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FAITHFUL SERVANT REWARDED:

A

S E R M O N,

DELIVERED AT PRINCETON,

BEFORE THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE COLLEGE OF
NEW-JERSEY, MAY 6, 1795, OCCASIONED BY THE DEATH OF

The Rev. JOHN WITHERSPOON, D. D. L. L. D.

PRESIDENT OF SAID COLLEGE.

BY JOHN RODGERS, D. D.

SENIOR MINISTER OF THE UNITED PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCHES, IN THE CITY OF NEW-YORK.

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1795.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following discourse was prepared at the pressing request of a number of the trustees of the college, to be delivered at the first meeting of the board after the late president's death. This meeting was unavoidably delayed until the fifth instant; as the trustees wished to fill the vacant chair, the first time they met—but this could not be done, by an ordinance of the board, of an early date, until after a certain period from the time of the commencement of the vacancy.

The board being met, they passed the following resolves :

May 5th. On motion resolved unanimously, that the reverend Dr. Rodgers be requested to preach a funeral sermon on the death of the reverend Dr. Wither Spoon, late president of the college, to-morrow, at 11 o'clock A. M. in the church.

May 6th. The board attended upon the delivery of the sermon on the death of the late president, and having met—On motion resolved unanimously, that the thanks of the board be given to Dr. Rodgers for his sermon; and that Dr. Boudinot, Mr. Roe and Col. Bayard, be a committee to request a copy for publication.

WALTER MINTO,

Clerk of the Board.

New-York, May 15th, 1795.

T H E

FAITHFUL SERVANT REWARDED.

MATTHEW xxv. 21.

“ His Lord said unto him, Well done thou good and faithful Servant ; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things ; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

THE doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments, lies deep at the foundation of our holy religion : It is a doctrine perfectly consonant to reason, and supported by it ; and is either asserted, or justly taken for granted, in every page of the sacred oracles. This is the immortality, for the blessedness of which we became incapacitated, by our apostacy from God ; and that, for the enjoyment of which, it is one great design of the religion of Jesus Christ to prepare us. The whole frame of this religion is wisely calculated for this end. Among the many evidences of these truths, we may appeal to the discourses of our Divine Master ; and particularly to this, of which our text is a part.

In the preceding chapter, he had given his disciples an instructive discourse on the certainty and solemnity of his second coming. He continues the subject in this chapter, and enforces the great duty

of preparation for it, by the parable of the ten virgins, from the first verse to the thirteenth ; by the parable of the talents, from thence to the thirtieth verse ; and by a more particular account of the process of the judgment of the great day, from thence to the end of the chapter.

The more immediate design of the parable of the talents, of which our text is a part, is to enforce the duty, and illustrate the happiness of being prepared for *giving up our account*, when he shall come to judge the world in righteousness. You may read it at your leisure. The "man travelling into a far country," in this parable, means our Lord himself ; who is the great head of his church, which is his family. The "servants," of whom we here read, mean all professing Christians ; all who call themselves the servants of Christ, whatever their nation or denomination may be ; though some suppose, the Ministers of the Gospel are more particularly intended.

By the *talents*, we are to understand the various gifts of Heaven, whether of a common or of a special nature. They include the bounties of Providence, such as health, strength, reason, riches, honour, power, learning, reputation, the several advantages arising from our stations in life ; and, together with these, those graces of the spirit that constitute the Christian temper. These are all so many talents put into our hands, to be improved for God, and the best interests of our fellow-creatures ; and they are different to different persons. To one God gives more of these gifts or graces, and to another less ; which is designed in the parable by the master's giving to one servant *five* talents, and to another *two*, and to another *one*.

By “the Lord of those servants coming, after a long time, to reckon with them,” we are to understand that particular judgment which every one passes under at death, when their final states are determined : and also, and principally, our Lord’s coming to judge the world in righteousness, at the last day, “When every one shall receive the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” At both these solemn periods, the faithful servant of Christ, whatever his character and station in life may have been, shall be received with a “Well done, thou good and faithful servant ; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things ; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

There are two things in these words that particularly deserve our notice. The *character of those* who shall meet with the approbation of their Lord, in the great day of final awards ; they have been *good and faithful* servants. And the *reward* such shall receive, on that solemn occasion, from the judge of quick and dead—They shall be each one received with a “Well done, thou good and faithful servant ; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things ; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

Agreeably to this view of my text, I shall,

I. Briefly consider the character of the good and faithful servant of Christ.

II. The nature of that reward here promised to all such, in the great day of the Lord.

Let us enquire,

I. What is the character of the good and faithful servant of Christ?

I have already said, this may be applied either to the disciples of Christ in general, of whatever nation, denomination, or character in life they may be; or to the Ministers of the Gospel in particular. I shall consider the phrase as including both. And it implies,

