "The concordant discord of a broken-healed heart".

by his scrupulous conscience, and brought him into the happiest period of his life, notwithstanding the fact that outwardly it was the most troubled.

He met her first as a girl of seventeen or eighteen at Kidderminster. This was in 1637 or 8 when his great ministry was at its height. She had come from Oxford—the residence at that time of her elder sister, wife of Mr. Ambrose Upton, a Canon of Christ Church.¹ Her mother had been living at Kidderminster for some time; and seems to have chosen it for her home on purpose to enjoy the benefit of Baxter's preaching at the Parish Church of St. Mary's.² She and Baxter belonged to the same county of Shropshire; but were of a different social rank—her family being "one of the chief Families in the County," while his was that of "a mean Freeholder (called a Gentleman for his Ancestors' sake, but of a small estate, though sufficient)".

Her husband, Francis Charlton, Esq., "did not marry till he was aged and gray, and so dyed while his children were very young". There were three of them—two daughters, of whom Margaret was the younger, and one son. His death took place in the opening years of the Civil War; and the reality of the war was brought home to the bereaved family in a strange way. Their home was "a sort of small castle" (B., p. 2) named "Apley, nr. Wellington"³ (B., p. 44); and was garrisoned for the King—not that Mrs. Charlton was a strong Royalist, but because she needed the King's protection against her husband's brother, Robert, who was bent upon getting the children, particularly the son and heir, into his own hands. To avert this she, in the first place, besought relief from the King at Oxford; and in the second, married one Mr. Hanmer,⁴ a Royalist and a man of influence. It may have been under his direction that Apley Castle was garrisoned; and so might be legally attacked by a Parliamentary

¹ B., p. 3.

² She lived in a "great house" near the Church—"in the Churchyard side"—within sight of "all the Burials" (B., pp. 44, 45).

³ "Within a mile of Wellington on the right of the road leading to Hodnet is Apley Castle eminent as the seat of the ancient family of the Charltons"—Halbert's "History of Salop," vol. ii., 156 (1837).

⁴ He appears to have died before the end of the war and nothing further is known of him.

force. This the uncle was strong enough to bring about. In Baxter's words "he procured it to be besieged by the Parliament's soldiers, and stormed and taken" (B., p. 2). A part of the house was burnt. Some of the men were killed. All the inmates were "threatened and stript of their cloathing, so that they were fain to borrow clothes"¹ (B., p. 44).

"So Robert got possession of the children" (B., p. 2). By dint of "great wisdom and diligence," however, they were at length snatched away from him "and secretly conveyed to one Mr. Bernards in Essex";² and, with the close of the war her troubles on that score came to an end. Then, as her son's guardian, she took charge of his estate; and "managed things faithfully, according to her best discretion, until her son marrying took the estate into his own hands". Why she did not continue to live with him or near him is not said. But there was something which rendered it undesirable³ and decided her to follow her inclination and make a home in Kidderminster.⁴ Here she lived (says Baxter) "as a blessing among the honest poor weavers—strangers to her—whose company for their piety she chose before all the vanities of the world".

When Margaret joined her—probably in 1658—she did so "for mere love of her mother".⁵

¹ Baxter mentions this experience as one of the nerve-shocks which afterwards rendered Margaret so 'fearful'.

² He appears to be the same as Sir John Bernards who afterwards boarded and educated Baxter's nephew, William Baxter (see Baxter Correspondence, Dr. Williams's Library).

³ Baxter hints at "passion in her," or some "fault in him" (B., p. 3).

⁴ First of all she desired Baxter "to take a House for her alone". He declined on the ground that he would do nothing to separate mother and son; and advised her to go back. "She went home, but shortly came again, and took a house without my knowledge." Baxter seems careful to note this fact because at a later time it was made a charge against him by her son that he had unduly influenced her. See a letter of his dated July, 1658, "to Mr. Charlton, Esq., at Appley in Shropshire," justifying himself and "Mr. Charlton's own mother against his hard speeches," Baxter MSS., vol. iv., ff. 130 *a*, *b*, 131 *b*, Williams's Library.

⁵ "She was the greatest honourer of her mother, and most sincerely loved her, that ever I knew a Child do to a Parent" (B., p. 81).

On the other hand, her mother "loved her least of her three children" before the time of her conversion. Then she "began to esteem her as her Darling" (B., p. 5).

Baxter himself did not interest her nor did she care for the people. Indeed she "had great aversion to" their "poverty and strictness," and put on a very unpuritan appearance of worldliness—"glittering herself in costly Apparel and delighting in her Romances". But this was only on the surface and did not last long. Already she was feeling a sort of divine discontent. She knew "she was not what she should be" and that "something better (she knew not what) must be attained".¹ Even while at Oxford the change had begun. A sermon "of Mr. H. Hickman's," which she heard there, had "much moved her". She had tried to throw off its influence; and her efforts to do so would account for the levity which rather shocked the Kidderminster saints. She was, in fact, 'kicking against the pricks'. And so it is not surprising that Baxter's preaching soon laid hold of her. His doctrine of conversion "was received on her heart as the seal on the wax". From being careless of religion (as it seemed) she became its most earnest devotee. She tested herself by all the marks of conversion set forth in Baxter's 'Treatise' on the subject and fell into a morbid state of mind because of her failure to stand the test. Some who chanced to overhear her praying in a remote room of her mother's house "said they never heard so fervent prayers from any person". Casting aside her romances she read none but serious books, and entertained none but serious thoughts, and "kept a death's head (or skull) in her closet" (B., p. 44) to remind her continually of her mortality. All this was quite according to the Puritan scheme, and "all her religious Friends and Neighbours" as well as her mother "were glad of so sudden and great a change". But the strain proved almost fatal to her—the more so as she was of what Baxter calls "a concealing temper" and said nothing. Her health broke down. She seemed to be wasting away. The doctors spoke of consumption and despaired of her life. Then an experiment was tried which to Baxter and his people was a most natural outcome of their faith. They "resolved to fast and pray for her". The result is best told in his own words: "Compassion made us all extraordinary fervent and God heard us, and speedily delivered her as it were by nothing, or by an altogether undesigned means. She drank of her own in-

¹ As a girl she had been put by her mother—for a time—under "an imprudent *rigid* Governess". Her levity was a reaction against this excessive restraint. The circumstance points to a Puritan home (B., p. 4).

clination, not being directed, a large quantity of syrup of Violets and the next morning her nose bled (which it scarce ever did before or since) and the Lungs seemed cleared, and her pulse suddenly amended, her cough abated, and her strength returned in short time " (B., p. 9).¹

She was at her worst on December 30th, 1659,² and this would be the date of the prayer meeting. Her recovery was sure but not rapid. There is no suggestion of miracle about it. It was not till April 10th that she seemed well enough to justify her mother in calling upon " those that had fasted and prayed for her to keep a day of Thanksgiving for her Deliverance ".

