

**MEMOIRS OF THE REV. JOHN
TOWNSEND, FOUNDER OF THE
ASYLUM FOR THE DEAF AND
DUMB, AND OF THE
CONGREGATIONAL SCHOOL**

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Memoirs of the Rev. John Townsend, founder of the Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb, and of the Congregational School by John Townsend

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JOHN TOWNSEND

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REV. JOHN TOWNSEND,

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THE ASYLUM FOR THE DEAF AND DUMB,

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"A Christian is the highest style of man."

First American Edition.

BOSTON:
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182, Broadway.
1831.

ADVERTISEMENT to the *London Edition*.....Circumstances over which Mr. Townsead's family had no control, have caused a delay in the publication of this volume, which has been to them a source of pain and regret. During his last illness, Mr. Townsead intended to consign his papers to the flames, but the voice of affection pleaded for their preservation.

These pages are humble in their pretensions, like the honored subject of them: his aim, was to improve and benefit mankind...theirs, is to excite young Ministers to the same patient Industry, indefatigable Zeal, and honorable Emulation, which marked his career. To the more private Christian, their perusal, it is hoped, will be soothing in the hour of affliction, and cheering in the prospect of death.



CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.	
Mr. Townsend's Birth, Education, and Conversion,	Page 9
CHAPTER II.	
From his Conversion, in 1774, to his final Settlement at Bermondsey, in 1784,	17
CHAPTER III.	
From the latter Period to the Formation of the Deaf and Dumb Asylum, in 1792,	29
CHAPTER IV.	
The Institution and Progress of the Deaf and Dumb Asylum,	35
CHAPTER V.	
Formation of the London Missionary Society, &c.	48
CHAPTER VI.	
Formation of the Congregational School,	67
CHAPTER VII.	
Publication of Claude's Defence of the Reformation,	75
CHAPTER VIII.	
Establishment of a Fund for the Relief of Aged Ministers,	94

CHAPTER IX.

Severe Illness—Domestic Trials, - - - 99

CHAPTER X.

Exertions in behalf of the Irish Evangelical Society, &c. - - - 111

CHAPTER XI.

Conduct in the Prospect of speedy Dissolution—His Death, - - - 131

CHAPTER XII.

Reflections on Mr. Townsend's most prominent Characteristics, - - - 138

Extracts from his Diary, - - - 150
 Extracts from Letters, Original Essays, &c. 182

MEMOIR
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CHAPTER I.

MR. TOWNSEND'S BIRTH, EDUCATION, AND CONVERSION.

THE objects of biography, in general, are instruction and example; but religious biography has another and a higher aim, namely, to "magnify the grace of God" in the subject of the narration: it is to concur in the great design of Jehovah himself, who said concerning Israel, "This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise."* Men of the world, in writing their own memoirs, have uniformly an eye to the advancement and display of their character and talents; and even when they admit their failings and indiscretions, (as they call them,) it is only with a view to set off their supposed virtues. Not so Mr. Townsend; the facts and circumstances which he records, and especially his reflections on them, which are numerous, have a direct tendency to self-abasement, and at the same time to glorify God by the acknowledgment of his providence and grace. His language uniformly corresponded with that of the Psalmist, "Not unto us, O Lord,

* Isa. xliii. 21.

but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake."*

Such being the object of the original papers before us, in preparing this narrative for the religious public, our duty will be to pursue the same design; and to show how much persons, neither elevated in rank, nor endowed with extraordinary genius, may yet effect, by God's assistance, for the advancement of his honor, and the benefit of their fellow creatures.

Mr. John Townsend was born March 24, 1757, in the parish of Whitechapel, and baptized by the curate of that church. He had not, indeed, to boast of a noble or rich ancestry, but his father had received his education from a respectable clergyman in Yorkshire, under whom he attained a considerable acquaintance with the Latin tongue. In early life he settled in London, in a family where the late Mr. Whitefield, of pious memory, used to visit, and was so much charmed with his vivacity, and the interesting nature of his conversation, that he was led to hear him preach; first at All-hallow's church, and afterwards at the Tabernacle, near Moorfields, of which congregation he became eventually a stated member. This, however, so degraded him in the estimation of his father's family, that he was menaced with loss of station and property. His god-mother, a rich aunt, promised to make him her sole heir, if he would forsake "*that enthusiast*;" a whole night was passed in entreaties and discussions, but conscience or principle prevailed over human pride and policy. The treasures of Egypt were renounced, the humble path of poverty chosen, and things eternal estimated more highly than things temporal.

On this circumstance Mr. Townsend himself remarks, "It is a greater mercy to be the child of providence than the child of fortune. How many have I seen left by their parents in affluence, but it 'made to itself wings

* Psal. cxv. 1.

and flew away.' I am perhaps placed in easier circumstances than some of those who inherited the property referred to. It is an honor to descend from those who suffer for righteousness sake."

"I owe much (says our deceased friend) to the love and care of an affectionate mother, not only for her regard to my personal safety, but also for her instruction and admonitions. Well do I remember standing at her knees to repeat Dr. Watts's hymns, and kneeling to say my prayers, which was often very irksome to me, and which I therefore tried to evade by the most frivolous excuses. As a proof of her regard to my religious interests, I recollect that on one occasion, when I had committed a great fault, and then told a falsehood to conceal it, (having the strongest possible conviction of my guilt,) she kept me fasting in my chamber till I confessed my sin." This to some may appear as a trivial circumstance; but as Mr. T. doubtless recorded it by way of admonition to his own family in the first instance, so we retain the fact as an admonition to parents in general, never to trifle with the truth, nor to pass over a falsehood, as a slight and venial fault: nothing, indeed, was more conspicuous or admirable in Mr. Townsend's character, than his sacred regard to truth in all his conversation.

It is a trite remark, the truth of which is often verified, that a particular providence attends on children. The subject of this memoir experienced much of that superintending care; some years afterwards, referring to recovery from a malignant disease, he writes, "God has protracted my journey in the wilderness to see new mercies, and to experience new deliverances, both in providence and grace."

Mr. Townsend received the first rudiments of his education, as most of the first scholars in the world have done, from "a good old lady, for whom he always entertained a strong recollection of esteem;" in which he may put many of us to the blush, who generally under-