1. *Love to Christ and his service.*—A good servant always loves a good master. But it is necessary to observe here, that this love to Christ and his service is not found in the heart of depraved man, in his natural state. We are by nature alienated from God; destitute of every principle of love to him and his son, Christ, in their true character. The apostolic description of depraved human nature is, “having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their hearts.”* Hence arises the necessity of being “renewed in the spirit of our mind; and of putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness,†” But one of the principal constituents of this new man is, love to God and his son, Christ Jesus. Love to God for his own divine excellence, as well as for the beneficence of his hand, to us—and love to Christ, as being the “brightness of his father’s glory, and the express image of his person.”‡ The sincere servant of Christ loves both his person and his character. His soul is pleased with him, as he is exhibited in the oracles of truth. “He is the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely in his esteem.§ He loves also his *service*: He el-

* Eph. iv. 18. † Ver. 23, 24. ‡ Heb. i. 3. § Song v. 10, 16.

seems his laws to be altogether equal and just.— This is the native effect of his love to his person and his government : “ For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous.”* The love we bear to the person of Christ, in proportion to its prevalence, will not only induce us to obedience, but render that obedience easy and delightful— We delight to oblige those whom we love.

2. The good and faithful servant of Christ *loves his fellow-servants*—He considers them as children of the same common father with himself : and we read, that “ every one that loveth him who begat, loveth him also who is begotten of him.”† He considers them as redeemed by the same precious blood of Christ ; and as the subjects of the same sanctifying and comforting influences of the spirit of grace, which are the common privilege of every true Christian ; for “ if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his.”‡ He considers them as engaged in the same common cause with himself ; the advancement of the kingdom of Christ, and the illustration of the honour of God in our world. These are the great ends the good and faithful servants of Christ have in view, however they may differ in some of the modes of pursuing them. Yet this difference does not forfeit their love, or destroy their charity for each other. If the person whose character I describe, cannot agree to agree with his brethren, in denomination, or mode of worship, he will agree to differ with them—He will agree they should think and act for themselves, in matters of such infinite concern ; a privilege he justly claims to himself. And in how many things soever the disciples of Christ may

* 1 John v. 3. † 1 John v. 1. ‡ Rom. viii. 9.

differ in matters of lesser moment, they will all agree in loving their Master, his honour, his truth, and his service—They will agree in adorning their profession in all godliness of conversation.

Again—The good and faithful servant considers his fellow-disciples as in the same vale of tears, and in the same state of imperfection and trial with himself; and, therefore, that both they and he stand in need of mutual sympathy, charity, and forbearance, one towards another. In a word, he considers them as heirs of the same future glory with himself; as “travelling to the same city, which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God;” and that, therefore, they ought not to differ by the way.

Of such importance is this brotherly love, in the Estimation of our Lord, that he not only enjoins it upon his disciples as their duty, but as their distinguishing and characteristic duty; that duty which more strongly marks their character as his disciples than almost any other; and that by which they are especially to distinguish themselves from the men of the world. You, therefore, hear him say, “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”*

3. *Diligence in his Lord's work*, is another ingredient in the character of the good and faithful servant. You will easily perceive the absurdity of a good, and at the same time a *slothful* servant, in common life; and it is still more so in the case be-

* *John xiii* 34: 35.

fore us. We all have our work in life assigned us, in the course of a wise Providence : and this is two fold, our general business as men and Christians, and the special business of our respective stations. Both these are fruitful of a variety of duties, too numerous to be recited in this place—They embrace the whole compass of duty, both moral and positive, that we owe to our God, our neighbour, or ourselves. Nor is there a single character we sustain, or relation we bear, in either of those views, but what is the source of important duties. And if you consider the variety and multiplicity of these relations and connexions, you will readily perceive these duties must be numerous, as well as important. But all these are so many claims on the diligence of the servants of Christ ; so many obligations on them to be “ not slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.”* We must be diligent too, that one duty may not interfere with another, for every thing is beautiful its season.

Again—Diligence is implied in the idea of *faithfulness* ; for the servant cannot be faithful who is not diligent. No man ever employed a servant to run idle ; nor can any thing be more contrary to the design for which Heaven has made us, than a life of sloth and idleness, unless it be a life of open and undisguised prophaneness. The author of our lives has sufficiently marked the great end for which he made us, upon the active powers with which he has endowed us—And this diligence is to be particularly employed in the discharge of the duties of our several stations in life. This is one way, among others, by which we are to bring forth fruit to the honour of our Lord. “ And herein,”

* *Romans xii. 11.*

faith our Saviour, "is my father glorified, that you bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples."*

