

ADDRESS

AT

THE INTERMENT

OF

ROBERT RALSTON, ESQ.

AUGUST 13, 1836.

BY ASHBEL GREEN, D. D.

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## ADDRESS.

"I HEARD A VOICE FROM HEAVEN—SAID THE INSPIRED AUTHOR OF THE APOCALYPSE—SAYING UNTO ME, WRITE, BLESSED ARE THE DEAD THAT DIE IN THE LORD, FROM HENCEFORTH: YEA SAITH THE SPIRIT, THAT THEY MAY REST FROM THEIR LABOURS, AND THEIR WORKS DO FOLLOW THEM."—Rev. xiv. 13.

THE beloved man—emphatically the *beloved* man—whose mortal remains lie before us, has rested from his labours, and is gone to join the society of the blessed who die in the Lord: and the works of piety and benevolence which follow the spirits of holy men, when they depart from earth to heaven, have seldom been more numerous, than in the case of him whose funeral rites we celebrate. Yet, no man ever more pointedly and unreservedly than he, renounced the merit of good works, as the ground of his acceptance with God. The infinite merits of Christ—the finished righteousness of his Redeemer—formed his only plea, and the sole foundation of his hope, that he might be admitted to the mansions of the blessed. Good works, brethren, go not before us, to form our title to heaven, but they follow after, as the evidence of our discipleship, and the measure of our gracious reward.

An inward deep-seated piety, was "the well of living water," from which were irrigated, and nourished, and invigorated, all those "trees and fruits of

righteousness," which marked and adorned the pathway of life, of our departed brother. He was truly and eminently a devout man. His communion with his God and Saviour was habitual—it was sustained and guarded by a definite allotment of time and attention. In the busiest period of his mercantile life—and there was a period, and not a short one, when there probably was not a busier man than he, in this city—still, *one hour* of closet devotion in the morning, taken if necessary from his sleeping hours, was his indispensable preparation for meeting his business engagements—the bustle and temptations of the world. This preserved on his mind an unbroken sense of the presence and observation of God; and of the comparative worthlessness of every object that might tempt to a forfeiture of the divine favour and approbation. Hence his peculiar conscientiousness, and his inflexible integrity. Where a matter of personal convenience, or a point of etiquette, or any thing not connected with principle was in question, he was the most yielding and accommodating of all men, and was noted as such, wherever he was known; but whenever what he esteemed a matter of duty, or of principle, was concerned, notwithstanding his pre-eminent meekness and mildness, you might as well think of changing the pole-star, as of moving him. His fear and love of God swallowed up every other fear, and all other love.

As a professional man, his standing through his

long life, was with the most distinguished and respected merchants of our city. In the vigorous periods of life, (for he had for some years past retired from all active mercantile pursuits) he was among the most extensively concerned, enterprising, and successful of our commercial men. For fairness in dealing, punctuality in all his engagements, and an accurate knowledge of accounts, he had no superior. In difficult cases and questions among merchants, his opinion was regarded as of the greatest weight; and probably no one, for a series of years, was oftener employed in arbitrating and deciding on embarrassed and disputable points. He strenuously maintained, in opposition to many others, that in cases of bankruptcy, there ought to be no favoured creditors—that all ought to stand on equal ground. This doctrine operated in some instances, greatly to his own loss, when its opposite might and would have insured him an indemnity. But with him, there was no equivalent for moral principle.

Although the piety of our lamented brother was eminent and fervent, it was at the farthest remove from bigotry, uncharitableness, or censoriousness. He had drunk deeply into the very spirit of the Gospel, and loved all, by whatever name they were called, who appeared to love his Saviour. In no man whom I have ever known, were “the meekness and gentleness of Christ” more beautifully and strikingly exemplified. His very countenance was lighted up with

kind and benevolent feeling—its benignity struck every beholder; and there was a courtesy and gentleness in the whole of his manners and deportment, which carried with them an indiscrible charm, and told to every stranger that approached him, that he had come into the presence of a friend.