Margaret wrote of the day—a Thursday—as one never to be forgotten. She sat late into the night recording her thoughts of it. She thoroughly agreed with the others that her recovery was due to a direct act of God and emphasized God's claim upon her. So, in Puritan fashion, she solemnly renewed her covenant with God—a covenant which Baxter, about the same time, rendered into verse. We sing a part of it in the well-known Hymn

Lord, it belongs not to my care
Whether I die or live,

though in the original the first line runs—" Now it belongs not to my care," while the line " to soar to endless day " is an unwarranted alteration for the line—" *that shall have the same pay* ".³

¹ This, in Baxter's view, was one of many similar instances. His people had lately prayed for 'a Demoniack' who ("after some years' misery") was suddenly cured; and for a 'violent' Epileptic who recovered on the second day and "never had a fit since"; and often for himself "in dangerous illness" with "speedy" success. Once *e.g.* he had "swallowed a Gold bullet for a Medicine, and it lodged in me long, and no means would bring it away, till they met to fast and pray, and it came away that morning". "God"—he adds—"did not deny their prayers, though they were *without Book*, and such as some deride as extemporare." One rather wonders why Baxter was always so inveterate a dealer in medicine!

² She afterwards kept it "secretly as an anniversary Remembrance of the Sentence of Death from which she had been delivered" (B., Preface, p. i).

³ The whole Hymn consists of eight stanzas—of eight lines each—in common metre and was *meant* to be sung. She made her covenant in public. "This day I have, under my Hand and Seal in the presence of Witnesses, nay in Thine own presence . . . devoted my all to Thee.

On April 13th, 1660—three days later—Baxter went up to London¹—eager to watch and have a part in the measures then on foot to bring about the Restoration. Unknown to himself, or them, he had said goodbye to his beloved Kidderminster flock. On April 30th he preached before the new House of Commons at St. Margaret's, Westminster.² On May 10th at their desire he preached before the Lord Mayor and Aldermen in St. Paul's (*id.*, 219). On June 25th he was sworn the King's Chaplain in Ordinary (R.B., p. 229). On November 1st he refused an offer of the Bishopric of Hereford (R.B., pp. 282, 283). Later in the year he petitioned the Lord Chancellor "to restore" him "to preach to" his "people at Kidderminster again" (R.B., p. 298)—and his people supported him by gathering in a day's time the signatures of 1600 communicants out of a possible 1800.³

He was willing to go and do the work on the "lowest lawful terms" or even for nothing; but it was not to be. The story of the calculated deceits which were practised upon him in this connection does not belong here. All through the year 1661 and part of 1662 he exerted himself to the uttermost in the interest of a reconciling policy. His efforts (as is well known) and every other effort failed. Hence on May 25th, 1662, by which time the Uniformity Act was a certainty, he pointed the way to his fellow-Nonconformists by preaching his last sermon as a minister of the Anglican Church.⁴ He was far and away the most active spirit on the Nonconformist side; but the currents against him were too strong; and he was not,

... " (B., pp. 16, 17). (She was writing in her room 'at twelve of the clock' a.m.). Baxter says she "subscribed it with a cheerful will" and "never lost sight" of it—"Poetic Fragments," p. 70.

¹ If April 10th (as Margaret says) was Thursday, then the 13th would be Sunday. But this is Baxter's own date (R.B., p. 215) and was Monday. Margaret meant Friday. Probably . . . meant Friday (about the dawn of which she wrote in her diary).

² "The next morning" "did the Parliament unanimously vote Home the King" (R.B., Pt. ii., pp. 218, 219).

³ R.B., Pt. ii., p. 299. "The rest were such as were from home." The whole population of the Parish was about 4000 (R.B., Pt. ii., p. 286).

⁴ "At Blackfryars." He had preached here once a Sunday for some months and previously at St. Bride's and St. Dunstan's, Fleet Street. He also lectured for a year at Milk Street on week days, *i.e.* (probably) once a week (R.B., Pt. ii., pp. 302, 303).

if he had known it, the best of pilots. His very simplicity and sincerity betrayed him.

Meanwhile, where was Margaret Charlton? She also was in London and her mother with her. She had, in fact, followed him; and had taken the resolution to do so almost as soon as she heard of his going. Thus she writes on April 10th: "My pastor . . . is by Providence called away and going a long journey";¹ and about the same time, she adds: "I resolve, if Providence concur, to go to London as soon as I can after the day of Thanksgiving for the Reasons mentioned in another place".² What other place was meant, or what were the Reasons, even Baxter did not know. But he quotes a passage from her Diary of April 10th which more than hints at one of them: "It may grieve me now he is gone that there is so little that came from him left upon my soul. O let this quicken and stir me up to be more diligent in the use of all remaining helps and means. And if ever I should enjoy this mercy again, O let me make it appear that . . . I was sensible of my neglect of it."³

Here it is her need of Baxter as a teacher and guide that she feels—no doubt sincerely and acutely. But was this all? Was it *enough* to explain the mood of deep despondency which returned upon her after his departure?⁴ Above all, does it suffice to account for her precipitate resolve to follow him?

I think not.

There is a pathetic little sentence in the secret paper she wrote near midnight on April 10th which tells its own tale. She is trying to wing her soul toward Heaven alone and away from mundane desires. Why? Because *there* "shall friends meet and never part and remember their sad and weary nights and days no more. *Then may we love freely.*" Then may we love freely—does not this lift a corner of the veil and show what she hardly confessed even to herself, viz. that love for the "wise and good" pastor had grown into love for the man; and that she found it hard, nay at last impossible, to endure the prospect of living far away from him? *That* is my own impression; and I imagine that her mother, while listening and yielding to her other pleas for going to London, may have divined her secret and been glad. For of the mother's devotion to Baxter there can be no question.

¹ B., p. 19.

² *Ibid.* p. 29.

³ *Ibid.* p. 20.

⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 29, 30.

At any rate to London they came—notwithstanding Baxter's Remonstrance. "It is not lawful (he said) to speak an idle word . . . much less to go an idle journey. What if you fall sick by the way, or some weakness take you there, will not conscience ask you who called you hither?"¹ Did the good man also suspect the truth; and did he wish to ward off from himself what he feared might be a too fascinating temptation? Possibly; and when she actually appeared on the scene he may have addressed her again with the like pastoral gravity. But, in such cases nature has a way of her own which usually prevails. Margaret could not be in London—within easy distance—and no meeting take place. She knew where he preached, and (we may be sure) was as often as possible one of his hearers at St. Dunstan's or St. Bride's or Blackfriars; while he was not an infrequent guest at her mother's lodgings in Sweeting's Alley or Aldersgate Street (B., p. 76). Nor could the fact of their acquaintance be long hid, even if they tried to hide it. It went on through more than two years and was not interrupted by Mrs. Charlton's death in 1661. Rather this event—an unspeakably sad one for Margaret who was only twenty-one (B., p. 3)—was perhaps the chief means in bringing matters to a head. Baxter links together her mother's death and her consequent "friendless state" as contributory causes of a "diseased fearfulness" to which she became liable. How could he help doing his best to comfort her; and in doing so was it not more than likely that their mutual attachment should declare itself? Anyhow, the attachment did come to a head and was widely known by the end of 1661. Such a love story excited more interest in some circles than even the burning questions which were then convulsing the Church. It reached the Court in the form of a definite report that Baxter, the hypocritical impugner of all clerical marriages, was himself married; and what the refined entourage of Charles II made of it there is no need to say. The Bishop of Worcester, Morley, who hated Baxter, seems to have been the first to 'divulge' the report; and he did so "with all the odium he could possibly put upon it". Outside the Court it was "everywhere rung about"—"partly as a wonder and partly as a crime". "I think," says Baxter, "the King's marriage was scarce more talked of than mine;" and