4. The good and faithful servant *has a sincere regard to his master's honour*. This is the end at which he wishes and studies to aim, in all his actions; agreeably to the Divine command, "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."† And in this the servant of Christ accords with his master; the great end of whose incarnation, atonement, and intercession, on the behalf of sinners, was, the illustration of God's declarative glory. He undertook the vindication of the character and government of God, from the contempt sin had cast upon them; and in this he fully succeeded, and appeals to his father, that so he had done—"I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."‡ You will perceive, then, that to aim at the honour of God, as the highest end of all our actions, is, in a capital instance, to have the "same mind in us, which was also in Christ Jesus, our Lord."§ The true servant of Christ regards the honour both of his character and of his person. By the honour of Christ's character, I mean his honour as mediator; particularly as the great atonement for sin, and as our intercessor at his father's right hand. But to honour Christ under this character, in a proper manner, is not only to profess our firm faith in these doctrines, but to accept him as the Lord our righteousness; it is to trust in the merit of his atonement, as the sole ground of our acceptance in the sight of God—Thus the good and faithful servant of Christ puts the highest honour in his power upon him, in the character of a Saviour. He practically risks his very salvation on his ability, suitableness, and willingness to save him.

* John xv. 8. † 1 Cor. x. 31. ‡ John xvii. 4. § Phil. ii. 5.

I shall mention but one ingredient more in the character I am at present illustrating, and that is,

5. *Faithfulness* in the discharge of the duties of life. The character under which our text represents the servants of Christ, is that of *stewards*, with whom their Lord had entrusted his goods; to some he gave more, and to others less, to trade withal. But the Apostle tells us, "That it is required in stewards, that a man be found *faithful*."* And you will please to observe, our text expressly styles the true disciple of Christ, "a good and *faithful* servant."

This faithfulness consists, principally, in a conscientious sincerity and diligence in filling up the duties of our several stations and characters in life. And the great rule by which we are to act, is the will of our Lord and Master.

Thus much for the character of the good and faithful servant.

Let us now proceed to enquire,

II. What is the nature of that reward promised in our text to all such good and faithful servants?

And, as it is here described, it implies, principally, the four following things:

1. The *acceptance of their persons* with God.— This is implied in the character here given them, and represented in the parable, as given them by their Lord, when he calls them to give an account

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* 1 Cor. iv, 2.

of their stewardship, *good and faithful servants*. And you will please farther to observe, they are not only acknowledged as good and faithful, but received with a “Well done, ye good and faithful servants.” This, indeed, chiefly imports an approbation of their conduct; but it is no less expressive of the acceptance of their persons.

But to estimate this blessing in a proper manner, it is necessary to recollect, that as sinners, we had forfeited all right to this acceptance with God, and justly merited his severe displeasure: That we deserve nothing but indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, from him, throughout an immortality of woe. Yea, that such is the nature of the forfeiture we have made of the Divine favour; and such the justice of the sentence that binds us down to suffer his displeasure, that it appears not to have been compatible with the honor of God, to reverse the sentence, and restore the sinner to favour, without an adequate satisfaction. And the price paid for this blessing, the precious blood of the Son of God, greatly contributes to enhance its value. But how rich the mercy, for an heir of Hell to become, in this way, “an heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ Jesus!”

2. It implies the *approbation and acceptance of their services for God*, and his cause in the world. Every individual among them shall be received with a “Well done,* thou good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things.” Language cannot express the approbation of the great Judge of quick and dead, in stronger terms. But did our time admit of considering the many

* The original word *Ev*, here rendered “well done,” has a force that cannot be fully expressed in our language.

imperfections that attend the very best services performed, by the holiest of our Lord's servants, for him, how deeply stained they are with guilt, it would serve, not a little, to illustrate the riches of that reward conferred upon them, in this acceptance of their services for him. And this farther suggests, what it is of importance to attend to, that this acceptance of our persons and services, when we come to stand before unblemished purity, is not of merit, but of grace, through the atonement and intercession of the Divine Mediator. "It is to the praise of the glory of his *grace*, that he makes us accepted in the beloved."* But it is never the less certain, for its being of grace.

This acceptance of our persons and services, is of itself a high reward, for all we have ever done, or can do, for God, while in this life, were there none other; but this is not all—for,

3. This reward implies *actual and superadded honours*, conferred upon the faithful servants of Christ, in the great day of God. This is the import of "Thou hast been faithful over a few things; I will make thee ruler over many things." What the nature of these honours shall be, we are not so clearly taught. Two things, however, seem to be plain respecting them, in the sacred oracles; namely, That they shall bear some proportion to our faithfulness and diligence in our Lord's service here—and, that they shall be great.

