Messrs Editors

It were much to be wished that the anonymous writers of professed memoirs of real characters, and especially of religious characters, would adopt it as a rule to submit their manuscripts, previously to the publication of them, to the inspection of some judicious friends acquainted with the facts contained in their narratives. It were also to be wished, that the editors of such memoirs would be at the pains to ascertain, satisfactorily, their truth, before they send them forth to the world, under their own sanction; and if they have unwittingly given publicity to unfounded memoirs, it were no less to be wished that, as soon as apprised of the act, they would give public notice of it, in order to counteract the injurious tendency of errors which they had contributed to propagate. It would seem that, as honest men, they could do no less than this; circumstances must determine whether they ought to do more. A single unfounded memoir of a professedly religious character, will do incalculable mischief whereof the real state of facts is known, by prejudicing the minds of very many people against all religious biography. What evidence have we, they demand, that every religious memoir is not actually unfounded? We know this to be false; why may not all others be so too? The next inference is, that religion itself is a farce; for it were not, its friends would not resort to fictions in order to recommend it. Now there is one effectual mode of doing away such unfavorable impressions, & but one; let the friends of Christianity promptly avow their disapprobation of such pious frauds, and their readiness to detect and expose them. Let them thus show that Christianity not only does not need, but disdains, the aid of fiction.

We have been led to make these remarks having lately noticed, in several papers, an article originally published in the Religious Intelligencer, under the title of “Religion exemplified in the life of poor Sarah.” We know not what the motives of the female who
projected that article. With them we have nothing to do. But of one thing we feel certain; that she continued to reside in the town where Sarah lived, she never would have presumed to publish that article in question. Those who have had their sympathies, & their pious feelings, excited by the perusal of that article, ought to be informed that the whole of it is no better than a romance. There did, indeed, once exist a person by the name of Sarah Rogers, a pretty sensible Indian woman. She lived in Ellington a great number of years, and there died, a year or two since, at a very advanced age. Pious people had considerable charity for her as a christian; but none, it is believed, except her biographer, were ever acquainted with her high religious attainments. She, undoubtedly, had some virtues, and some faults, and unluckily some of the latter were rather at variance with much of the character which is given her by the author. Instead of the negro brogue attributed to her, she spoke good English, and with as much fluency, and propriety, as American women, of no more than common education. She was the subject of charity, and often received it, and that, too, without any great regard to two or three cents worth of sand, which occupies so conspicuous a place in the narrative. As to her passing along the streets with her hands up lifted in the attitude of prayer, her giving fruit to children to induce them to listen to her pious counsels, and other similar incidents, we will not assert that such things never existed; but, if they did, they were known solely to her biographer. All at any rate, with whom we have conversed, and who were vastly better acquainted with Sarah, than she could have been, never even suspected any such thing. The whole story, in short, is so mis-stated, miscolored, or overdrawn, it would be tedious, and useless, to go through with its several parts, and point out their respective errors.

The truth of the statement which we have thus given, is matter of public and universal notoriety among all who were acquainted with Sarah. Some of these were acquainted with her for the space of twenty, thirty, and forty years. On the other hand, the author lived in town about five years, and at the distance of about two miles from her heroine. It was impossible
that she could have had much acquaintance with the subject of her story, for the “old limbs” of the latter did not permit her to make very frequent visits to that part of the town where the author had her “cottage.” From the concurrent testimony of all acquainted with Sarah, we seem at last to be brought to this dilemma; -- the author has either intentionally misrepresented her heroine to the public, or her heroine, in some of her visits greatly misrepresented herself to the author. Either alternative will have a rather unfavorable bearing upon the memoir.

Were it not that fidelity to the truth demands the exposure of its violation; and had it not been that the cause of religion has, in this quarter, suffered much, in the view of many, in consequence of the publication alluded to, and that much indignation and disgust have been excited among all who were acquainted with Sarah, the article, its heroine, and its author, might, for us, have continued to attract the attention of the public. In hope that the disquietude which at present exists, in this region, may be allayed, and that the insinuations against all religious biography, which are now frequently thrown out in consequence of this publication, may be done away, we have been induced to make this statement, with the accompanying observations. If the latter should happen to apply to any one, it is hoped that the application will prove salutary; if they should not apply, they will, at least, be harmless.

MANY

Ellington, March 1820