



George Storrs
1796-1879

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

GEORGE STORRS, the subject of the following remarks, was born in Lebanon, N. H., December 13th, 1796. He was the youngest of eight children. His father, Col. Constant Storrs, was originally from Mansfield, Conn.; and was an industrious mechanic, serving, for a time, in the American Revolution as a wheelwright. After the war of the Revolution he was married to Lucinda Howe, who was half-sister to the late Richard Salter Storrs, for many years minister of Longmeadow, Mass. After their marriage they removed to New Hampshire - the country being then a wilderness - and located in Lebanon, on Connecticut River; and by industry and economy became, what, in those days, was called a wealthy farmer. To them were born seven sons and one daughter. The mother of these children was ever watchful over their religious instruction, while the father was most studious to promote their temporal welfare. The mother invariably gathered her children around her, particularly on the Sabbath, to give them instruction in things pertaining to God, and our Saviour, Jesus Christ. She was not disposed to leave their religious education to the minister, or any other less interested in their welfare than a Mother.

The Congregational and Calvinistic ministry was about the only preaching in Lebanon for many years. Very few of any other denomination ever preached there. The strong tendency to fatalism, in the Calvinistic preaching of that period, was a subject which the mother of these children did not fail to endeavor to counteract in the minds of her offspring, and to impress upon them unceasingly, that if they would seek the Lord he would be found of them. Such pious labor was not lost.

Though this family of children grew up to maturity, four of them died before their father; and six had gone down to the grave before their mother: two only survived her.

GEORGE'S mind was often deeply exercised on the things of religion from a

child. Many anxious desires filled his heart that he might be a Christian. Early had his mother taught him to acknowledge "Our Father, who art in Heaven," and point him to "Our Saviour, Jesus Christ." Experimental religion, however, was a mystery to his mind, though one that he often anxiously desired to solve. Secret prayer was often resorted to, but he heard sometimes from the pulpit that, the man who cursed and swore was as likely - yea, more likely, to be converted than he who went to his closet to pray for the salvation of God. Such teaching made George feel sadly, as he thought his case was more hopeless than boys who he knew to be very profane, while he feared an oath. This influence, however, was counteracted by the vigilant instruction of his mother. Happy for him that he had such a mother. But for her instruction he has often thought and felt that he would never have been brought to a saving knowledge of God and His Christ. The sweet and heavenly strains of prayer, poured forth by that mother when she took George to her closet, and sought the mercy of God in Christ for him, made him forget or disregard the false teaching of the mere Theologian. Such scenes told on his heart not to be obliterated.

The preaching of the torments of hell never won his heart, though it often filled him with a dread of God, which was calculated more to drive him from God than to draw him to such a being. From fifteen to seventeen years of age was the most thoughtless period of his life. None of the terrors of preaching had any tendency to win him to the service of God; but at the close of the time last mentioned, in meditation, alone, far removed from all excitement, he became so affected with a sense of the goodness of God to him, that he resolved henceforth to seek the Lord till he should find Him. If he could pray for nothing else, he determined to pray daily that God would show him his need of a Saviour, which theoretically he understood, but experimentally he had not realized. His resolution being made, he pursued noiselessly and alone his purpose; light gradually breaking upon his mind till he was led to bow to Jesus, and come to God by him and found mercy. Months had passed away and no mortal but himself knew the exercises of his mind: he did not even communicate to his mother the revolution going on in himself. He took occasion, however, to listen to any persons who seemed disposed to converse on spiritual subjects, and often felt his heart encouraged by such conversation, though he took no part in it, but was an interested listener, unknown to them. This state of things continued for a year or more. During this period his only sister died. After her death his anxiety increased to be in a state of reconciliation with God, yet all his exercises were kept within his own bosom, except on one occasion to ask his mother - who was at the time confined by a fever - some indirect questions relating to God and Christ: after which he retired alone, and was overwhelmed with a sense of the love of God. Still he travelled on alone, sometimes believing and sometimes doubting. After months had passed away in this manner, he expressed to his mother, one day, that he much liked to hear a man talk who always talked sweetly about Jesus. His mother said to him - "George, do you think you are a Christian?"