They shall bear some proportion to our diligence and faithfulness in our Lord's service in this life. We read, "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory

* *Ephesians i. 6.*

of the stars ; for one star differeth from another in glory—So also is the resurrection of the dead.”* These words plainly point us to a difference in the degrees of that glory which shall be conferred on the several servants of Christ, in the day when he shall finish the mediatorial system, by raising the dead, and judging the world in righteousness. They shall differ as the sun differs from the moon, and the moon from the stars, and the stars one from another. But the ground of this difference will be, the zeal, the diligence, and the faithfulness with which his servants have served him in this life. I may not say their success will have no influence on this difference of reward ; for we read, “ That they who turn many to righteousness, shall shine as the stars, forever and ever.”† But when we consider, that it is an act of mere sovereignty in God, whether he will succeed the faithful labours of his servants, yea, or not, it is not so consonant to our ideas of equity, to make it an equal ground of distinguished honours, with those things that are voluntary in us, as our faithfulness and diligence, in a great measure, are. Besides, this would be to weaken, if not to destroy, the encouragement to diligence and faithfulness, arising from those promises of reward to them, so frequent in the oracles of truth ; especially as the most diligent and faithful servants of Christ, are not always the most successful. And it farther deserves our notice, that the reward conferred, in our text, on the good servant, is founded, not on his *success*, but on his *faithfulness* : “ Thou hast been *faithful* over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things.”

I shall only add, under this particular, that the parable of the ten pounds, entrusted by their Lord

* 1 Cor. xv. 41, 42. † Daniel xii. 3.

to the ten servants, which you have in the nineteenth chapter of the Gospel by Luke, sufficiently demonstrates, that the rewards that shall be conferred on the servants of Christ at last, will not only differ in their degrees of honour, but that this honour shall bear a proportion to their diligence and faithfulness for him in this life. They each one received one pound a piece, as you may perceive by reading the parable. Of these, one, by his diligence and faithfulness, had gained ten pounds, and he is made ruler over ten cities.— Another, by his diligence, had gained five pounds, and he is made ruler over five cities.

You will please to observe, the sums entrusted to these servants were the same ; but the improvement is represented as different, and that the difference in the reward, is proportioned to the difference in the improvement.

The lowest degree, however, of this reward shall be very great to those who receive it. This appears, from the images used in Scripture, to illustrate its nature. It is compared to, it is illustrated by, all the glories of royalty. Hence we read of “a *crown* of righteousness,”* and of “a *crown of glory*, that fadeth not away,”† that shall be conferred upon all the sincere disciples of Christ. Of a *throne*, and their *sitting upon* that throne ; “To him that overcometh, will I grant to sit with me on my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.”‡ We also read of a *kingdom*, and their entering on the possession of that kingdom : “Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”§ Agreeably

* 2 Tim. iv. 8. † 1 Pet. v. 4. ‡ Rev. iii. 21. § Matt. xxv. 34.

to this, the good and faithful servants of Christ are said to be made *kings* and *priests* unto God.* But a throne, a crown, and a kingdom, are the summit of earthly grandeur, the utmost reach of human atchievement. And yet these, all these, fall infinitely short of the blessedness and honours, in sure reserve for those whose character I have described : for it is written, " Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."†

4. The reward in our text includes the *most consummate happiness, in the immediate presence and fruition of a God in Christ*. This is imported in that phrase, " Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." These are, literally, " Joys unspeakable, and full of glory." They include all that happiness that is derived to the spirits of just men made perfect, from the clearest knowledge of a God in Christ ; from the most perfect conformity to him, and the fullest enjoyment of him. By the *clearest* knowledge of a God in Christ, I do not mean a *perfect* knowledge of him ; for " Who, by searching, can find out God, or know the Almighty to perfection ?" ‡ But I mean the fullest knowledge of him, that the then enlarged, and daily enlarging, capacity can possibly receive ; and which, when compared with our present knowledge, will be in a sense perfect. The clearness, precision, extent, and satisfactory nature of this knowledge, are expressed, in Scripture, by " seeing no more darkly through a glass, but face to face ; and knowing, even as also we are known." § And by the strong expressive phrase of " seeing God's face." ¶

* 4 Rev. i. † 1 Cor. ii. 9. ‡ Job xi. 7. § 1 Cor. xiii. 12.
¶ 1. Rev. xxii 6 .

This knowledge of God, especially as shining in the face of Christ, is one principal source of that consummate happiness, enjoyed by glorified spirits. They know him as *their* God and portion, and as such their delightful experience recognizes and realizes him. That is an instructive and emphatical phrase, as it lies in the original, Rev. xxi. 3, last clause—which, literally rendered, runs thus, “And God himself shall be with them, their God;” that is, exhibiting and manifesting himself to them, as their God, in all the ways that their souls, now arrived at the maturity of their existence, both in a natural and moral view, can possibly admit. Every power of the matured mind shall be an avenue, through which blessedness shall flow into it, from God, the fountain of blessedness, throughout an unwasting immortality.

