

TRUE HISTORY
OF
JOHN THOMAS.
OF BRISTOL.

PUBLISHED BY WRIGHT & ALBRIGHT ;
SOLD BY TANNER, BROTHERS,
BRISTOL; AND AMEN CORNER, LONDON.

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BY J. G. FULLER.  
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IN presenting my young readers with a short account of John Thomas, I would begin by telling them it is a *true* history. This is of great importance for us to know; because, as it is true, when we have read it we may feel sure that we

can be as pious as he was, and if God should be pleased to afflict us, that we *may* be as peaceful and as happy. Sometimes, after reading very interesting and instructive little tales, we feel something like *this* :—‘ All this is very delightful, but I wonder whether a child so young *could* think and act and feel as this child is said to have thought and acted and felt ! ’ Now, when we have read the history of John Thomas, we need not entertain any such feeling as this, because it is quite true. It is not a fancied picture of what a perfect Sunday-scholar *should be* ; but a true account of what a Sunday-scholar actually *was* ; and therefore a correct pattern of what other Sunday-scholars, situated as our young friend was, really *may be*. Let us think of this while we read it.

JOHN THOMAS was born at Bristol, on the 27th of June, 1814. It was his unspeakable privilege to be the child of Christian parents, by whose prayers and pious resolutions, he was, in his early infancy, dedicated to God. As his mind began to open, they stored it with scripture truth, and their instructions and prayers were crowned with the divine blessing. Almost as soon as he was capable of judging between good and evil, he began to feel that he was a sinner in the sight of God, to lament that he had broken his holy law, and to trust in Jesus Christ alone for the salvation of his soul.

In 1821, he entered the Broadmead Sunday-school, in which he always conducted himself to the satisfaction of his teachers. In the four years during which he was a scholar, he was never once absent, either from the school on the Sabbath, or from the monthly prayer-meeting of the teachers on a Monday evening, without being able to give a satisfactory reason. And although, during the latter two or three years of his

life, he lived more than a mile from the school, he was generally *early* in his attendance. His diligence in learning, and his constant endeavours to please, secured him the affectionate esteem of his teachers, and their tender sympathy during his heavy affliction.

He manifested the greatest dislike to the evil dispositions and practices common among children: such as Sabbath-breaking, lying, swearing, and keeping bad company. His father says *he never once saw him in a passion*. Indeed, he always felt agitated when he saw others in a passion, and would sometimes observe that they showed the spirit of the devil, rather than that of the meek and lowly Jesus. He would not allow himself on the Sabbath day, to speak on the common affairs of life, except when necessary; and when he saw persons taking idle walks, or playing about the street, on that day, he used to pity them, as being “lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.”

He was particularly attentive to the wishes of his parents and teachers, in avoiding the evils of the Bristol Fairs.

If he had occasion to go to any place, the direct road to which was through the fair, he always chose to go round some other way, agreeably to the advice of Solomon: "Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men: avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away."

It was the custom in the Broadmead Sunday-school, and in some others, to give a tract to each child who did not go to the fair. On one of these occasions, after St. James Fair, a wicked boy said he had not been, and took the tract. When the teacher asked our young friend whether *he* had been to the fair, he answered, "No, sir!" "I'm sure he has," said the other boy. "Indeed? (said the teacher,) how do you know that?" "Why *I saw* him there," replied the boy. "You saw him there? (answered the teacher,) then you were there yourself!" The boy was confounded, and corrected, not for going to the fair, but for telling a lie, and for bearing false witness against his school-fellow. John, who had never been detected in a falsehood, was be-

lieved, and received the tract; which he valued very highly, though a mere trifle, as a mark of the approbation of his teachers.