This was said with an anxious look which made him feel that a mother's heart was deeply interested. It was question so unexpected that he almost faltered in answering it; but at length said, his mind was much interested on the subject. His mother replied - "I have long thought it was." This was as unexpected as her

question, as he had no suspicion that any one thought him specially serious.

From that time himself and mother had frequent conversations, and she often prayed with him and for him, being a mother indeed, in more senses than one. He has never ceased to bless God for that mother. At the age of nineteen he united with the Congregational Church, and about twenty others near his age united at the same time, who were the fruits of a revival at this period. Three years afterwards he was happily married to one of like faith in Christ. Two years passed and that wife was confined on a bed of sickness and suffering, which can never be known except to those who were witnesses of the scene. Four and a half long years of sickness, suffering and trial were then endured which terminated in her death. - She died most triumphantly, though a most painful death. Her husband stood by her bed-side and closed her eyes, when the dying struggle was over.

Prior to her death, Mr. Storrs had had his mind exercised with the conviction that God had called him to preach the gospel of Christ. He had exercised his gifts in the prayer and conference meetings of the church for years; and the thought had often occurred, that possibly he might have to proclaim Christ more publicly, and as a minister.

During the time of his wife's sickness, he was induced to hear a Methodist minister preach for the first time since he was interested in the things of religion. That minister he invited to his house, and also another of the same denomination. Their visits became a source of comfort to himself and wife. Ever after an intimacy existed between him and the Methodists; and about the time of his wife's death he united with that Church, and soon after commenced his labors as a minister of the gospel. He joined the Methodist Traveling Connection in 1825, being then twenty-nine years old. The same year his second marriage occurred with a daughter of Col. Thomas Waterman, of Lebanon, N. H. His father-in-law was the first child ever born in Lebanon, and to the close of a long life one of the most prominent men in that town, being highly esteemed by all. Mr. Storrs traveled and preached among the Methodists till 1836, when he took the relation of a Local Preacher, but traveled more extensively than ever. For three years he spent most of his time lecturing and preaching on the subject of slavery, in a time which tried men's souls; as nearly the whole Methodist E. Church was hostile to an agitation of that subject. That hostility manifested itself specially through the Bishops, who endeavored by every possible means to suppress the discussion of the subject. That opposition convinced Mr. Storrs that individual responsibility was the true ground to occupy, and he could not submit to leave his responsibility in the hands of Bishops, nor any body of men, however good they might be. Without going into details of matters which led to such a result, he withdrew from said church entirely, in 1840, after a connection with it of sixteen years.

At this point it may be necessary to say, that Mr. Storrs never had a charge preferred against him for immoral or disorderly conduct at any period of his connection with the Congregational or Methodist Churches. And in severing his connection with them he was not actuated by hostility to them but by a deep conviction that his responsibility was to God alone.

In 1837 - three years prior to his withdrawal from the M. E. Church - his mind was first called to a consideration of the subject of the final destiny of wicked men as being, possibly, an entire extinction of being and not endless preservation in sin and suffering. - This was by a small anonymous pamphlet put forth, as he learned, by Henry Grew, of Philadelphia. He read it to pass away a leisure hour while passing from Boston to New York. It was strange to him that so plausible and scriptural an argument could be made in defence of a doctrine, which he had always regarded as unworthy of a serious consideration; for he had never doubted that man possessed an immortal soul. - A new train of thought had now been waked up in his mind; but he proceeded with great caution in examining the subject, and in conversing with any one upon it. He searched the Scriptures carefully, and sought every opportunity to get information from ministers, in particular. As the inquiry continued, the strongest arguments urged against this, to him, new view, served to carry his mind into the conviction of its truthfulness and scriptural basis. After several years investigation, conversation and correspondence with some of the most eminent ministers, and looking to God for direction he became settled that man has no immortality by his creation, or birth; and that "all the wicked will God destroy" - utterly exterminate.

He had counted the cost before he came to this conclusion. He had stood high in the denomination with which he was connected, and was greatly beloved by the ministers in the Conference, with which he had passed so many years. That Conference had given him, always, the most gratifying evidence of its confidence and esteem. Though he had, previous to the time now spoken of, taken a "local relation" he still enjoyed a high place in the affections of those ministers, and was ever happy to enjoy association with them.