I may not, I dare not undertake to describe the nature of this happiness. I shall only observe respecting it, that our text styles it “the joy of our Lord”—“Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord”—This, no doubt, means, the joy of our Lord Christ.

It is the joy of our Lord, *because it has been purchased by him*. This reflects a peculiar glory upon it, in the estimation of the spirits of just men made perfect; it infuses a divine and exquisite relish into it—to this accords their song to him, “Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof; for thou wast slain, and hast *redeemed us to God by thy blood*, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.”*

Again—It is the joy of our Lord, *because Christ, our Lord, has taken possession of it in the name of*

* Rev. v. 9.

his people—Some of his last words to his disciples were, “ I go to prepare a place for you.”† He rose from the dead, and ascended to glory, not in the character of a private person, but as the covenant head and representative of his people—This is the character in which “ he has entered into Heaven, as the forerunner for us.”‡

It is also the joy of our Lord, because it is *derived from God, to the happy subjects thereof, through Jesus Christ, as the bond of their union with him, and the medium of their intercourse with him*—And this will continue to be the case throughout a blessed immortality.

And, lastly, It is the joy of our Lord, because it is a joy of the same kind with that which the glorified human nature of our Lord himself shares ; so far as they shall be capable of it—What less than this can be the import of that strong phrase, “ Heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.”§ Nor is this all, They shall enjoy it in the same mansions of blessedness, which he himself inhabits. This is his promise to them, “ I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.”¶ And his availing prayer for them is, “ Father, I will, that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me.”§§§ Agreeably to which, we read, “ They shall ever be with the Lord.”¶¶

And now from all this, you will not hesitate to conclude, that this joy must be a compleat and an everlasting joy. And, what can it be more ?

† John xiv. 2. ‡ Heb. vi. 20. § Rom. viii. 17. §§ John xiv. 3. §§§ John xvii. 24. ¶ 1 Theff. iv. 17.

My brethren, you will easily perceive this subject teaches us, the nature of the religion of Jesus Christ. It forms its happy subjects to a proper temper and a proper conduct towards God and their neighbours. It makes them good and faithful servants to their Master, who is in Heaven. It teaches them their duty, and inclines and enables them to comply with it. Its doctrines and precepts, its promises and threatenings, are powerful principles of action. Thus it is that divine truth sanctifies the human heart, agreeably to our Lord's prayer, "Sanctify them through the truth; thy word is truth."*

You will farther observe, this religion not only teaches us our duty, and forms us to it, but rewards us, in the most glorious manner, for this our very duty—Rewards us with an immortality of blessedness, in the full enjoyment of the Father of our Spirits. How grand, interesting, and dignified the scenes it opens beyond the grave!

Do any of those systems of morality, which the sons of infidelity wish to establish, independent of the sacred Scriptures, furnish such motives to virtue? Motives so rational and so calculated to influence? It is revelation alone that pushes its incentives beyond the grave; that pushes them home to the inmost feelings of the human heart; that embraces every spring of action, even the most secret; and touches them in the most tender, just, and energetic manner.

Again—This subject suggests matter of great encouragement to the people of God, and especially to the ministers of Christ, to be faithful and diligent

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* *John xvii. 17.*

in the work assigned them in life. Our Lord marks, with an omniscient eye, all our conduct towards him ; and while he reprehends our sloth and unfaithfulness, he encourages and rewards our meanest services for him. " A cup of cold water given to a disciple, in the name of a disciple," he assures us, " shall in no wise lose its reward."* Let us, then, shake off our sloth ; let us up and be doing : Our work is great ; our time is short, and our reward glorious. Nor is there a single Christian, however private his station, or obscure his character, but what may, some how or other, serve the interests of his Lord in the world. This he may do by a conscientious discharge of the duties of the devout, but especially of the duties of the social life. This will exhibit religion in a just point of light to the surrounding world, and glorify our Father, who is in Heaven.

They may also be useful in and by the duty of prayer ; secret and family prayer. Our God is a God who hears prayer ; and he, no doubt, sheds many a blessing on his ministers, on his church, on the commonwealth, and on the world, in answer to the prayers of his humble, though obscure, friends. " Therefore, my beloved brethren, seeing God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love"—" Let us be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know our labour is not in vain in the Lord."

But it is time I should hasten to observe, that this subject strongly applies to the occasion of my addressing you this day—The death of that venerable man of God, who presided, with so much dignity, over this institution for twenty-six years.

* *Matt. x. 42.*

This great man was descended from a respectable parentage ; which had long possessed a considerable landed property in the east of Scotland. His father was minister of the parish of Yester, a few miles from Edinburgh, where he was born on the fifth day of February, 1722.* This worthy man was eminent for his piety, his literature, and for a habit of extreme accuracy, in all his writings and discourses. This example contributed not a little to form in his son that taste and that love of accuracy, united with a noble simplicity, for which he was so distinguished through his whole life. He was sent, very young, to the public school at Haddington : His father spared neither expence nor pains in his education. There he soon acquired reputation for his assiduity in his studies, and for a native soundness of judgment, and clearness and quickness of conception, among his school-fellows : many of whom have since filled the highest stations in the literary and political world.