One time, however, since then, he was in great difficulty about the fair. It was one Temple Fair. His father, who was that week Steward of a Friendly Society, had occasion to pay some money to a sick member, who lived in Avon Street, the very street in which the fair was held. Not considering that it was fair time, he took John with him. As soon as they approached the scene of vanity and guilty pleasure, they heard the sound of music, when, in a moment, the thought first rushed upon them—that it was fair-time. John immediately, in very strong terms, expressed his unwillingness to proceed. His father explained to him the difference between going to the fair on purpose to join in its follies and vices, and simply passing through it in a case of absolute necessity. After hesitating a long time, our dear young friend yielded on one condition—that he should shut his eyes and be led by his father, going and returning; “and

then, (said he,) I can tell my teachers that I never saw the fair!" Nor was this an intended deception, to impose upon his teachers; but a scheme, by which, while yielding to necessity, he could yet comply with *the spirit* of their wishes.

He gave very good proof afterwards, during his last illness, that this reluctance to go to the fair, was founded on *principle*: and that he regularly avoided these wicked and ruinous scenes, not only because his parents and teachers disapproved of them, but also because he knew that it was "an evil and bitter thing to sin against God." During one Temple Fair, held in the month in which he died, he spoke of it in the most affecting manner. Though his sufferings were very great, yet, being supported and cheered by the consolations of religion, he exclaimed, "Sweet affliction! Sweet affliction! I would rather lie here in the greatest pain, than be in the enjoyment of full health in Gough's Yard!" [Gough's Yard is a place in which the Masquerade Ball was held.] "Oh! (said he,) they don't consider

their latter end ! ‘ At the last, it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.’ ” This he said, in allusion to a sermon he had heard Mr. Winter preach, in reference to the fair, a year before.

Indeed, he was always attentive to what he heard in a place of worship. He was remarkable also for a missionary spirit, and generally attended the public meetings of the different Missionary Societies : and having a good memory, and feeling a deep interest in the subject, he was able to give a pretty correct statement at home of the most of the speeches. The accounts of the good which, by the blessing of God, Missionaries were doing in different parts of the world, gave him great pleasure ; and he exerted himself very zealously to procure contributions for a missionary box, in aid of schools, and of the translation of the Bible, in the East Indies.

His attachment to the school was very strong. Perhaps he erred sometimes, in attending, when it would have been wiser if he had stayed at home. His father would sometimes say, “ Now, John, I think you should not go to-day ;

I think you are not strong enough ; ” when, as his father did not *command* him to stay at home, he would reply, “ Father, I *must* go—let me go—I love to go—and I know the teachers are disappointed when the children are not there.” On one of these occasions he added, “ Only think, father, of what the hymn says—

‘ Make you his service your delight,
Your wants shall be his care.’

If it is of any consequence, I’m sure God will take care of my health ; and I would rather be ill than disappoint my teachers.”

A short time before his last illness, his father thought it prudent, as he was so often ill, that he should give up going to school, and asked him if he were willing. He replied, “ No, father, I hope I shall never leave the school till I am old enough to be a teacher.” And certainly, if he had lived, he would, in a few years, have made a very excellent teacher. How delightful would it be, if all Sunday-scholars were to become Christian teachers !

From a child, he knew and loved the scriptures. He *searched* the scriptures. It was customary in the Broadmead-school, to require those children who were able, to bring texts of scripture, every Sabbath morning, on some subject which was mentioned to them the Sabbath before. John Thomas was one of these: the texts he selected were always proper, and sometimes he showed a correctness of judgment and understanding very uncommon in children of his age.

One day, while he was engaged in finding texts, his father gently reproved him for handling the Family Bible rather roughly, by turning down the corners of the leaves; when he replied, "Father, it is no good to have a Bible unless we use it, and a ragged Bible is an honour to the family."

From this practice of searching the scriptures, his knowledge of them became very extensive. If any particular part were inquired for, he was almost always able to mention, not only the Book in which it was contained, but generally the chapter and verse. Nor

was his judgment inferior to his knowledge. He never read his Bible without trying to understand it. In reading the Psalms, especially, he was very careful to distinguish those parts which related to the history of David or Solomon only, and those parts which had a special reference to the history and reign of Jesus Christ; and he was equally particular in trying to find out to *what part* of our Saviour's life and ministry these texts referred. In the hope that my young readers will take the hint, and imitate his laudable example, they are referred, just as specimens, to the sixteenth, fortieth, forty-fifth, and seventy-second Psalms.