¹B., p. 42. Baxter is not named, but there is little room for doubt that the remonstrance was his.

this "near a year before it came to pass".¹ There were plausible grounds for the widespread gossip, malicious and otherwise. There was, e.g. the disparity of age—suggestive of a merely amorous fancy on Baxter's part; there was the disparity of rank—suggestive of misused pastoral influence over a guileless girl; then there was her wealth—suggestive of covetousness; and especially there was his avowed and acknowledged disapproval of the married state for ministers—suggestive of hypocrisy. But the truth, known to the few, really made the story a romantic and beautiful idyll. For the simple truth was that they loved each other—with a love of that high spiritual character which unites soul to soul, and transfigures life, and is immortal. Hence, neither the scoffs of the frivolous nor the sneers of the malignant could have any weight with them; and in due course, when at last the way was clear, they were married. "On September 10th we were married"—says Baxter—"in Bennet Fink Church by Mr. Samuel Clark . . . having been before contracted by Mr. Simeon Ash, both in the presence of Mr. Henry Ashurst and Mrs. Ash;"² and, he goes on, "when we were married her sadness and melancholy vanished; counsel did something to it, and contentment something; and being taken up with our household affairs, did somewhat. And we lived in inviolated love and mutual complacency, sensible of the benefit of mutual help. These near nineteen years I know not that ever we had any breach in point of love, or point of interest, save only that she somewhat grudged that I had persuaded her for my quietness to surrender so much of her estate, to a disabling her from helping others so much as she earnestly desired."

The reference in these last words is to one of the conditions of their marriage which he had exacted, viz. that she should so alter her affairs as to prevent his being entangled in any law suits.

Her brother, in fact, appears to have made claims upon what she had inherited from her mother; and Baxter had induced her to concede them, although legally disputable. He would rather she suffered unjust loss—which evidently she did—than gratify the

¹ R.B., Pt. i., p. 384.

² "Good old Mr. Simeon Ash was buried the very Even of Bartholomew Day"—i.e. August 24th, so that the contract of marriage must have taken place before that date (R.B., Pt. ii., p. 430).

scandal-mongers by a law suit. Her fortune as thus reduced was not by any means large. How much she had given up is not clear; but the remnant, after crossing off bad debts, amounted to no more than £1650,¹ equal perhaps to £5000 at the present time. Her marriage left this entirely at her own disposal: for a second condition, insisted upon by Baxter, was that he should have nothing that before was hers, so that, as he says, "I (who wanted no outward supplies) might refute the charge of covetousness".² However she may have rebelled against this condition in after days, he held her to it. Of course he could not hinder her from using some of her money in house-keeping and had no wish to do so. But he would not handle any of her money himself nor inquire how she spent it. He let her do with it as she pleased; and so, after she was gone, he could say: "Through God's mercy and her prudent care, I lived in plenty and so do still, though not without being greatly beholden to divers friends; and I am not poorer than when I married: but it is not by marriage nor by anything that was hers before".³

Their first home was in Moorfields (B., p. 51), where they lived for ten months. Then on July 14th, 1663, they removed to Acton in Middlesex—for the sake of Baxter's health and studies and a quiet country life.⁴ Here they lived for nearly six years when "a new sharper law against" the Nonconformists—known as the Oxford or Five mile Act—forced them away.⁵ Towards the end of 1669, they took lodgings with a farmer at Totteridge near Barnet—ten miles from London, exchanging these for a separate house the next year. Their last 'remove' was back to London on February 20th, 1673, into what Baxter calls "a most pleasant and convenient House" at Southampton Square, Bloomsbury—⁶ "where she died". This marks the outline of their married life; and its contents, from more than one point of view, are full of interest. But our concern just now is chiefly with Mrs. Baxter and the sort of woman she proved herself to be.

1. She turned out an excellent housewife. Probably she had been well trained by her mother. Anyhow "her household-affairs (says Baxter) she ordered with so great skill and decency as that others

¹ B., p. 48. ² *Ibid.* p. 47. ³ *Ibid.* p. 101. ⁴ R.B., p. 440.

⁵ For the circumstances which permitted Baxter for some years to escape the force of this Act, see R.B., Pt. iii., pp. 46 ff.

⁶ B., p. 51; R.B., Pt. iii., pp. 60, 103.

much praised that which I was no fit Judge of: I had been bred among plain mean people, and I thought that so much washing of Stairs and Rooms to keep them as clean as their Trenchers and Dishes, and so much ado about cleanliness and trifles, was a sinful curiosity, and expence of servants' time who might, that while, have been reading some good book. But she that had been otherwise bred had somewhat other thoughts" (B., p. 80). It will be noticed that she kept servants; and Baxter testifies that she was a lenient mistress. "When her servants did any fault unwillingly she scarce ever told them of it. When one lost Ten Pounds worth of Linnen in carriage carelessly, and another Ten Pounds worth of Plate by negligence she shewed no anger at any such thing. If servants had done amiss, and she could not prove it, or knew not which did it, she would never ask them herself, nor suffer others, lest it should tempt them to hide it by a lye (unless it were a servant that feared God, and would not lye)" (B., p. 74). Evidently the moral welfare of her servants was something for which she felt a responsibility. Baxter felt it, too; and his part was to catechize them weekly besides expounding the Scriptures at morning and evening prayers. But now and then, absorbed in his studies, he was apt to forget; and his wife never failed to remind him with an "expression" of "trouble" in her face at his "remissness" (B., p. 70). She kept him up to the mark, too, in other ways. Her ideal of a home required it to be bright. To this end, she encouraged conference and cheerful discourse. She did not like her husband to come from his study and sit at table and say little or nothing—not even if he seemed to have good reason in his "weak pained state of body". And this was good for him—there being no doubt that he was rather apt to dwell somewhat morbidly upon his ailments. It was no less good for him that she tried to curtail his hours of study; and to make him see that by spending more time in 'religious exercise' with her and his Family and his neighbours, he would be furthering his ministerial work just as much as by writing books. Indeed, she told him, that he "had done better to have written fewer books and to have done those few better". "Some others" thought the same, while *he* thought that writing was the chief of his duties and the study in very truth his 'sanctum sanctorum'.