* *Dr. Witherspoon was lineally descended from that eminent man of God, the Rev. Mr. John Knox, whom Dr. Robertson styles, "The prime instrument of spreading and establishing the reformed religion in Scotland." The genius, learning, piety, zeal, and intrepidity of this great man, rendered him singularly qualified for the distinguished part he bore in that interesting event. It is recorded of Mary, Queen of Scots, that she said, "She was more afraid of John Knox's prayers, than of an army of ten thousand men." Worn out by incessant labours, he died on the 27th day of November, 1572, in the 67th year of his age. The Earl of Morton, then Regent of Scotland, who attended his funeral, pronounced his eulogium in a few words ; the more honourable for Mr. Knox, says the above historian, as they came from one whom he had often censured, with peculiar severity, "Here lies he who never feared the face of man." Mr. Knox's daughter Elizabeth married the famous Mr. John Welsh, who strongly resembled his father-in-law in genius, character, and usefulness in the church : And in this line Dr. Witherspoon descended from this honourable ancestry.*

At the age of fourteen, he was removed to the university of Edinburgh. Here he continued, attending the different professors, with a high degree of credit, in all the branches of learning, until the age of twenty-one, when he was licensed to preach the Gospel. In the theological hall, particularly, he was remarked for a most judicious taste in sacred criticism, and for a precision of idea and perspicuity of expression rarely attained at that early period.

Immediately on his leaving the university, he was invited to be assistant minister with his father, with the right of succession to the charge. But he chose rather to accept an invitation from the parish of Beith, in the west of Scotland. Here he was ordained to the work of the gospel ministry, and settled with the universal acquiescence, and even with the fervent attachment of the people: A circumstance which, under the patronage that unhappily exists in that church, is but too rarely the case in the settlement of their clergy. His character as a preacher, which rendered him so acceptable and popular, will come more naturally before us in another place. Let it suffice to remark here, that, always interesting and instructive in the pulpit, he was assiduous in the discharge of every parochial duty when out of it. And his preaching generally turned on those great, distinguishing, and practical truths of the gospel, which, in every Christian country, most affect and attach the hearts of the great body of the people.

From Beith he was, after a few years, translated to the large and flourishing town of Paisly, so celebrated for its various and fine manufactures.— Here he resided in the height of reputation and usefulness; and riveted in the affections of his peo-

ple, and his fellow-citizens, when he was called to the presidency of this college.

During his residence at Paisly, he was invited to Dublin, in Ireland, to assume the charge of a numerous and respectable congregation in that city. He was also called to Rotterdam, in the Republic of the United Provinces—and to the town of Dundee, in his own country. But he could not be induced to quit a sphere of such respectability, comfort, and usefulness. He rejected also, in the first instance, the invitation of the trustees of this college. He thought it almost impossible for him to break connexions at home, that had been so long endeared to him—to violate all the attachments and habits of the female part of his family—to leave the scene of his happiness and honour—and, in his middle career, to bury himself, as he apprehended, in a new and distant country.

But warmly urged by all those friends whose judgment he most respected, and whose friendship he most esteemed—and hoping that he might repay his sacrifices, by greater usefulness to the cause of the Redeemer, and to the interests of learning, in this new world—and knowing that this institution had been consecrated, from its foundation, to those great objects to which he had devoted his life, he finally consented, on a second application, to wave every other consideration, to cross the ocean, and to take among us that important charge to which he had been called, with the concurrent wishes, and the highest expectations, of all the friends of the college.* Their expectations have not been

* *Dr. Witherspoon arrived with his family at Princeton in the month of August, 1768. He was the sixth President of the College since its foundation in the year 1746. His predecessors were, the Rev. Messrs. Jonathan Dickenson, Aaron Burr, Jonathan Edwards,*

disappointed. Its reputation and success, under his administration, have been equal to our most sanguine hopes.

Almost the first benefit which it received, besides the eclat, and the accession of students, procured to it by the fame of his literary character, was the augmentation of its funds. The college has never enjoyed any resources from the state. It was founded, and has been supported, wholly by private liberality and zeal. And its finances, from a variety of causes, were in a low and declining condition, at the period when Dr. Witherspoon arrived in America. But his reputation excited an uncommon liberality in the public; and his personal exertions, extended from Massachusetts to Virginia, soon raised its funds to a flourishing state. The war of the revolution, indeed, afterwards, prostrated every thing, and almost annihilated its resources; yet we cannot but with gratitude recollect, how much the institution owed, at that time, to his enterprize and his talents.