The attention and judgment of our young friend, in understanding what he read, was very apparent in his remarks on a text of which he had made choice, as the one from which he wished his minister, Mr. Winter, to preach his funeral sermon. The words he selected were these: "Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and

hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father : for so it seemed good in thy sight." On mentioning these words, he said, " I am aware they do not refer to babes *in years*, but to the humble disciples of Jesus Christ. But I hope they will in some sense apply even to me." Mr. Winter, of course, complied with this request, and considered the passage to be remarkably suitable to the character of his dear young friend.

Sometimes he was cast down, lest at last he should be found to have deceived himself. One day, his father observed him in tears, and asked him why he was weeping. He replied by asking, " Can a person enter the kingdom of heaven without being born again ? " " No. " " And I fear I am not born again : for I do not remember any particular change ! " By the by, it was impossible he should ; since those who begin to fear God in childhood, and are therefore never guilty of gross and notorious faults, cannot be the subjects of so *marked* and *striking* a change, as those who have lived many years in the commission of sin. His father asked him,

“ Don't you love Jesus Christ ? ” He hesitated, and at length said, “ I am afraid to say I do, with as much confidence as Peter did.” “ Do you hate him, then ? ” “ Oh no, father ! I can say I desire to love him. But I fear Jesus Christ does not love me ; or surely I should not be so afflicted.” His father read to him a few verses from the twelfth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, which soon cleared up the mystery : such as—“ Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.” He replied, “ Oh ! that is very consoling ; and I think, father, the Lord does not correct *in anger*, or he would not support *you* under your trials as he does.”

One day, his parents complained to some who visited him from the school, that their greatest difficulty was to persuade him to take his medicine. He was told he would *die*, if he did not. He replied, he would rather die—he wished to die. He was then told, that though it was very desirable to be willing to die, yet he ought also to be willing to live ; for if he lived a few years

longer, he might become very useful to others, glorify God, and go to heaven at last. The effect of this conversation was, that he was convinced he had been wrong; he took his medicine immediately, and never refused it afterwards.

On being asked how he felt in the prospect of dying, he said, he hoped he should go to heaven. From a desire to hear him *express* the reason of his hope, and not from any suspicion that he was deceiving himself, he was reminded that he was a sinner, and asked, How, as such, he could expect to go to heaven. He replied, "Because Jesus Christ died for sinners." The visitor of course admitted this; but, reminding him that *all* sinners will not therefore be saved, asked him why he thought *he* should. He answered with great energy, "Sir, *I love* Jesus Christ; and he has said, I love them that love me, and they that seek me early shall find me." This was delightful.

From this time, his desire to die gave place to a willingness to live or die, as it should please God. And yet, being the subject of great pain, and feeling a

solid, scriptural hope of a blessed immortality, it is not to be wondered at, if sometimes he still preferred to die. One day, when his mind was exercised with the thoughts of dying, he asked his father if it was *sinful* to wish to die, and be with Christ; thinking, probably, of what had been said to him on the subject, on a former occasion. But, without waiting for an answer, he gave vent to his feelings, by repeating a part of a favourite hymn :

“ Thou dear Redeemer, dying Lamb !
 I love to hear of thee :
 No music’s like thy charming name,
 Nor half so sweet can be.”

It is not surprising that he should sometimes be cast down under his very severe sufferings. Yet he never murmured, nor entertained hard thoughts of God. One day he said, “ My pain is very great ; but it is not the spear ! my suffering is nothing, compared with what Christ endured for me.

‘ And though painful at present,
 ’T will cease before long ;
 And then—oh how pleasant
 The conqueror’s song ! ”

His desire of being with Christ grew stronger, as he approached nearer to the heavenly world. A short time before he died, he requested his father to read to him a part of scripture, containing a figurative representation of the love of Christ and his people; and while his father was reading, his soul was in rapture, and he broke out with indescribable energy, in the following delightful language:—

“Haste, my Beloved, fetch my soul
Up to thy blest abode:
Fly—for my spirit longs to see
My Saviour and my God.”