All the same, there is no doubt that he sometimes yielded to her persuasion; and went back to his books none the worse for having

wasted (as he might fancy) some precious half hours in her drawing-room. In a word it is plain that his home-life, under her gentle reign, was as wholesome for him as it was delightful. If she was exacting in some ways, she was as exacting with herself as with him. Nay, if she seemed to make light of his physical sufferings, she also made light of her own—which were often no less acute. He found her utterly unselfish. She had, moreover, the best of tempers. If she was ever angry she “little made it known” (he says). She rarely ever *spoke* in anger or in an angry tone; nor could she well bear to hear *another* speak angrily or even loud. Best of all, experience proved them to be, what they hoped to be, as regards religion—its beliefs, its duties, its ideals and its hopes. Here, at the centre of their life, they were one; and here she remained to the end his grateful pupil—though to a greater extent his teacher than she was aware. Thus in the deepest things there was never a jarring note. One illustration may be quoted. They were both fond of singing Psalms to sacred music. And (says Baxter) “it was not the *least* comfort that I had in the converse of my late dear wife that our first in the morning and last in bed at night was a Psalm of Praise till the hearing of others interrupted it”.¹

A husband and wife who began and ended each day with a ‘Psalm of Praise’ sung so heartily as to evoke a protest from the neighbours need no further testimony to their mutual content!

2. Baxter dilates upon her charm outside as well as inside the home. “I know not (he says) that ever she came to any place where she did not extraordinarily win the love of the inhabitants (unless in any street where she staid so short a time as not to be known to them).” This he admits was due partly to her liberality. But “her carriage” (i.e. her behaviour) won more love than her liberality. She could not endure to hear one give another any sour, rough, or hasty word. “Her speech and countenance was always kind and civil whether she had anything to give or not.” She was the same to rich and poor; or, if she made a difference, more considerate of the poor than the rich. Among the poor were her chief friends. “And all her kindness tended to some better end than barely to relieve peoples bodily wants—even to oblige them to some duty that tended to the good of their souls or to deliver them from some straits which fill’d

¹ “Fragments of Poetry”—Address to Reader, p. 3.

them with hurtful care, and became a matter of temptation to them". Nor was there anything sectarian in her kindness. "If she could hire the poor to hear God's word from Conformist or Nonconformist, or to read good Serious practical Books, whether written by Conformists or Nonconformists, it answered her end and desire : and many an hundred books hath she given to those ends."¹ Baxter refers in particular to her influence over the people of Acton, among whom she lived and moved for six years. They all "greatly esteemed and loved her". Not a few of them were "accounted worldly ignorant persons"; but to please her they came to hear her husband preach in her house; and what he calls "her winning conversation" drew them to goodness even more than his powerful sermons. He gladly notes this when telling how on one occasion "the people hearing that" he "again wanted a house . . . they unanimously subscribed a request to" him "to return to" his "old house with *them* and offered to pay" his "house-rent". What moved them most, he says, was their love for her (B., pp. 50, 51).

3. Something has already been said as to her liberality. This played a great part in her life; and it was from Baxter that she learnt how to use her money. She had been in the habit of giving, he says, "but a tenth of her incomes to the poor; but I quickly convinced her that God must not be stinted, but as all was his so all must be used for him by his stewards, and of all we must give account; only in his appointed order we must use it which is—1, For our own natural necessities; 2, For public necessary good; 3, For the necessities of our children and such Relations as are part of our charge; 4, Then, for the godly poor; 5, Then for the common poor's necessities, and, 6, lastly, for conveniences, but nothing for unuseful things" (B., p. 53). This was his lesson; and she learnt it almost too well. In order to give away "she used mean clothing and a far meaner diet for her own person" than was consistent with her health, or (as some thought) with her rank. In fact, she gave away so much that there were times when she had nothing to give. Then she begged. She did not dream of begging for herself; but "she at length refused not to accept with thanks the liberality of others, and to live partly on charity that she might exercise charity to them that could not so easily get it

¹ B., pp. 49, 50. In this she was an imitator of her husband. See R.B., Pt. i., p. 89, § 14.

from others as we could".¹ Failing to get what she had need of by begging she had recourse to borrowing; and, as she could always offer "sufficient security" she found borrowing easy. But the net result was, that when her affairs were wound up at her death most of her property turned out to be mortgaged; and Baxter came off badly. This led to the accusation "that she was wasteful and imprudent in leaving" him "so much in debt".

To which he replied that there were no debts, since all obligations were covered by her securities. Nor was there any sense of grievance on his part that nothing was left for him, since that was what he desired. Nevertheless, we differed (he says) on two points. One was this—that he disliked her borrowing—"unless in some public or extraordinary case," whereas *she* thought "that, while she could give security, she *ought* to borrow to relieve the poor, especially the most worthy".² The other point was this—that while He was for "exercising prudence in discerning the degrees of need and worth," she held "that we ought to give more or less to everyone that asketh, if we have it".

Still she did discriminate in her own way. Thus she gave more readily to poor widows and orphans than to the poor generally. ("Alas! (says Baxter) I know many" of these who "think they have now lost a mother".) And she was specially compassionate of any worthy person "in Prison for debt". One of her last acts "a Fort-night or Month before she died" was to promise £20 for the release of one of these—hoping to beg the amount and having to pay all but £8 herself (B., p. 63). But the chief objects of her bounty were religious enterprises, and her poor kindred. As to the latter, her poor kindred were really Baxter's—³ "to many of" whom (says he) "she

¹ B., p. 60. There were "faithful pious friends" so "kind and liberal" in this respect that Baxter had "much ado to forbear naming them".

² B., p. 65. There is a sentence here which seems to imply that Baxter's means as well as his wife's went in charity. It is—"I thought I was to give but all my Income and not to borrow to give. . . ." But this must be read in the light of his own scheme (p. 53).

³ Except her sister Mrs. Upton and her brother, with their families she had no near relations of her own, so far as we know. "Her sister's children she loved as if they were her own, especially three daughters" (B., p. 64). Baxter mentions a strange story how she compelled him (first satisfying his reason) to be "a motioner of a Wife to her brother's son" who brought him £20,000. He mentions it to illustrate her wish, next to saving their souls, to settle her kindred well in the world!

was much more liberal than " himself—though " her way was not to maintain them in idleness ; but to take children and set them to some Trade, or help them out of some special straits ". The most notable of these was his nephew, William Baxter, afterwards well known as a Distinguished Classical scholar and antiquary. The letters between him and Mrs. Baxter which have been preserved in the Baxter Correspondence of Dr. Williams's Library show the unfailing interest she took in his career as long as she lived, and his grateful admiration.¹ As to religious work, her gifts were incessant. When, e.g. they came to live in Bloomsbury and she found herself surrounded by the " ignorant untaught poor " of St. James's Parish, she could not rest until she had " set up a school there to teach some poor children to read and the Catechism," free of charge. She engaged for the purpose " a poor honest man " (Mr. Bruce) " who had a wife and many children " and no other maintenance—paying him ' six pounds a year till her death ' mostly out of her own purse.² This surely was one of the first free schools of the kind established in London ; " and " (says Baxter) " she would fain have set up more, had she had the money ".³

¹ His posthumous works were published in 1726 in a book of the same title as his uncle's, viz. " Reliquiæ Baxterianæ ". He died in 1723—aged seventy-three. One of his included works contains a pedigree of the Baxter family which makes it very ancient and respectable. The name Baxter he derives from a Saxon word meaning ' Baker '. He himself was born at Lanlujan—vicus admodum obscurus—in a house belonging to his great-grandfather William—his father's name being John and his mother's Catherine. The family circumstances were poor (in tenui re).

