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OF THE LAST HOURS  
OF ALBERT B. DOD.

BY CHARLES HODGE.

NOV. 20th, 1845.

PRINCETON, N. J. :  
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A

## BRIEF ACCOUNT

### OF THE LAST HOURS OF PROFESSOR DOD.

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A very undue importance is often given to the exercises and expressions of men in their dying hours. If they depart in peace, and still more if they avow distinctly their faith and confidence, it is considered enough to outweigh the opposing evidence of a misspent life. Few men felt the truth of this remark more than Professor Dod. He often said, and said deliberately to a friend, "If you should survive me, I wish you to judge of me and my sentiments from my life, and from what I say in health; rather than from what I may say upon my death bed." He knew too well that the emotions had neither in their nature, nor in the modes of their manifestation, marks of character sufficiently distinctive, to enable us to distinguish certainly the genuine from the spurious. There may be a sorrow, which is not repentance; a confidence which is not faith; a joy which comes not from the Holy Ghost. He knew that the only satisfactory evidence of the correspondence of our feelings with the truth, is the power of that truth in forming the character and governing the life. With regard to no man, therefore, would it be more inappropriate, to give to his dying testimony and professions any higher value than justly belongs to them. That value however is very great. Death

is a great searcher of the heart. It puts it to the question with a solemnity and authority, which rarely fail to extort the truth. What is said may be taken as the honest witness of what is felt. Death brings with it also so much of the light of eternity that every thing is seen as it was never seen before. The soul is never in so favourable a position to estimate things aright, as when about to rise to a higher state of being. The ancients therefore were accustomed to consider the dying inspired, and their sayings were regarded as prophecies. The very instinct of our nature leads us to cherish the last words, actions and looks of our friends as the most precious, because the most trustworthy testimony of their feelings. Hence the dying expressions of affection are never forgotten by those to whom they are addressed.

Peculiar circumstances often give special value to what a man says when he comes to die. Much in this respect depends upon the character of the man himself, and much upon his intellectual condition at the time. In the present instance, every thing would seem to concur to give to the dying testimony of Professor Dod whatever value can belong to such declarations. He was undoubtedly one of the ablest men New Jersey has ever produced. His intellect was so clear in its perceptions, so vigorous and so rapid in its action, that he saw as by intuition, what ordinary minds attain only by laborious examination. This gave him his remarkable perspicuity of statement, his power in argument, his ability to analyse and make plain the most complicated or abstruse subjects. With this was connected a certain impatience of all false reasonings, or false exhibitions. He saw things so clearly that he wondered at the blindness of others; and he

could not bear to see them impose on themselves or others by mere words. Such a man, with his knowledge of the scriptures, could not easily be deluded by false grounds of confidence; or mistake the apathy of exhaustion for peace with God.

Then again, this highly gifted man, addressed himself to the work of dying in the perfect possession of his intellect. He felt that it was a work of immeasurable importance, which it behoved him to do deliberately and intelligently. This will appear from the following brief statement of the progress of his disease. He was seized on Thursday the 13th, between 10 and 11 o'clock at night, with a severe pain in the side, which was much relieved by appropriate remedies. During Friday and Saturday his case did not excite much anxiety. On Saturday night, however, there was a return of pain, which he referred to the region of the liver, more violent than the first attack. This pain in a measure yielded to a copious loss of blood. On Sunday night, Dr. Forman, his family physician, who had been out of town, returned, and seemed to take a serious view of his case. On that night and the subsequent morning he was again bled twice or thrice, and got through Monday and Monday night in comparative comfort. Throughout the day of Tuesday there was such an alleviation of all his symptoms, that the most sanguine expectations were entertained of his recovery. About six o'clock, however, a change occurred in his manner of breathing which caught the watchful ear of his wife, who from first to last hovered over him, as a ministering spirit, and excited her alarm. When he awoke from the slumber into which he had fallen, he complained of severe pain in his breast. His kind