His liberality and kindness to the poor and afflicted, was a prominent trait in his character. In addition to what he bestowed in strict accordance with our Lord's injunction on the subject of alms-giving, "not to let the left hand know what the right hand doth," there was not a charity in this city (justly noted for its charitable institutions) to which he was not a known and decided friend. Of some he had been the projector and founder, and to many he was a liberal and cheerful contributor. Those ornaments and blessings of our city, the Widows' and Orphans' Asylums, of which his excellent lady was the contriver, originator, and patroness, not only received his cordial and joyful concurrence, but without his co-operating aid and influence could never have come into existence. Of the Mariner's Church he was one of the earliest, most active, and most munificent friends; and here, as in other institutions, the chief burden of care and labour in sustaining the establishment, by managing and economizing its funds and extricating it from the embarrassment of debt, rested on him, till the time of his death.

But his benevolent feelings were not confined to

Philadelphia. Did a calamity fall so heavily on any city, or town of the United States, as to call for general sympathy and relief? nay, did famine or pestilence smite a distant island or region, so that an appeal was made to the general compassion of mankind?—he was either the first, or a co-operator with the first, to call on our citizens for their interposition, to mitigate the misery of the afflicted: and not unfrequently, as treasurer of the public contributions, he cheerfully incurred the trouble of superintending their transmission and their proper application.

The patronage of meritorious and promising young men, was a species of benevolence in which he greatly delighted, and greatly excelled, “I have too long overlooked that amiable youth,” said he once to myself, in a whisper, when the subject of his remark retired from a company of which we formed a part. At the same time, I saw him making a note privately in his memorandum book; and soon I heard of an advantageous employment, which he had obtained for this deserving individual, by which in a few years, he rose to competence and respectability.

Like his Divine Master, “he went about doing good.” Wherever he went—on a visit or on a journey—he was constantly looking out, to see what good he could do; and I have known the complete repair of a dilapidated church, which I passed with him on a journey, to be effected by a subscription which he set on foot in its neighbourhood, and headed with a

liberal donation. When only taking a ride for air and exercise, I have seen him, I know not how often, drop a tract, from a bundle which he carried for the purpose, that it might be picked up by a foot passenger, whom he had espied coming towards us at a short distance.

On the whole, when it is considered that he has been a liberal pecuniary donor to all objects of Christian benevolence for fifty years in succession, although his largesses, in particular instances, may have been exceeded by those of others, yet, taking the whole of his life into view, it is probable that no individual in this city has given more money than he—perhaps not as much—to objects of piety and humanity. But in addition to this, his active, incessant, and unwearied personal exertions, in promoting and carrying into effect all charitable, pious, and humane undertakings and enterprises, have probably been of more value than all his pecuniary contributions. Often have they been such as money could not have purchased.

The natural consequence of this long and continued course of benevolent action was, that our departed friend, as I intimated at first, was greatly beloved. Since the days of holy Job, the number has been small, of whom it could be more truly said, “When the ear heard me, then it blessed me, and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me; because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him

that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me; and I made the widow's heart to sing for joy; I put on righteousness and it clothed me; my judgment was a robe and a diadem. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father to the poor; and the cause that I knew not I searched out." But although this language was peculiarly applicable to him, he was the last man in the world to have appropriated it to himself. Never was there a man less given to display, or less a seeker of applause, or commendation, or even of credit, for the numerous charitable acts he performed, the services he rendered, and the exertions he made. On the contrary, he seemed to be best pleased, if he could hide himself from personal observation. If the good he had in view was achieved, he manifested no concern that the achievement should be credited to himself. If it went to another, as it sometimes did, that other might take it, and take the whole, without any opposing claim on his part. In a word, a retiring modesty and unaffected diffidence formed a marked feature of his whole character. Yet when called by duty to take the lead at public meetings, or to preside in a public body—as for a time he did in one of the Councils of our city, and to the time of his death, in some smaller corporations—he discharged the duties of the chair with full intelligence, dignity, and propriety.