The day before he died, he repeated to a friend, what he had often said before, that he was not afraid to die, and that his hope of eternal life rested on the merits and atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Nor was this merely an expression which he had heard at school or in the family, to which he did not affix any certain meaning; for having read his Bible attentively, his knowledge of the gospel method of salvation was very correct. The doctor called in just then, and told him he could not recover, and

that he might expect to die all at once. It was remarked, that this would be a happy exchange for him, to which he assented, and wished that his school-fellows might be reminded of the wisdom of valuing health while they have it, and of the importance of seeking the Lord before a time of sickness; "for (added he) I could never have borne this affliction as I have, if I had not been supported and strengthened from above."

The next day, the 28th of March, (1825,) Mr. Winter called, and reminded him that he was not far from the kingdom of heaven, and added, "You have no fears of death, John?" He replied, "Oh no! All my hopes are founded upon Christ, and he came into the world to save sinners. Come, blessed Jesus, come. Come, and take me to thyself." Then, checking himself, as if he had appeared in too much *haste* to be gone, he added, "Yet—not my will, but thine be done."

After Mr. Winter left him, his thoughts turned again to the Sunday-school. He had been told the day be-

fore, that his teacher was about to leave Bristol. This, though he was just on the brink of eternity, gave him great concern. "I hope (said he,) the next teacher will be as kind and affectionate as he was—but there—*kindness* is of no use sometimes—there's such a boy, (mentioning his name) I believe he never *tries* to please."——Here his expressions became very rambling, and could not be understood; his voice faltered, and he sunk down into sleep—a blessing he had not enjoyed for a long time before. From this sleep, between four and five o'clock, he suddenly started up, made a strong effort to speak, but fell back, and instantly expired.

Thus lived and died this dear little boy, not eleven years of age. What is recorded of Josiah, was exactly true of our young friend—*While he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father.* We may observe,

First, He sought the Lord **WHILE HE WAS IN HEALTH.**

And this was a *great blessing to him.*

If he had not sought the Lord in health, he might have had no comfort in sickness, and no hope in death. Sickness and pain are very unfavourable for first beginning to think of religion. At such times, we have no strength of body to support us under the anguish of mind occasioned by the thought of what we are, and whither we are going; and when we so earnestly desire something to cheer, and soothe, and comfort, we are in great danger of seizing upon any kind of hope that presents itself, and so of resting short of the only true hope as declared in the gospel. So that it is not only sinful, but unwise, to put off religion till a time of sickness and pain. Our dear young friend embraced religion while he was in health, and it supported him in sickness and pain, and rendered the thought of dying desirable, rather than distressing.

But his seeking the Lord in health, was not only of benefit to himself: *it afforded great comfort to his parents.* A dying testimony may give us hope, but it does not yield any certainty. We hope people are sincere, when, on a

dying bed, they profess to repent of sin, and to trust in Christ for salvation; and perhaps they themselves think they are sincere; but we cannot feel sure; because it is so easy to deceive ourselves, and to mistake alarm for repentance, and convictions for conversion; and so many persons, when they recover from affliction, forget all their fair promises, and become even worse than before. Then, if we would afford our friends the unspeakable consolation of *knowing* that we are safe for eternity, we must seek the Lord while we are in health.

Another recommendation of this is, *it is honourable to God, and useful to our fellow-men.* There is something so mean in putting off religion till a time of sickness. It looks as if we had no feelings but selfish ones, and as if all our concern were for our own safety. But this is not religion, nor any thing like it. True religion requires that we should love God supremely, and our neighbour as ourselves. Our young friend felt the influence of this principle: he was concerned, not only for his own happiness, but also for the good of

others, and the glory of God ; he sought the Lord, therefore, in a time of health.

Secondly. He sought the Lord,
WHILE HE WAS YOUNG.

And it was well he did ; for if he had not then, he never would. Most people make sure of living to be old. But how uncertain this is ! If our dear friend had calculated on this, and had therefore put off religion till old age, his soul would have been lost for ever. But he was too wise to run such a dreadful risk. Let us be equally wise, since we know not that we shall live to old age.