He was married by the time of Mrs. Baxter's death ; and his eldest child was born in the same year, 1681. There were three others—two daughters and one son—all born in Tottenham High Cross, Middlesex, where he lived and kept a boarding house or school. Then (after 1700) he was for more than twenty years Master of Mercer's School, London. He ought to be an authority on the number of his own children. But Nicholls (" Literary Anecdotes," vol. i., 165) makes the number six ; and calls the eldest Rose instead of Richard.

He speaks of Baxter as " Richardus majoris patrii mei Richardi filius ".

² B., p. 58. " For this she beg'd a while of her good friends but they quickly gave over."

³ He pleads with ' charitable people ' to extend the movement, for the sake of the multitude of poor children, " in the many great out-parishes of London," who " spend their time in idleness and play, and are never taught to read ". There " are many good poor women " who would be glad to do the work for " a small stipend " and results might be attained

But chapels, or rooms for preaching, were her main concern. When they came to London in February, 1673, there was no meeting house which Baxter could call his own. Most of the available places of worship had been taken up by ministers on the spot. He wished this; and had delayed his return expressly for this. "I thought it not just"—he says—"to come and set up a congregation there till the Ministers had fully settled theirs who had borne the burden there in the times of the raging Plague and Fire, and other Calamities—lest I should draw away any of their Auditors and hinder their Maintenance."¹

But his wife thought he held off from preaching too long. She was not content for him merely to deliver "a Friday Lecture at Mr. Turner's Church in New St. near Fetter Lane". Such a Lecture did not reach the *people* and it was the people she thought of. She wanted to see them flocking again to his preaching as they always did, so she contrived a little scheme. "She first fisht out of me (says Baxter) in what place I most desired more Preaching. I told her in St. Martin's Parish where are said to be 40,000 more than can come into the Church, especially among all the new Buildings at St. James's where Neighbours many live like *Americans* and have heard no Sermon of many years." She at once set to work, and, after more than one failure to find "some capacious Room," hired one over the market-place consisting of "divers Rooms" "laid together" and upheld by one big central beam. Here he agreed to preach every Sunday morning—the afternoon service to be taken in turns "by the ablest Ministers they could procure in London". To 'supply' for these a Minister out of charge was brought up from some place "a hundred miles off" at a stipend of "£40 a year". And the point is that she paid this herself—besides most of what was required to hire and prepare the room, and "to pay a Clerk," and to engage "a woman to look to the Seats". The people indeed raised something by collections; but she detested collections for fear they might suggest a device to turn godliness into gain; and soon dropped them (B., pp. 54, 59).

parallel to those of "honest" Mr. Gouge's work in Wales. Mr. Gouge set up "about 300 or 400 schools in Wales," etc. (see R.B., Pt. iii., pp. 190, 148).

¹R.B., Pt. iii., p. 102. The licence to preach which he had taken out (or had been taken out for him in October) seems to have been a Licence at large, i.e. for no particular place.

One day when the room was crowded the supporting beam gave way. There was a resounding 'crack' which "put all the people in a fear"; then another, which set them "running and crying out at the windows for Ladders". Baxter from the pulpit "reproved them sharply for their fears". But what averted a catastrophe was his wife's presence of mind. For somehow she managed to get out of the room, and lay hold of a carpenter, and induce him to strengthen the sagging beam with a tough prop—all in a few minutes. But the shock unnerved her; and the room was abandoned (B., p. 55).¹ Then, however, she built a chapel in Oxenden Street upon land only procurable on a short lease; and at a ground rent of £30. She begged the money to defray the cost of the building;² but herself bore the burden of the ground rent and other expenses. But once more her venture came to grief—this time through the malice of a neighbour who happened to be a considerable personage, Mr. Secretary Henry Coventry.³ For in consequence (it was thought) of Mr. Secretary's information, there came out a warrant, after Baxter had preached just once, to apprehend the preacher. Next Lord's day this was done; but the preacher turned out to be someone else—Baxter having gone to preach "twenty miles off". So the arrest with its penalties fell on his unfortunate substitute. And here the point is that Mrs. Baxter, because she had been the means of his coming, felt bound to discharge his lawyer's fees, etc., amounting to £20 (B., p. 57).

In addition, the new chapel was left useless on her hands, and entailed a loss, from first to last, of more than £400. She had now come to the end of her resources; and all she could do was to *hire* a chapel in Swallow Street, which she did until Baxter was again turned out. This was her last effort for him, but not her last in the way of chapel-building. For "she got from her friends money to help to build another very usefull Chappel for another, among a numerous poor people where still much good is done. And she promoted two or three such more" (B., p. 59). All this public activity was unconventional and set going not a few critical tongues. It took her—they said—out of her proper sphere. Why was she "not content to live

¹ See also R.B., Pt. iii., p. 152. The date of the accident is here mentioned—July 5th, 1674.

² Baxter gives a list of the contributions in R.B., Pt. iii., p. 172.

³ R.B., Pt. iii., pp. 171, 174.

privately and quietly" like other Puritan women? (B., p. 64). And no doubt her notion of woman's work was something strange in the seventeenth century. One does not need to ask what she would have been had she lived in the twentieth. But her husband, at least, was not disturbed. All he found to say was that she did good in the way she deemed best; that her zeal in doing good sprang from a keen sense of a stewardship for which she must give account; and that it was a pity she had so few imitators.

4. The quality in her character which, according to Baxter, outshone every other, was her cheerful courage. There would have been no great scope for this had she married him in the heyday of his popularity, or if he had been a Bishop. But she linked her lot to his when he had just declared himself a Nonconformist; and so was stepping out into the dark way of trial. She knew of his refusal of a Bishopric. Did she wish him to accept the glittering bribe? Nay, his refusal (he tells us) heightened her esteem and love which would otherwise have been much alienated (B., p. 48). Nor was she incapable of forecasting "the scorn and the jealousies and wrath and persecutions" which awaited him. For she had heard what Bishop Morley had said and done against him in Kidderminster; and of the like, or worse, treatment already meted out to others. She *expected* suffering, but her spirit rose at the prospect; and, having once made her choice she never flinched. On the contrary her husband bears abundant witness that she was, under all circumstances, the brightest as well as the bravest of his human helpers.¹

Her first serious trial happened at Acton when Baxter was carried away to the 'common gaol'² for holding a conventicle. "I never," he says, "perceived her troubled at it. She cheerfully went with me into prison. She brought her best bed thither; and did much to remove the removable inconveniences. . . . I think she had scarce ever a pleasanter time in her life than while she was with me there" (B., p. 51). So it was on other occasions. The first winter at Totteridge

¹ She said at the outset of her Christian career "that, 'if she was but in a condition, in which God's service was costly to her, it would make her know whether she were sincere or not'; so she had her wish, and proved her sincerity by her costliest obedience" (B., p. 73).