physician was soon in attendance, and such remedial measures as the case admitted were adopted. Still the pain continued, attended with an indescribable feeling which produced the conviction in his own mind that his end was near. About the middle of the night a friend, who had left him late in the preceding afternoon, when every thing bid fair for his recovery, was sent for. When that friend entered his room, Professor Dod said "You hardly expected so early a summons;" and requested to be prayed for. When a man is thus suddenly called from the flattering prospect of recovery to the almost certainty of speedy death, things come in crowds upon his mind, all demanding instant attention and contending for the precedence. Professor Dod mastered that difficulty and took them in their order. He first considered his family and expressed his great anxiety about leaving them. In reply to the affectionate request of his wife not to pain himself on their account, he said, "It is a proper cause of anxiety; and there is no rational ground of composure in reference to it, but faith in God." His wife replied, "Dear Husband, I have faith, and you have faith, so do not permit leaving us to disturb you." He answered, "It is well." From that moment the subject was dismissed from his mind as a matter of anxiety. He frequently afterwards referred to it, with cheerful composure, giving his wife weighty counsels as to the education and government of their children, and expressing the hope that it might be one of the employments of departed souls to watch over their friends on earth, and said, if such be the will of God, he would delight to act as the ministering spirit to those so near his heart.

Having thus promptly brought himself to commit his family

to God, he turned to the state of his own soul. Here there was a moment, not of doubt, but of suspense; the solemn silence, as it were, which preceded the answer to the self-interrogation, Am I prepared to die? He spoke of the difficulty, simple as the act of faith is, of knowing whether we truly believe. As soon, however, as the object of faith was presented to him in the free, full, and explicit declarations of Scripture, he seized it with a clearness and strength that left no doubt, in his own mind, whether he had faith or not. As promise after promise was repeated to him, he said, with emotion, "I thank you for that;" "God bless you for that." He then said, "I am sorry I cannot talk, I have so much to say. There is one thing, however, I must say. I have been suspected of a philosophism which tends to skepticism. I deliberately, therefore, wish it to be known, that I know myself to be nothing, and less than nothing, and God all in all. And Christ precious. I know no other God than him." The text was then repeated, "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Son of God, is born of God." "Thank you for that," he replied, and attempted to raise his friend's hand to his lips.

The above remark may need some explanation. No one, to the best of our knowledge, ever suspected Professor Dod of skepticism; and no one, who knew him long or intimately, ever questioned his piety. It is but justice to his memory to say, that he appeared before the public much more frequently as a literary and scientific man than as a preacher. This was in a measure the necessary consequence of his official relation to the college as Professor of Mathematics. His views also of the best method of preaching were somewhat peculiar. He often avowed the opinion that in a community in which the



great facts and doctrines of the gospel were familiarly known, those sermons were the most useful which clearly presented some great practical truth. Thus if he would fix in the minds of an intelligent audience the conviction that men are responsible for their faith, (the topic of one of his ablest discourses) he would think that he had done them far more good, than if he had awakened for the moment their devotional feelings or excited their fears. This opinion gave to his occasional sermons the philosophical cast, which was the subject of frequent remark, and sometimes of regret. Yet those who knew him well and heard him frequently, knew that no man could preach the gospel more simply or fervently than he often did.

It is also proper to remark that Professor Dod's dislike of the extreme doctrines of that form of philosophy, which refers all our knowledge to sensation and experience, and which seems to leave out of view the soul and our moral constitution as a source of higher knowledge than can be derived from the senses, sometimes led him into forms of expression which were liable to misconstruction. Here again it was only those who knew him slightly, who misconceived his meaning. His talents also for conversational debate were so pre-eminent, and he delighted so much in such exercises, that it was almost unavoidable that he should at times be thrown upon the wrong side of a question, which he would maintain for the sake of argument, rather than as an expression of the real convictions of his own mind. All these circumstances combined to give rise to those misconceptions to which he alluded, when he said, "he had been suspected of a philosophism which tended to skepticism."

No intimate friend of Professor Dod can have failed to re-

mark, that he was distinguished by two things. The one was, an unwavering love and reverence for the Lord Jesus Christ. The writings of the apostle John were to him peculiarly dear, because they dwell so much upon the glory of the Son of God. He was pre-eminently a worshipper of Christ, in whose person he saw the clearest revelation of God. Christ was the centre of all his religious feelings: and hence the peculiar form of his remarkable confession quoted above—"I know no other God than Christ;" which was only giving expression to the experience of the truth, "No man knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son shall reveal him." "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father also."