But even were we certain we should, still it would be true wisdom to seek the Lord while we are young. For is it not desirable to be happy in youth, as well as in old age and eternity ? Is it not wise to have God for a friend in all the trials and difficulties of life ? Do you wish to be miserable while you live ? Surely not. Do you not wish to be happy immediately ? To be sure you do. Then seek the Lord while you are young ; for that is the only way in

which you can be truly happy. Pray, not only for happiness after death, but, in the language of Moses—"Oh, satisfy me *early* with thy mercy, that I may rejoice and be glad *all my days*."

Thirdly, He sought the Lord IN THE RIGHT WAY.

Though he feared and loved God, even from his childhood, yet he did not depend on his own goodness for salvation. He felt that he was a sinner; that sometimes he did what he ought not to do, and that sometimes he left undone what it was his duty to do. Therefore, instead of being proud because he was better than wicked children around him, he felt humbled because he was not more like Jesus Christ. Having broken the holy, just, and good law of God, he knew he could not be saved by his own obedience; and therefore he prayed to be saved for the sake of Jesus Christ, who came from heaven, and obeyed the law perfectly, and died to save those who had broken it. And this is the way in which we must all be saved, or we cannot be saved

at all. There is no other way. Every one that will may be saved in this way. But all who reject the free mercy of God, through Jesus Christ, or even neglect it till they die, must perish in their sins.

Fourthly, He sought **THE LORD GOD OF HIS PARENTS.**

Though he possessed the privilege of christian parents, he did not therefore neglect religion himself. He did not suppose, that because they were pious, therefore he should go to heaven. Nor must we. The Jews made this mistake. They thought, because they were descended from faithful Abraham, they were the children of God without being themselves believers in Christ. But they were greatly mistaken. Religion is a personal concern; and our having pious parents, so far from excusing us in the neglect of it, should make us more deeply concerned to seek the Lord for ourselves; lest that which is in itself a blessing should be turned into a curse.

But some who read this history may not be blessed with pious parents. Yet

let them not be discouraged. Let them rejoice that there are Sunday-school teachers and other Christian friends, who say to them "Come, ye children, hearken to me, and I will teach you the fear of the Lord." Seek the Lord for yourselves, in health, in youth, and in the way pointed out in the Bible; and then, though father and mother forsake you, or, though kind to you in temporal things, yet neglect your souls, the Lord will be a Father and a friend to you, under all the trials of life, in the solemn hour of dying, and after death for ever. Like our beloved young friend, you will be sure to find the promise true—"I love them that love me, and they that seek me early shall find me."

To every reader, this history addresses itself on the subject of FAIRS, REVELS, and OTHER SINFUL AMUSEMENTS.

Why do people wish to attend such scenes! Why, that they may enjoy a little present pleasure. But at what an expense they do this! The pleasures themselves are low and grovelling and unsatisfying, and the effects are truly

awful. Among the multitudes who are ruined by going to fairs, the writer knew one young man who was hanged, another who died of a broken heart, and others, (once happy Sunday-scholars,) who were banished from their country: he could also tell of a brother and sister, the former of whom was transported for life, and the latter, in a fit of despair, destroyed herself! And in all these instances, the first fatal step in the downward road of gross sin, was *going to a fair*. And probably, we do not hear of one instance in a thousand, where property is wasted or stolen, the health destroyed, the mind polluted and debased, the peace of families and of conscience banished, and the soul eternally ruined, by the sinful amusements of a fair or a revel.

But some may say that they have been to such places without at present having fallen a prey to gross sins. Well, and what then? Does it follow that they always will? Nay, even already, who will presume to say they have escaped uninjured?—Multitudes have, at such places, begun to feel a relish

for sin which they have never lost, and have lost a regard for religion which they have never recovered. And of what consequence will it be, at the last judgment, whether you died by a public execution, or in disease and wretchedness, or in extreme old age, "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God?"

Contrast either of these ends with that of John Thomas. What was it made him prefer pain to what thousands call pleasure? Is pain desirable? No. But he enjoyed peace of mind, and a scriptural hope of pure and eternal pleasure. Is not even guilty pleasure alluring? Yes. But "at the last, it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder." Then what a wise choice he made! Let it be ours. Then he will not have lived in vain, nor will this short history have been written in vain.

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