But the principal advantages it derived, were from his literature; his superintendancy; his example as a happy model of good writing; and from the tone and taste which he gave to the literary pursuits of the college.

In giving the outlines of the character of this great man, for I attempt no more, I shall begin

Samuel Davies, and Dr. Samuel Finley—Men deservedly celebrated for genius, learning, and piety. Mr. Dickenson and Mr. Edwards were advanced in life when chosen to the presidency.

Not long before Dr. Witherspoon left Scotland, and while in suspense respecting his duty, a gentleman, possessed of a considerable property, an old bachelor, and a relation of the family, promised to make him his heir, if he would not go to America.

with observing, that perhaps his principal merit appeared in the pulpit. He was, in many respects, one of the best models on which a young preacher could form himself. It was a singular felicity to the whole college, but especially to those who had the profession of the ministry in view, to have such an example constantly before them. Religion, by the manner in which it was treated by him, always commanded the respect of those who heard him, even when it was not able to engage their hearts. An admirable textuary, a profound theologian, perspicuous and simple in his manner; an universal scholar, acquainted deeply with human nature; a grave, dignified, and solemn speaker, he brought all the advantages derived from these sources to the illustration and enforcement of divine truth. Though not a fervent and animated orator,* he was always a solemn, affecting, and instructive preacher. It was impossible to hear him without attention, or to attend to him without improvement. He had a happy talent at unfolding the strict and proper meaning of the sacred writer, in any text from which he chose to discourse; at concentrating and giving perfect unity to every subject which he treated; and pre-

* *A peculiar affection of his nerves, which always overcame him when he allowed himself to feel very fervently on any subject, obliged him, from his earliest entrance on public life, to impose a strict restraint and guard upon his sensibility. He was, therefore, under the necessity of substituting gravity and seriousness of manner, in public speaking, in the room of that fire and warmth, of which he was well capable, by nature; and which he so much admired in others, when managed with prudence.*

He never read his sermons, or used so much as short notes, in the pulpit. His practice was, to write his sermons at full length, and commit them to memory; but not confine himself to the precise words he had penned. He often took great liberties, in the delivery of his discourses, to alter, add to, or abridge what he had written; but this never infringed upon the strictest accuracy.

senting to the hearer the most clear and comprehensive views of it. His sermons were distinguished for their judicious and perspicuous divisions—for mingling profound remarks on human life, along with the illustration of divine truth—and for the lucid order that reigned through the whole. In his discourses, he loved to dwell chiefly on the great doctrines of divine grace, and on the distinguishing truths of the gospel. These he brought, as far as possible, to the level of every understanding, and the feeling of every heart. He seldom chose to lead his hearers into speculative discussions, and never to entertain them by a mere display of talents. All ostentation in the pulpit, he viewed with the utmost aversion and contempt. During the whole of his presidency, he was extremely solicitous to train those studious youths, who had the ministry of the gospel in view, in such a manner, as to secure the greatest respectability, as well as usefulness, in that holy profession. It was his constant advice to young preachers, never to enter the pulpit without the most careful preparation. It was his ambition and his hope, to render the sacred ministry the most learned, as well as the most pious and exemplary body of men in the Republic.

As a writer, his style is simple and comprehensive—his remarks judicious, and often refined—his information, on every subject which he treats, accurate and extensive—his matter always weighty and important—closely condensed, and yet well arranged and clear. Simplicity, perspicuity, precision, comprehension of thought, and knowledge of the world, and of the human heart, reign in every part of his writings. Three volumes of essays, and two volumes of sermons, besides several detached discourses, already published—and treat-

ing chiefly on the most important and practical subjects in religion—have deservedly extended his reputation, not only through Britain, Ireland, and America, but through most of the protestant countries of Europe. His remarks on the nature and effects of the stage, enter deeply into the human heart. We find there many refined observations, after the example of the Messieurs de Port-Royal in France, not obvious to ordinary minds, but perfectly founded in the history of man, and the state of society. The pernicious influence of that amusement on the public taste and morals, was, perhaps, never more clearly elucidated. On the following interesting subjects, the *nature and necessity of regeneration—Justification by free grace, through Jesus Christ; and the importance of truth in religion, or, the connexion that subsists between sound principles and a holy practice*, there is, perhaps, nothing superior in the English language. But Dr. Witherpoon's talents were various. He was not only a serious writer, but he possessed a fund of refined humour, and delicate satire. A happy specimen of this is seen in his *Ecclesiastical Characteristics*. The edge of his wit, in that performance, was directed against certain corruptions in principle and practice prevalent in the church of Scotland. And no attack that was ever made upon them, gave them so deep a wound, or was so severely felt. Dr. Warburton, the celebrated Bishop of Gloucester, mentions the *Characteristics* with particular approbation, and expresses his wish, that the English church, as she needed too, had likewise such a corrector.