² The new Prison in Clerkenwell, June 3rd, 1669 (R.B., Pt. iii., pp. 49; cf. 50, 51, 58).

was a dreadful time. "Few poor people," he says, "are put to the hardness that she was put to ; we could have no house but part of a poor Farmer's, where the chimneys so extreamly smoak't, as greatly annoyed her health : for it was a very hard Winter and the Coal smoak so filled the Room that we all sate in, that it was as a Cloud, and we were even suffocated with the stink. And she had ever a great straitness of the Lungs that could not bear smoak or closeness." Her own bodily condition, therefore, was wretched ; and, added to this, was the anxiety of nursing Baxter who was "in continual pain".¹ Yet amidst all "she lived in great peace" (B., p. 52). We have seen some of the troubles which followed their removal to London. Of course compared with those of many other Nonconformists the Baxters came off lightly. But their troubles were quite bad enough. The very eminence of Baxter marked him out for all sorts of annoyance. He was a favourite object of slander and was dogged by spies. And, although during the rest of her life he was not again in prison, he escaped only at the cost of repeated heavy fines. For every sermon he was liable to a penalty of £40 which could be distrained upon his goods. Sometimes the fine was paid in money, sometimes in goods. But Mrs. Baxter was always for paying it in one form or the other ; and then for his going on to preach as before. Many a wife might have thought it right to urge that £40 was too big a price for a sermon. Not so Mrs. Baxter. "If," he says, "she did but think I had the least fear, or self-saving by fleshly wisdom, in shrinking from my undertaken Office work, it was so great a trouble to her that she could not hide it (who could too much hide many others)" (B., p. 61).

In this connection he says : "She was exceeding impatient with any Nonconformist Ministers that shrunk for fear of suffering, or that were over-querulous and sensible of their wants or dangers ; and would have no man be a Minister that had not so much self-denial as to lay down all at the feet of Christ and count no cost or suffering too dear to serve him" (B., p. 61). She even went so far as to blame Baxter himself "for naming in print his Losses, Imprisonment, and other Sufferings by the Bishops, as being over selfish querulousness, when" he "should

¹It was from Totteridge that he wrote to the Earl of Lauderdale (June 24th, 1670) stating reasons for a refusal of the Earl's offer to secure him a place in Scotland. One of these is, that he "hardly expects to live another year" (R.B., Pt. iii., p. 75).

rather with wonder be thankful for the great mercey we enjoyed". Baxter thought her hardly fair in this point—because he had never mentioned his privations by way of personal grievance, but in order to place on record instances of a great public injustice. But he understood, and sympathised with, her attitude. Her principle was that the persecuted should suffer in silence ; should forbear railing for railing ; should be proud to suffer in a righteous cause ; and should leave the vindication of their cause to its own intrinsic merits. For this reason she deprecated sectarian strife. She did not like " to hear *Conformists talk't* against as a Party " ; she wanted it to be realized that conscience belongs to both sides ; and that the way of peace is for each side to recognize this and respect the other (B., p. 75).

May we not say that Baxter had good reason to admire her brave spirit and clear mind ?

5. These last words " a clear mind " point to another of the precious qualities which her husband discovered. He discovered that in matters practical, as distinct from speculative—where he was easily first—she was the safest of guides : " Her apprehension, he says, was so much quicker and more discerning than mine, that, though I was naturally somewhat tenacious of my own conceptions, her reasons, and my experience, usually told me that she was in the right ; and knew more than I. She would at the first hearing understand the matter better than I could do by many and long thoughts." So in things relating to " the Family, Estate or any civil business " he left her to her own judgment. In particular he found her possessed of an extraordinary insight where cases of conscience came up for decision.

" I often put cases to her which she suddenly so resolved as to convince me of some degree of oversight in my own resolution. Inso-much that of late years, I confess that I used to put all, save secret cases, to her, and hear what she could say. Abundance of difficulties were brought me, some about Restitution, some about Injuries, some about References, some about Vows, some about promises, and many such like ; and she would lay all the circumstances presently together, compare them, and give me a more exact resolution than I could do " (B., pp. 67, 68). It speaks well for Baxter's humility as well as common sense that he put himself so readily under her guidance where she was best qualified to lead ; and no doubt she saved him from many a mistake. Here is a fine passage of appreciation and self-confession :—

“She was so much for calmness, deliberation, and doing nothing rashly and in haste ; and my condition and business, as well as temper made me do, and speak much, so suddenly that she principally differed from me, and blamed me in this. Every considerable case and business she would have time to think much of before I did it, or speak, or resolved of anything. I knew the counsel was good for one that could stay, but not for one that must ride Post : I thought still I had but a little time to live ; I thought some considerable work still called for haste : I have these Forty years been sensible of the sin of losing time : I could not spare an hour : I thought I could understand the matters in question as well at a few thoughts as in many days : and yet she (that had less work and more leisure, but) a far quicker apprehension than mine, was all for staying to consider, and against haste and eagerness in almost everything ; and notwithstanding her over-quick, and feeling temper, was all for mildness, calmness, gentleness, pleasingness and serenity” (B., p. 78).

Had she no faults ? Baxter mentions two or three. But they do not strike the reader as very serious.

One, strange to say, was her tendency to be righteous overmuch—by which he seems to mean that she lacked a due sense of moral perspective or proportion. In other words, she was apt to fasten on one duty and pursue it to the exclusion of other duties no less important. Thus, “she set her Head and Heart,” he says, “so intensely upon doing good that her head and body would hardly bear it” (B., p. 72). She forgot that in her case it was a duty to think of her physical weakness and not spend her strength in doing good to the extent of ruining her health. Again, she overlooked the fact that it is a mistake to be so sedulous about the exact and perfect performance of one duty as to leave too little time for due attention to another. We are limited in our capacity and time. No man can afford to concentrate *all* his time upon one thing until it is done to perfection. We must take note of all duties and neglect none—but so apportion our attention as to give most to the highest. He thought his wife not regardful enough of this necessity sometimes—perhaps, when he saw her like Martha too busy in keeping everything clean and neat about the house.

Another of her faults was her slowness to speak about religious things. He means in public : for “she would talk privately to the servants and read good books to them”. Of course, he did not ex-

pect her to preach ; but like every good Puritan he thought a Christian bound to bear his witness in company ; and in company Margaret seldom spoke of religion. She loved to listen while others talked and could herself have said much to the point. "I scarce ever met (says Baxter) with a person that was abler to speak long, for matter and good language, without repetitions." But she was possessed of a fear that if she talked of religion, or of her own religious experience, people might fancy she was better than she knew herself to be, or might be made to stumble by her inconsistencies. In Baxter's words, she had "a diseased enmity to ostentation and hypocrisie". So she left "the open speaking part of Religion" to others. Evidently this was but a phase of the first fault—that is to say, her over-righteousness in the direction of sincerity led her to neglect the duty of "profitable speech".