He never was the object of popular suffrage, except



for membership in the Councils of this city; and even in this he reluctantly submitted to the entreaties of his friends, and escaped from it as soon as a fair opportunity was offered. He sought to avoid the public gaze, and had little pleasure in political assemblages of any kind, and least of all, in those in which there was ardent debate or heated controversy. It was in those peaceful associations which are formed for the promotion of charitable and pious designs, that he delighted to take a part. Of the Bible cause he was, from first to last, a devoted friend and advocate; and certainly he was second to no one, as an efficient auxiliary. He was one of the small circle of pious and public spirited individuals in this city, who projected and instituted, in the year 1809, the first Bible Society in the United States; and from which all the rest have germinated. Of this Philadelphia Bible Society he was chosen the Treasurer, and he held the office, without other remuneration than the gratification of his own pious feelings, during the remainder of his life. It was, at all times, an office, which, in the exact and regular manner in which he discharged its duties, was productive of considerable labour. But it was in a high degree onerous, and required a large portion of time, and of constant and vigilant attention, during the whole period in which the enterprize of putting a Bible into every family in this large State, was in the process of its execution. The General Society ap-

pointed a special committee of its members, to superintend and direct this noble undertaking. The committee met weekly, to devise and determine on the proper measures, and to urge them forward by their personal influence and exertions, and by all the means which they could properly command. Nor was any member backward or inactive; but still, the labouring oar was more efficiently applied by the hands of the Treasurer, than by those of any other member—probably more than by all the others collectively taken. To him it fell to import Bibles from abroad, and to employ printers at home, and to superintend their operations; to take care, and see that there was a provision of the necessary funds; to state and settle all accounts; to provide Bible depositories; to inquire after, and correspond with influential men, friendly to the enterprize, in every part of the State; to forward the numerous copies of the sacred volume to the places of their destination; and to report to the committee at every meeting. All this he undertook and performed, with a laboriousness, exactness, and untiring perseverance, that was equally surprising and gratifying to all his coadjutors. He was, also, one of the largest pecuniary contributors to the funds, which were indispensable in carrying into effect this expensive, but incalculably beneficial work.

Not only on this extraordinary occasion, but at all other times, he has been the most laborious member of the Philadelphia Bible Society; as it is

believed every member of that Society will cheerfully testify, although the Secretaryship of the institution has certainly required no small share both of vigilance and labour. But to him we have been indebted for an economical employment of all the funds of the Society, and a faithful statement of their disbursement, as well as for the general distribution of the sacred volume, and a constant detailed account of the copies, in various languages, sent to different parts of our own country, and of other countries. He also has chiefly, and almost exclusively, corresponded with the British and Foreign Bible Society—the noble and original progenitor of all similar institutions, and with our own excellent national Bible Society, in whose wide success he greatly rejoiced. In a word, his activity in this blessed cause has made the name of Robert Ralston known, as the zealous friend of Bible distribution, as well as of missionary effort, in the four quarters of the world.

Brethren of the Philadelphia Bible Society, who now honour the memory of our departed brother, by your attendance here in your corporate character—it is surely a dispensation in the righteous providence of God, which demands our notice, that our venerable and venerated President, and our excellent and highly esteemed Treasurer, should both have been taken from us, in the short period of four weeks.\* While

\* See the paper at the close of this address.

we bow with reverend submission to the holy will of God, in his thus dealing with us; and while we are thankful, that the deceased were so long spared to us, and have gone to their rest and their reward full of days and full of honours, we must yet feel that two of the main pillars of our Society are removed. This dispensation surely addresses to us an impressive call to put forth all our energies, in sustaining that sacred cause which was so dear to them, and which they so long and ably contributed to support. Let us do this in the fear and strength of that God whose holy truth we seek to diffuse abroad; and let us hope for his aid and approving smiles, to crown our humble endeavours with success.

The brother whose death we mourn had suffered for several years, under a painful malady, which he bore with a patience and uncomplaining fortitude, that has few parallels. Still it was a deadly arrow, which could neither be extracted nor escaped from; and its effects, aggravated by occasional diseases of the whole system, gradually, but incessantly, diminished the vital energy, till it became extinct. He expired without pain, and without the convulsion of a muscle, or the distortion of a feature. His mind, for two or three days before his death, although it suffered no alination, was oppressed by a kind of lethargic stupor; from which, indeed, he could be aroused, and respond rationally to any question which required but a short answer; but which dis-

qualified him for all conversation. The lamp of life flickered in its socket, till, by insensible degrees, it sunk away into the darkness of death. But in his last conversation with his friends, while he had the command of his mental powers, it was evident that he retained, what he had long possessed and cherished, "a good hope" through grace—a hope full of immortality.