The other thing was his strong attachment to the doctrines of grace. He held them in their ultimate principles and in their details, and was their able defender. He never evinced any repugnance to them, or any disposition to escape from them by having recourse to other systems of doctrine less humbling to the human heart. We question whether any minister in our church entertained a more intelligent or stronger dislike to, (if the expression on such an occasion may be pardoned for sake of its conciseness) "New Schoolism" in all its forms. He often said, "I have gone through that system, and know it well. It has robbed me of half my life." He was accustomed to call the works of Archbishop Leighton his *vade mecum*, and said he seldom passed a day without looking into them; always resorting to them when his spirits flagged, as to a stream of refreshing water.

From this digression, rendered necessary in justice to our departed friend, in consequence of the expression quoted above, we return to the narrative of his last hours.

Having satisfied himself that being in Christ, he was prepared for death, he thought of his friends. He sent messages to his mother and sisters, and requested that his brethren in town should be assured of his love. "Say for me all you know is in my heart." After sleeping for some time, he said, I ought to see my colleagues; and as he appeared to be sinking, Dr. Maclean was sent for. When he saw him, he took him by the hand, and said, "As you represent my colleagues here, I wish you to say to them, that if I have ever in any way injured or offended them, I beg their forgiveness." Dr. Maclean, overcome with emotion, begged him not to speak so; that they all loved him, and that any little difference of opinion or feeling that might at any time have occurred, was forgotten in a moment. He replied, "I must be heard, and I charge you to deliver my message. I wish you to ask their forgiveness, and to assure them that I honour and love them as Christian brethren; and you know that what I say in such an hour, is the honest language of my heart. I should like to address the students, but you must say for me, what I cannot say for myself. As for yourself, I need not say, I have always respected and loved you, and regarded you as one of my truest and best friends."

The bell for morning prayers having rung, Dr. Maclean went to the college, and communicated the sad intelligence of the extreme danger of their Professor to the students. Soon after, his study was filled with his appalled and weeping colleagues; and as one after another they came into his room to take their leave of him, he took them by the hand and addressed to each some words of kindness and affection. When asked whether his children should be sent for he answered

“The subject must be looked at all round. You know there is something of animal feeling connected with parental affection, which in me is peculiarly strong. If I see my children I am confident the end will come.” The subject was of course dropped.

From the extreme depression into which he had sunk early on Wednesday morning, so that even his physician thought him at one time to be actually dying, he in a measure revived. When he alluded to the severe struggle through which he had passed during the night, his friend, Mr. Lord, said, “I am glad to inform you that you have been yourself throughout.” “Something better than myself, I trust,” he replied with a smile. “Yes” said Mr. Lord, “your better self.” “A Christian,” he answered, “is nothing but in Jesus Christ.”

During Wednesday morning he took leave of several of his friends, who had been most assiduous in their attentions to him. This was one of the most beautiful exhibitions of his character made during his illness. There was something so sweet in his smile of recognition, so appropriate and tender in the words which he addressed to each. To one who called him her dear friend, he said with an almost playful smile, “Mother, or sister, sometimes you claim one title, sometimes the other; I give you both. Now kiss me.”

Wednesday night was devoted to renewed and strenuous exertions to fan the flickering flame of life. All his friends were removed from the room except the physician and Mr. Lord, whose devoted love to his dying friend, while it rendered absence from his bed-side insupportable, qualified him for the office of nurse during those critical hours.

On Thursday morning about 8 o'clock, the difficulty of

respiration was so increased, that it became apparent that he was dying. A friend who was sitting behind him supporting his head, repeated in his ear the first verse of the hymn beginning, "Jesus can make a dying bed, feel soft as downy pillows are." He replied, "I feel that to be true." Passages of Scripture were then repeated from time to time, to which he would signify his assent by saying, "I know it." "I feel it." "I believe it," or by joining in the repetition. On one occasion when he signified no assent, some one said, "He did not hear that." He replied, "Yes I did; it sank through my soul."

When he spoke of his bodily distress, a friend said, (it is hoped in pardonable accommodation of scripture,) "This corruptible *must* put on incorruption and this mortal *must* put on immortality; but when this corruptible *has* put on incorruption, and this mortal *has* put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written—'Death is swallowed up in victory.' O death where is thy sting, O grave where is thy victory. The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law, but thanks be to God who giveth *me* the victory through *my* Lord Jesus Christ." As soon as the words "O death where is thy sting" were reached, he joined in the repetition, and followed his friend in saying with emphasis "Who giveth *me* the victory," but would not follow him in saying "through *my* Lord Jesus Christ," but corrected him, saying, "not *my* but *our*. He is *our* Saviour. There is nothing selfish in religion."