Baxter remarked a similar fault in his friend Sir Matthew Hale, the eminent judge—who "would make no great shew of zeal in Religion lest if he did anything amiss, Religion should be reproached for his sake" (B., p. 100) ; and he quotes approvingly a saying attributed to Cardinal Richelieu that "he hated no Counsellor more than those that were always saying—*Let us do it better*—by *that* hindering the doing of *much* at all". And certainly, if we never spoke or acted until we could be quite sure of not doing harm to anybody or to our cause we should hardly dare to speak or act at all.

To these two venial faults Baxter adds a third which is best described simply in his own words. It sprang out of her eager, trustful, sanguine temperament :—

"She was apt when she set her mind or heart upon some good work which she counted *great*, as the welfare of some dear Friend, to be too much pleased in her expectations and self-made promises of the success ; and then almost overturned with trouble when they disappointed her.

"And she too impatiently bore unkindnesses from the friends that were most dear to her, or whom she had much obliged.

"Her will was set upon good, but her weakness could not bear the crossing or frustration of it" (B., p. 76). Poor human Margaret !

6. Baxter does not print any letters of Margaret to himself and only one of his own to her. They were so seldom away from each other that, in fact, there were few to print (B., p. 85). But in the Baxter correspondence we come across several of hers to William

Baxter, the nephew who became a distinguished Classic, and one of these brings to light a fact which her husband does not mention, viz. that she was a scholar. She congratulates him on his 'studious forwardness' and sends him advice about his studies at the request (she says) of his 'worthy and greatly valued father and mother' who have laid upon her 'great obligations'. She then goes on to give a list of the best helps in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew Grammar, and does so in a way that indicates close personal acquaintance with them. Lastly, she offers him two bits of wise counsel.

In the first place, "as to your Latin style you must read good authors and well observe them; and use yourself to speak and write it well. And herein you may much improve yourself by being Master of Erasmus's 'Colloquies,' Quintilian, Bandius his Epistles; and when you have a mind to read something in Divinity in Latin no style will you find beyond Calvin's, and were I worthy to advise you I should offer this, viz. that you translate your authors (some of it) into English, then throw your author by, and translate your English into Latin, and then compare your own Latin with the Author's." In the second place, "be not too severe in studying" (she says), "but give nature its needfull recreations, sustenances and reposes . . . you may easily spoil yourself by putting nature upon too great a force. But if you jade it your work will prove too tedious to reach, or forward, that proficiency which is desirable and which you are aiming at." At the outset of the letter she tells him that due attention to 'school affairs' in his present situation is a nearer duty than spending more time "in retirement for sacred reading, contemplating or devotions". His work must stand first. His parents and master expect this of him and expect "no more nor otherwise than what God approves of".¹ The whole letter is a model of good sense.

¹ Baxter Correspondence, vi., 172^{a b}, 173^a (Williams's Library). Other letters express a motherly interest in all his affairs; while his to her breathe warm gratitude for varied benefits. He was located with Sir John Bernard in Essex (cf. B., p. 2) who seems to have kept a school. The Baxters proposed to make a 'Doctor' of him, and for this, to put him with a 'Dr. Ridgley' for seven years. He was 'prepared' to submit; but, as is clear, found a way of escape. Before this there was some thought of his entering the ministry, but Baxter did not encourage it unless he could show (as he could not) that he had "that zeal and self denyall which would incline" him "to serve Christ upon the hardest terms" (Letter from

7. How came it that Mrs. Baxter died so young? The explanation is not far to seek. Baxter supplies it in the words: 'Her knife was too keen and cut the sheath' (B., p. 73). She was highly strung; she lived intensely; her body broke under the strain. Once a month, and often once a fortnight, for many years she had an agonizing headache (B., p. 45). About three years before the end this abated, but was succeeded by 'a pain in one of her breasts' which seemed to threaten cancer. The effect of all this was doubly bad—it reacted upon her mind, clouding it with depressions which sometimes bordered on distraction and indeed caused her to apprehend that she might lose her reason; it also induced her partially to starve herself under the impression that this was a way of warding off the dreaded cancer. "She kept down her body so in her diet that about five ounces of Milk, or Milk and Water, with a little chocolate in it morning and night, and about one or two bits at Dinner was her diet for many years" (B., p. 91).

What medicines she took did but aggravate the evil—as they did also in Baxter's case. She took e.g. "a spoonful of powdered Ginger every morning, near a quarter of a year together"; she took "the Waters for Physick often"; and during the ten weeks immediately before her death "she divers days drunk Barnet Waters along with tincture of Amber" (B., pp. 91, 92). This finished her. The two together worked "too powerfully on her brain, and suddenly cast her into strong disturbance and delirations in which, though the Physicians, with great kindness and care, did omit nothing in their power she died the 12th day: she fell sick on Friday, June 3rd, 1681, and died June 14th".¹ These last days were extremely sad. "She oft cried out" (complaining of her Head) "Lord, make me know what I have done, for which I undergo all this". "The last words that she

Baxter of date March 21st, 1679⁶/₇). Generally the letters have only the day of the month; but two or three letters have the year 1679 and are addressed (strange to say) to Mr. or Mrs. Baxter at their house in Highgate. I find no other hint of a residence in Highgate. William was still his uncle's trusted friend in June, 1688, and so continued to his death.

¹ She was buried on the 17th "in Christ's Church in the Ruines, in her own mother's grave"—"next the old Altar or Table in the Chancel". Here Mrs. Baxter "had caused a very fair, rich, large marble-stone to be laid". But it was broken "all to pieces" "in the doleful flames of London, 1666".

spake were, my God help me, Lord, have mercey upon me." It was the fashion in those days to infer the character of a life from the manner of its close. If its close was happy and peaceful it had been good, and vice versâ. But Baxter scouted so shallow a notion. "There is no judging of a man's sincerity . . . by his Disease, or by his Diseased Death-bed words : He that liveth to God shall die safely into the hand of God, though a Fever or Deliration hinder him from knowing this—till experience and sudden possession of Heaven convince him"¹ (B., p. 106). *Him* he says—but he was thinking of his wife.