A severe personal illness, from which I am yet but partially recovered, detained me, most reluctantly, from the death bed of my friend—a friend between whom and myself, the most delightful intimacy and confidential communications had existed, without any interruption or any alloy, for very nearly half a century. The seasons of sweet and sacred fellowship, enjoyed in conversation with him, and in mingled petitions at the mercy seat of our covenant God, have been among the happiest moments of my life, and I doubt not of his.—Sainted spirit! shall we not soon meet again, and renew our friendship for eternity, at the foot of our Redeemer's throne on high!

"Mark the perfect man and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace." In strictness of language, no mere man, since the primitive apostacy, has been a perfect man. Where such language as has just been quoted, appears in the inspired writings, it is doubtless to be taken in a qualified sense. The beloved man whom we mourn, was not a perfect man. Had any one intimated such a thought to him,

he would have repelled it with disgust and horror. He acknowledged and deeply mourned his many imperfections. Still, it is true that he was regarded, not only by partial friendship, but by impartial observers, as approximating perfection, more nearly than is the common lot, even of eminent Christians. There was no marked defect in his character, in any of the numerous relations which he sustained in life. As a husband, a father, a friend, a Christian, a Ruling Elder in the Church, a merchant, a citizen—he was alike exemplary in all. In the seventy-fifth year of his age, he has gone to the bosom of his Saviour and his God: and his family, his friends, the poor and afflicted, the church, the city, the religious community of our land, and indeed of the world, have sustained a loss, which will not easily be supplied. His example ought to be exhibited in a permanent Memoir. I have but imperfectly sketched a few lineaments. His pastor will, I trust, supply much, in his funeral sermon, to be delivered in the church to which the deceased belonged, on the morning of to-morrow week. But I repeat, there ought to be a Memoir that should embody the features of his whole character, and show the effects of his benevolent exertions, and exhibit them as an example to the world. May not the public look for this, from one of the relatives of the deceased, who is perfectly competent to the task? To those relatives I have but a few words to say on the present occasion, and they need to be but few.

Their own meditations will suggest far more than any language of friendship could communicate.

**MOURNERS**—Your deceased parent has left you a rich and rare inheritance—ininitely more valuable than that competent worldly provision, which the smiles of God's providence on his activity and industry enabled him to leave. Yes, an inheritance you have, far beyond the wealth of the world, in his prayers, his counsels, his alms-deeds, his Christian example, and his amiable and influential character. Be it yours, as we trust it will be, to improve this inheritance; for verily it gives you a high responsibility, to your God, to your friends, and to the observing public. Your father's character holds you up to view—Oh! follow him, as he followed Christ. You have our deepest sympathy, and our most fervent prayers, that the God to whom your pious parents, with united hearts and vows, devoted you from your very birth, may have you constantly in his holy protection, may bless you as the seed of the faithful, may confer on you every earthly good, may guide and guard you in all the path of life, may richly endow you with his grace; and may at last gather you to the relatives who have gone before you, in the mansions of bliss in heaven.

**CHRISTIAN BRETHREN**—A large chasm has been made in all our Christian and benevolent institutions, by the death of Robert Ralston. Who in this audience—who among our youth, or our middle aged Chris-

tians and citizens, will come forward and endeavour to fill the chasm? Who will emulate, and strive to imitate the character of the deceased? Who will take his place in the Bible Society, and labour as he did, to sustain its energies, and promote its usefulness? Who will succeed him in all those labours of love, by which his life was filled up? God knoweth—If He intends not this death as an unmingled calamity, He can never want instruments to do his work. He can form them at his will. But this is no just cause of thoughtlessness and indifference on our part. No: and if it be his purpose to promote his cause and his glory by our agency, He will put it into the heart of one and another, competent individual, to say, “here am I, send me.” Happy they who willingly and unreservedly consecrate themselves to the service of their God and Redeemer; for whatever may be their toils and trials on earth, in the midst of all, their consolations will abound, and great will be their reward in heaven: for it was from heaven that the voice was heard, “saying write, blessed are the dead that die in the Lord from henceforth; yea saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them.” *Amen.*



## APPENDIX.

## APPENDIX.

TRIBUTE OF RESPECT FROM THE BIBLE SOCIETY  
OF PHILADELPHIA.

At a meeting of the Bible Society of Philadelphia, August 11th, 1836, the following Preamble and Resolutions were unanimously adopted.