Soon after this he asked some one to sing, and the hymn "Rock of Ages cleft for me," was sung. The stricture in the chest, after 12 o'clock, became so severe that he spoke but

little beyond the frequent exclamations, "Come quickly." "Lord Jesus receive my spirit." His mind began occasionally to wander, and from two o'clock to four, it was a painful struggle for breath. As the clock struck four, his soul was with God.

This account is in every respect imperfect. It records little of what he said—little of the tender love he manifested for his wife and children. It cannot present him as he exhibited himself through all these trying hours; his penetrating intellect, his strong discriminating sense, rejecting instantly every proffered ground of consolation, which was inadequate or unsound; his constitutional cheerfulness, and his irrepressible disposition, which every one must have noticed in him during life, to say pleasant things. These and other prominent traits of character were exhibited in a most attractive manner to the very last. Any written statement, therefore, must be powerless to convey the impression made by the scene itself. To say that he joined in the repetition of passages of scripture, can give no idea of the effect produced by the light beaming from his countenance, which seemed to those who were kneeling about his bed, as gleams of glory from the other world. Imperfect as this account is it may suffice to show that whatever evidence of Christian character could well be given on a death bed, was given by Professor Dod. There was an entire renunciation of self-dependence—an intelligent and joyful acquiescence in the truth. The passages of scriptures to which he assented with so much emotion, were such as these: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by me." "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not

perish but have everlasting life." "I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." This passage he repeated almost with exultation. The passage, "Christ Jesus is of God made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption," was, it is believed, the one which it was thought he had not heard, but which he said, sank through his soul. After one of these avowals of faith, he said, "You now see the foundation on which I have built." With this faith was connected peace. There was not from the first pause for self-inspection, to his last breath, a single misgiving; a single doubt of God's love, or of the ability or willingness of Christ to save him. When on Wednesday morning he began to revive a little, he said, "I am sorry to be brought back," and then immediately corrected himself, and said, "I do not mean that; you know what I mean. There are two feelings in the case. I have passed through the conflict and have done it calmly. And it is natural to wish not to have to do it again." With this peace were connected, humility, submission and love. As far therefore as the eye of man can see, he died the death of a Christian. Had he died suddenly, or in a state of unconsciousness, few persons would have less hope in his good estate, than they have now. But surely it is a great blessing thus to die. Surely it is a great satisfaction to his friends to see, as well as to believe. It was at least a most affecting and

animating sight, to see such a man walk deliberately into the dark cold waters of death, saying at every conscious step he took, "I know in whom I have believed, and that he is able to keep that which I have committed to his hands."

The most striking feature of this whole scene, and that which gives it its greatest value is this. Professor Dod was certainly a great man; a man of large and varied attainments, yet it was as plain as day, that the truth that saved him, the truth with which he armed himself for the conflict with death, was the truth which he had learned when he was a child, and in the precise scriptural form in which he then learned it. This is not said in disparagement of learning; nor as an argument for or against any system of opinions, but as another illustration of the truth that we are sure of nothing but what God has said, and that the moment we attempt to alter the form of the truth as He has stated it in his word, and endeavour to make it more abstract or philosophical it loses its authority and power. It is no longer divine, but human. And therefore in real emergencies, when the soul must have sure ground on which to stand, it takes the simple unaltered word of God, without note or comment. A man alone in the midst of the ocean buffeting its waves, could not feel more utterly helpless than Professor Dod evidently felt, when struggling in the waters of death, as far as the resources of human strength and knowledge are concerned; and a man in the ocean could not seize with more obvious confidence and joy the hand of God reached down from heaven for his deliverance, than our departed friend manifested in the clear firm grasp with which he laid hold on the sure word of God.



And now, by all that is awful in death, and by all that is glorious in victory over death, let us, one and all, cling to the Bible. Take it as it is. This is **THE** lesson taught us by the death-bed experience of our gifted, admired, and beloved brother **ALBERT B. DOD**.