To take a position, then, which should sever himself from them, and separate himself from the relation which had so long existed, with the certainty that he must for ever after be excluded from their pulpits, if not from their Christian regard, was a trial to his mind which could not have been endured except under a deep sense of the truth of that position which he now felt called to advocate and defend. Relying upon God, he chose to follow his convictions of truth to any and all other considerations; and he took his stand in defence of the doctrine, that there is no immortality out of Christ, and therefore wicked men will be consumed - destroyed - or cease from life - be no more - "be as though they had not been."

He wrote three letters to a prominent and able minister of the Methodist E. Church, with whom he had been intimate. In reply, he acknowledged that he could not answer Mr. Storrs' arguments; and he never undertook it. On the contrary, after a few months, they had an interview, and examined the subject together, which resulted in his advising Mr. Storrs to publish the letters he had written him, but with a request to withhold his name. Accordingly, in the spring of 1841, four years after his attention was first called to the subject, two thousand copies of the "Three Letters" were issued from the press and sent abroad. This was not done without counting the cost.

At this period he was residing in Montpelier, Vt.; and expected likely he would never be called to preach anywhere again only as he did so on his own

appointments, and near his then residence. Contrary to this expectation, he shortly after had an invitation to visit Albany, N. Y., which he did; and after preaching in that city three Sabbaths concluded to remove his family to that place in August, 1841. There he ministered to a small congregation, who came together on the principle of "Receiving one another as Christ had received them." The Bible was the only creed – Christian character the only test. For eight months he preached there without dwelling distinctly on his new views of Christian doctrine, though he had frankly told them what his views were, and circulated among them the "Three Letters" he had previously published.

He now felt called upon to come out more fully and distinctly on the subject, and he determined to do so. This gave rise to what has ever since been called the "Six Sermons," the special history of which we will here state.

Early in the spring of 1842, he determined to give one sermon that should embody all that might be desirable to present in relation to it. The appointment was made one week before hand, and public notice given in the city papers. Monday previous to the time appointed he went to his study, and there spent the entire week in investigation, meditation, and prayer. Thus was the "First Discourse" prepared. - Never had he a deeper and sweeter sense of the Divine presence and blessing; and of being engaged in a work well pleasing in His sight; and he could as well doubt any other part of his Christian experience as to doubt that.

He found before the first week in his study was ended, that two discourses at least would be necessary to present the subject in a proper light. The time came for the first discourse to be delivered: it was Sabbath evening, and the house, for the first time since his ministry there, was full.

He informed the congregation that as his subject was a peculiar one, and he was liable to be misrepresented in what was said, he had determined to do what he had never done before - i.e., read nearly all he had to say. At the close he gave out to preach another sermon on the same subject the next Lord's day evening. His second week was spent in his study in the same manner that the first had been; and thus was the "Second Discourse" prepared; but found there must be a third; and so did the matter proceed till he had prepared and preached the "Sixth Discourse;" and the history of the first week in his study is the history of the six weeks, each of which was spent in the same manner as the first. All this was without any reference to ever publishing. After the Discourses were ended, several who had listened to them desired their publication. - Accordingly he spent several weeks more in revising, reviewing, and preparing them for the press, and they came forth in May or June.

Such is the origin of his "Six Sermons," as they are now called. And he has never doubted, from that day to this, but what it was of God. His opponents, therefore, may not expect him to be easily shaken, whatever reaction they may suppose will take place; or though they may think the views are "making very little progress." They have made ten thousand times more progress than Mr. Storrs ever expected in his life time. A brief history of that progress may not be uninteresting.

A few weeks after the "Six Sermons" were first published, at Albany, Mr. Storrs was visited by a man who was preaching the views of Wm. Miller on the second advent. He gave him the use of the "House of Prayer" in which to present those views. As the attention was deep, and the subject one of so much importance, if true, it was consented that he might repeat his course of Lectures in their place of worship, and Mr. Storrs became partially convinced of the correctness of the views advocated; so much so that he solicited the services of the late Charles Fitch, formerly a Congregational minister, who had embraced the views of Mr. Miller, to visit Albany and preach to the people on the subject. Accordingly a Tent meeting was appointed for that place, and thousands came out to hear that holy man of God, Mr. Fitch, who labored unceasingly and with great power in preaching the coming of the Lord. During his ministry there Mr. S. became settled that the doctrine he preached was true. Under this impression, he left his stated ministry in

Albany to travel and preach; and for the next three months, in the fall of 1842, preached to thousands on thousands in relation to the coming of the Lord. - Thus, without seeking it, the providence of God had given him an influence over a multitude of minds, both ministers and laymen. He did not however introduce his peculiar views directly into his ministrations in public. He had no desire to do so. But as it was known that he held these views he was constantly met with inquirers, both ministers and private Christians, to whom he frankly stated his belief that "all the wicked will God destroy." The Six Sermons were sought for and read, and the truth on that subject spread while he kept silent, publicly.