The Managers of the Bible Society of Philadelphia, have recently suffered a painful trial, in the loss by death of two of their most respected, exemplary, and effective members. Wholly to restrain the expression of their mournful sense of the loss, might appear like indifference to the solemn indications of Divine Providence, whilst at the same time they are aware, that the revered names of their departed colleagues can receive no augmentation of true loveliness from any tribute emanating from their surviving associates. These associates feel, however, that they owe it to the institution, with which they had a common connexion, to themselves, and to the memory of the just ones now removed from them by death, briefly to bear their testimony to the uncommon merit and superior character of their deceased brethren. The propriety of such an expression is rendered unquestionable by the fact, that the Bible Society of Philadelphia, from its very origin, has derived much of its good name and usefulness from the eminent talents and services of those honoured individuals. It will be perceived at once, that regard is now had to the Right Rev. WILLIAM WHITE, D. D. and to ROBERT RALSTON, Esq.

As a friend and supporter of the Bible Society, BISHOP WHITE was decided, uniform, and persevering. His comprehensive and benevolent mind selected this pious expedient, as one among the most direct and hallowed, for the communication of good to his fellow men. For years his generous mind, approving countenance, and Christian assiduities, helped to confer upon the measures and operations of the Society success and respectability. As the presiding officer during the whole of that time, he acted always with the utmost discretion and dignity. Ever the adviser of prudent

plans, the dispassionate and conciliating moderator, the punctual applicant to business, he gained to himself the undissembled confidence and affection of all those with whom he co-operated. His seat in the Board was never vacant, except from indisposition, or some avocation which necessarily detained him from the post of his duty. A few minutes before the time of meeting, and seldom if ever long after, he would be found in his place, ready to enter upon the duties of each recurring occasion. A pious regard to the authority, and an humble appeal to the grace of God, marked all his conduct; nor was there wanting in him any of those attributes and characteristics, which constitute the man of true goodness and the Christian of devoted piety. The loss of such a coadjutor, of such a presiding officer, of so firm a friend and advocate of the Bible Society, is an event which the Managers deeply feel and sincerely lament, whilst they submit in humble resignation to the will of the Great Disposer of events.

ROBERT RALSTON, Esq. late Treasurer of the Society, after a life of consecration to the cause of his Divine Master, and the completion of his luminous course as a Christian and a philanthropist, has also passed from his station of active duty in the Board, and left another vacancy, to remind them of the desolating power of death. The Managers as yet are unable to estimate the loss which the interest confided to them sustains, by the death of their venerable Treasurer. On him devolved, from the very commencement of the Society, not only the care of its funds, but frequent demands upon his time and attention, in devising and executing plans for the increase of the Society's resources, in corresponding with distant bodies and individuals, and in other departments of service immediately related to its general interest. As Mr. Ralston acted in all other good and munificent enterprizes, so he acted as Treasurer of the Bible Society of Philadelphia, signalizing his life by liberality, disinterestedness, honour and singleness of purpose, for the furtherance of the cause and kingdom of the Redeemer. With such impressions and recollections of the two eminent individuals, who have been discharged by death from their labours of love, the Board unanimously and solemnly adopt the following resolutions:

1st. *Resolved*, That this Board experience deep and unaffected regret, at the lamented death of their beloved brethren and faithful

coadjutors, the Right Rev. WILLIAM WHITE, D. D. and ROBERT RALSTON, Esq.

2d. *Resolved*, That thanks be rendered to Almighty God for the excellent lives, Christian examples, long continued usefulness, and exalted worth of these venerable brethren.

3d. *Resolved*, That though they died in the maturity of their graces, in the fulness of their ages, and in conformity with the righteous ordination of the Lord, and therefore, as may be fitly concluded, have attained the consummation of their hopes, yet their removal from the sphere of active usefulness is to be deemed an admonitory lesson, imparting impressive instructions to the living, and tending, by the grace of God, to the sanctification of survivors.

4th. *Resolved*, That the Board deeply and cordially sympathize with the families and relatives of their deceased colleagues, in the afflictive visitation by which they are tried, and that the foregoing expressions of their feeling and regard be transmitted to them.

*By order of the Board of Managers of the Bible Society  
of Philadelphia*

(SIGNED)

PETER WOLLE,

*Recording Secretary.*