It may have occurred to some of you that in point of temperament and intellect and spirit and nervous suffering there is a singular likeness between Margaret Baxter and Jane Welsh Carlyle. Perhaps the parallel fails in this respect—that Margaret, although constantly in more or less pain and subject to nameless Fears even worse than pain, strove to keep it all to herself and to appear habitually cheerful. Certainly the parallels does not extend with any closeness to the husbands. There was no reason on Baxter's part as on Carlyle's for bitter regrets on the score of harshness or misunderstanding or neglect. But Baxter had *two* regrets, and they only show how intimate must have been the union which had been affected by nothing worse. One regret was that he had been "too apt to be Impatient of her impatiency and with every trouble of her Mind, not enough considering how great tenderness in all our discourse she needed—though I remember nothing else that ever I shewed impatience to her in" (B., p. 80). In plain words, he had been apt to pooh-pooh her "too great fears of the overthrow of her understanding" as merely fanciful. The other regret was that he did not come up to her expectations. She had always a passion for the ideal, for the morally perfect and hoped to find it in him ; but did not. "My dear wife did look for more good in me, and more help from me than she found, especially lately in my weakness and decay. We are all like Pictures that must not be looked at too near" (B., p. 87). For this regret, however, he had at least one consolation : that

¹ At Baxter's request her funeral sermon was preached by John Howe—Minister of the Presbyterian congregation in Silver Street, where she often attended. The text was 2 Cor. v. 8. Howe refers to his having spent "some days under the same roof with her"—several years before her marriage. He observed then "her strangely vivid and great wit"; and he insists that by her marriage she 'gave proof of' her unworldliness.

through his inevitable shortcomings she had acquired a needed lesson. "This use she made of my too cold and careless converse, and of all my hasty words, that she—that had long thought she had no grace because she reach't not higher than almost any reach on earth, and because she had many passions and infirmities—perceived by me, and many other esteemed Teachers, that we were all as bad as she; and that, therefore, grace doth stand with more faultiness than she had imagined; and that all our teaching much excelled the frame of our souls and lives, and was much more worthy to be followed; and therefore, that God would also pardon such failings as her own" (B., p. 56).

His last reflection, as he sat writing in his lonely study at Southampton Square and thought of the lovely soul which had been the 'light of his eyes' for nineteen years, strikes a deeply human chord. "Had I been to possess the company of my Friends in this Life only how short would our comfortable converse have been! But now I shall live with them in the Heavenly city of God for ever. And they, being *here* of the same mind as my forgiving God and Saviour, will forgive all my Failings, Neglects and Injuries, as God forgiveth them and me. The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away: and he hath taken away but that upon my Desert which he had given me undeservedly near nineteen years. Blessed be the name of the Lord. I am waiting to be next. The Door is open. Death will quickly draw the Veil, and make us see how near we were to God and one another, and did not (sufficiently) know it. Farewell vain world and welcome true Everlasting Life" (B., p. 107).

Strange to say, one of the 'Uses' or lessons which he draws from his experience of married life is that, on the whole, it were better for ministers, in regular charge, not to marry. It had never been forgotten that he said this to one of his Reverend brethren before his marriage; and many a time his inconsistency had been cast up against him. Well, he now answers: "I did say so to him; and I never changed my judgment; yea, my wife lived and died in the same mind. And I here freely advise all Ministers that have not some kind of necessity, to think of these few reasons among many":—

1. "The work of the sacred ministry is enough to take up the whole man, if he had the strength and parts of many men." Baxter's

conception of a minister's work, we must bear in mind, involved the 'pastoral care' of every soul in his parish. And as things are this demands all his time. "In the primitive Church every Congregation had many Ministers; but covetousness of Clergy and people will now scarce allow two to very great Parishes. I did not marry till I was silenced and ejected and had no flock or Pastoral Cure. Believe it, he that will have a wife must spend much of his time in conference, prayer, and other family-duties, with her. And if he have children, O how much care, time and labour they will require! I know it though I have none. And he that hath servants, must spend time in teaching them, and in other duties for them. . . . And then it will disquiet a man's mind to think that he must neglect his family or his Flock, and hath undertaken more than he can do. My conscience hath forced me many times to omit secret prayer with my wife when she desired it, not daring to omit far greater work."

2. "And a Minister can scarce look to win much on his Flock, if he be not able to oblige them by gifts of charity and liberality. And a married man hath seldom anything to spare especially if he have children that must be provided for, all will seem too little for them. Or if he hath none, Housekeeping is chargeable, when a single man may have entertainment at easy rates; and most women are weak, and apt to live in fear of want, if not in covetousness; and have many many wants real or fancied of their own to be supplied."

3. "In a word, St. Paul's own words are plain to others, but concern Ministers much more than other men, 1 Cor. vii. 7, etc. . . . He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but he that is married careth for the things of the world how he may please his wife. This is true. And believe it, both caring for the things of the world, and caring to please one another, are businesses, and troublesome businesses; care for house rent, for children, for servants' wages, for food and rayment, *but above all for debts*, are very troublesome things, and if cares choak the word in hearers, they will be very unfit for the mind of a Student, and a man that should still dwell on holy things.

"*And the pleasing of a Wife is usually no easie task*: there is an unsuitableness in the best, and wisest, and likest. Faces are not so unlike as the apprehensions of the mind. They that agree in Religion, in Love, and Interest, yet may have daily different apprehensions about

occasional occurrences, persons, things, words. That will seem the best way to one that seems worst to the other. And passions are apt to succeed, and *serve* these differences. Very good people are very hard to be pleased. My own dear wife had high desires of my doing and speaking better than I did, but my badness made it hard to me to do better. . . ." And "there are too many that will not be pleased unless you will contribute to their sin, their pride, their wastefulness, their superfluities and childish fancies, their covetousness and passions; and too many who have such passion that it requireth greater skill to please them than almost any, the wisest, can attain. And the discontents and displeasures of one that is so near you will be as Thorns or Nettles in your bed" (B., pp. 101-104).

These are plausible reasons for his plea—though taken one by one their force is less than it seems. But he allows that "some kind of *necessity*" may justify a Minister as well as any other man in disregarding them. It did so in his own case. Love stepped in and decreed the necessity. Love is always stepping in and experience bears witness that the Reasons of Love are wiser than all the reasons of abstract logic, even when they emanate from so great a divine as St. Paul.

In the collection of 'Baxter Treatises and other Papers' of the Williams's Library (vol. v., No. 2) is to be found Mrs. Baxter's (autograph) will as follows:—

"To my worthy and beloved friends, Richard Hampden,¹ Esq., John Swinfen, Esq., Thomas Ffoley, Esq.,¹ and the rest of my Trustees—

"Whereas I have before my marriage chosen you as my Trustees for the securing and disposall of my estate, desiring you to lay out £800 on an annuity for my life, and the rest after my death to lay out for charitable uses—Except I signified under my hand and seale that it should be otherwise disposed of, I do hereby, under my hand and seale accordingly, notifie to you that it is my desire and will that the remainder² of my moneyes being £85³ shall be disposed of otherwise

¹ For Mr. Thomas Foley (Junr.) see R.B., Pt. iii., p. 71, § 150.

For Mr. Richard Hampden, see R.B., Pt. ii., p. 448, § 445.

² Crossed through in the original.

³ From B., p. 65, it is to be feared that by 1681 nothing of the £85 was left for Baxter's use.

than is appointed in the deed of Trust in such manner and to such uses as I have signified to my dear husband Richard Baxter, to whom for the said uses I would have it all delivered.

“Given under my hand and dated this Tenth day of February, 1670.

MARGARET BAXTER.

“ In the presence of WILLIAM BAXTER,
ROBERT PRICHART,
LYDAE WOODS
(= Lydia ?).”