At length the "organ" of Mr. Miller's views, "The Signs of the Times," Boston, Mass., came out strong against a minister who felt it his duty to preach what the end of the wicked would be as well as to preach the coming of the Lord. That paper several times published remarks censuring that minister; and Mr. S. felt that as he held the same sentiments he was bound not to keep silence and let him suffer alone. - Accordingly, in Dec., 1842, under a deep conviction that God called him thereto, he revised the Six Sermons, and published an edition of five thousand in newspaper form, in the city of New York, where he was then preaching, and scattered them over the United States, at his own expense. A few weeks after that he gave them another revision and published ten thousand more and scattered them in the same manner. Thus was the seed sown, and it sprung up in all directions.

In the spring of 1843, he was invited to Philadelphia to preach on the advent, and thousands came out to hear. It was well known what his sentiments on the end of the wicked were, and there was an evident desire to hear something on that subject. Instead, however, of preaching on the subject, he had the Six Sermons stereotyped in the quarto form, and printed two thousand copies; these were distributed among the congregation to which he was then preaching; and there is little doubt but that most who then read were either convinced of the truth, or had their prejudices so far removed as to feel no opposition.

In the fall of 1843, he went to Cincinnati, Ohio, and spent several months. There also and in Indiana, some five or six thousands of the Sermons were scattered; and we know that the seed took root in that region. It is proper and right that we should here state that Mr. Miller uniformly opposed Mr. Storrs' views on the

immortality question.

The views maintained in the Six Sermons, in the winter of 1843 and 1844 had taken strong hold of many minds; and in Jan., 1844, Charles Fitch, of whom we have previously spoken, wrote Mr. Storrs a letter commencing as follows –

CLEVELAND, Ohio, Jan. 25, 1844.

Dear Br. Storrs: - As you have long been fighting the Lord's battles alone, on the subject of the state of the dead, and of the final doom of the wicked, I write this to say, that I am at last, after much thought and prayer, and a full conviction of duty to God, prepared to take my stand by your side."

He then went on to state his "thorough conversion" to the views in question. This letter was indeed a cordial to Mr. Storrs. Mr. Fitch was a pleasant and powerful preacher, and carried with him a mighty influence. This letter from him was a dreadful blow to the opposers of the doctrine of the Six Sermons among the advent believers.

In May of the same year he wrote Mr. S. again, and commenced by saying - "I have received a long letter from Br. Litch, touching the state of the dead, the end of the wicked, &c. It would be exceeding pleasant to me, to be able to please him, and the dear brethren who agree with him, for I love them all, and could rejoice to concede anything but truth, to be able to harmonize with them in my views. But there is a friend who has bought me with his blood, and I take more pleasure in pleasing Him, than in pleasing all the world besides. I never preached my present views touching the state of the dead, and the destruction of the wicked, until fully convinced that I could no longer withhold them without displeasing my blessed Lord and Master."

He wrote another letter in July, 1844, giving a particular account of his "first impressions" - "the process of conviction, "and his "conversion" to these views. In this faith Mr. Fitch lived and labored a few months; but his abundant labors brought on sickness, and in October, 1844, he fell asleep in Jesus, in the glorious hope of soon awaking at the voice of the Son of God.

About the same time as Charles Fitch, many other ministers in various parts of the country came into the same views, and their number has steadily continued to increase to the present time.

In 1843 the Six Sermons were republished in England and circulated in various parts of that country, and must have attracted some attention, as they are referred to by several writers on both sides of the question there. About this time Dr. Lees, of Leeds, broke ground in England against the endless-torture doctrine, and man's natural immortality. Near the same point of time, Mr. Dobney, a Baptist minister, published his excellent work on "Future Punishment," in England, which has been republished here, and has been the means of bringing many to the truth. Mr. White, a Congregationalist minister, also published his "Life in Christ," taking the same side with Mr. Dobney; and several other ministers in England are on the same ground, and among those who favor it is Archbishop Whately; also Wm. Glenn Moncrieff, lately a minister in the

Congregational Church in Scotland; and last, not least in labor, J. Panton Ham, Congregational minister, Bristol, England. The work is clearly spreading on the other side of the Atlantic.

But to return to this country. These truths are spreading all through the western States; both ministers and laymen are taking hold of them, and sinners are converted through their influence that could not be reached by the old horrible doctrine - "Ye shall not surely die" - "Ye shall be kept alive eternally, and tormented." In North Carolina Dr. Lee and Eld. Pritchard, both Baptist ministers, are doing battle for the truth on this subject. Dr. Lee has there scattered several hundred copies of the Six Sermons.

Dr. Pope, in the State of Missouri, has not been idle; but has circulated many of the Six Sermons and other works. More recently a number of ministers in various places, have espoused the cause of Life and Immortality only through Christ; and the conflict is waxing warmer continually.

For the sentiments contained in the Six Sermons, as now revised and much enlarged, Mr. Storrs alone is responsible, as he has steadily refused to let any man, or any body of men, hold any responsibility for him or his views. It has not been, nor is it now, his object to establish a sect; as he has steadily refused to be recognized as in, what is called, a church relation with any body of men. He does, not, however, make his views of his independent responsibility a standard for the action of others; he desires all to act in harmony with their convictions of what truth and duty requires of them, as responsible to God.

It may be proper in this place to say, that he labored steadily in the city of Philadelphia from Nov. 1844, to April, 1852, employing nearly all his time among that people, but never seeking for, or consenting to, an organization such as all sects labor to establish. - He believed that love was the bond of union, and that when that would not bind a people together they had better separate. For the last two or three years of his residence in Philadelphia he was called more to visit different parts of the country, and finally concluded to remove to New York, as a more central position for visiting abroad.

The "BIBLE EXAMINER" was started by him in 1843, as an occasional issue, at his own expense. It was continued in that way till 1847, when it was issued regularly each month, then in quarto form. With 1848 it was changed to a super-royal sheet of sixteen pages, and continued monthly till 1854, when it was issued semi-monthly. Its object is expressed by its motto - "NO IMMORTALITY, OR ENDLESS LIFE EXCEPT THROUGH JESUS CHRIST ALONE." In 1852 and 1853, in addition to issuing the EXAMINER, Mr. Storrs traveled thousands of miles, east and west, preaching to many people on the Life Theme. Since the EXAMINER has been issued twice each month, his labors have been nearly confined to it, and preaching in New York and vicinity. Thus situated, he resolved on a revision and enlargement of the "SIX SERMONS." While uncertain whether to attempt to publish them in this revised form, his plates for the quarto Six Sermons were destroyed by fire. He then resolved to go forward with the work he had been contemplating, which resulted in the issue of the volume here presented to the reader.

A Phrenological description of Mr. Storrs, given in 1849, may conclude this account of the author of the Six Sermons. It is as follows:

Mr. Storrs' physical and mental constitution is durable; he has considerable force and energy of character, with fortitude, firmness and perseverance. He thinks for himself, but is open to conviction; will not be forced, but may be persuaded. He is naturally confiding, but experience may have, to a considerable extent, corrected this predisposition to believe, confide in, or give credence to. He is a man of enlarged views, liberal sentiment, and a benevolent disposition. His object is truth, and this he strives to obtain, no matter at what sacrifice. He consults duty before expediency; and would sooner stand alone with truth, than go with the multitude and be in error; yet, he is not dogmatical in the advocacy of what he conceives to be the truth, but is rather persuasive, conciliatory and argumentative. He is a warm friend, a good companion, and an excellent counsellor.

He takes comprehensive views of things, examines both sides of all questions of a scriptural character, and decides according to the weight of evidence. - While he uncompromisingly advocates what he believes to be truth, in opposition to this and past ages, he does not sit in judgment on his opponents, but leaves them in the hands of God, to whom they must give account, and unto whom they stand or fall.