This may be the proper place to mention his general character, as a member of the councils and courts of the church, and the part particularly that he took in the ecclesiastical politics of his native

country. The church of Scotland was divided into two parties, with respect to their ideas of ecclesiastical discipline. The one was willing to confirm, and even extend the rights of *patronage*—the other wished, if possible, to abrogate, or at least limit them, and to extend the rights and influence of the people, in the settlement and removal of ministers. The latter were zealous for the doctrines of grace, and the articles of religion, in all their strictness, as contained in their national confession of faith. The former were willing to allow a greater latitude of opinion; and they preached in a style that seemed to the people less evangelical, and less affecting to the heart and conscience, than that of their opponents. In their concern, likewise, to exempt the clergy of their party from the unreasonable effects of popular caprice, they too frequently protected them against the just complaints of the people. These were stiled *moderate men*, while their antagonists were distinguished by the name of the *orthodox*. Dr. Witherspoon, in his church politics, early and warmly embraced the side of the orthodox. This he did from conviction, and a sense of duty; and, by degrees, acquired such an influence in their councils, that he was considered at length as their head and leader. Before he had acquired this influence, their councils were managed without union and address, while the measures of the moderate party had, for a long time, been conducted by some of the greatest literary characters in the nation. It had happened among the orthodox, as it often does among scrupulous and conscientious men, who are not versed in the affairs of the world, that each pursued inflexibly his own opinion, as the dictate of an honest conscience. He could not be induced to make any modification of it, in order to accommodate it to the views of others. He thought that all address

and policy, was using too much management with conscience. Hence resulted disunion of measures, and consequent defeat—But Dr. Wither-
 spoon's enlarged mind did not refuse to combine *the wisdom of the serpent with the harmlessness of the dove*. He had, probably, the principal merit of creating among them union, and harmony of design; of concentrating their views, and giving system to their operations. One day, after carrying some important questions in the general assembly, against the celebrated Dr. Robertson, who was at that time considered as the leader of the opposite party, the latter said to him, in a pleasant and easy manner, "I think you have your men better disciplined than formerly." "Yes (replied Dr. Wither-
 spoon) by urging your politics too far, you have compelled us to beat you with your own weapons."

We have seen him in our own church judicatories, in America, always upright in his views—remarkable for his punctuality in attending upon them—and able to seize, at once, the right point of view on every question—able to disentangle the most embarrassed subjects—clear and conclusive in his reasonings—and from habit in business, as well as from a peculiar soundness of judgment, always conducting every discussion to the most speedy and decisive termination. The church has certainly lost in him, one of her greatest lights; and, if I may use the term in ecclesiastical affairs, one of her greatest *politicians*.

Before entering on his talents as a president, suffer me, in a sentence or two, to call to your mind his social qualities. When not engaged in the great and serious businesses of life, he was one of the most companionable of men. Furnished with a rich fund

of anecdote, both amusing and instructive; his moments of relaxation were as entertaining, as his serious ones were fraught with improvement. One quality remarkable, and highly deserving imitation in him was, *his attention to young persons*. He never suffered an opportunity to escape him of imparting the most useful advice to them, according to their circumstances, when they happened to be in his company. And this was always done in so agreeable a way, that they could neither be inattentive to it, nor was it possible to forget it.

On his domestic virtues I shall only say, he was an affectionate husband, a tender parent, and a kind master; to which I may add, he was a sincere and a warm friend.—But, I hasten to consider him as a scholar, and a director of the system of education in the college.

An universal scholar himself, he endeavoured to establish the system of education in this institution, upon the most extensive and respectable basis, that its situation and its finances would admit. Formerly, the course of instruction had been too superficial; and its metaphysics and philosophy were too much tinged with the dry and uninteresting forms of the schools. This, however, was by no means to be imputed as a defect, to those great and excellent men, who had presided over the institution before him; but rather to the recent origin of the country—the imperfection of its state of society—and to the state of literature in it. Since his presidency mathematical science has received an extension, that was not known before in the American seminaries. He introduced into philosophy, all the most liberal and modern improvements of Europe. He extended the philosophical course to embrace the general principles of policy

and public law ; he incorporated with it a sound and rational metaphysics—equally remote from the doctrines of fatality and contingency—from the barrenness and dogmatism of the schools—and from the excessive refinements of those contradictory, but equally impious sects of scepticism, who wholly deny the existence of matter, or maintain that nothing but matter exists in the universe.

He laid the foundation of a course of history in the college—and the principles of taste, and the rules of good writing, were both happily explained by him, and exemplified in his *manner*. The *style of learning*, if you will allow me the phrase, has been changed by him. Literary inquiries and improvements have become more liberal, more extensive, and more profound. An admirable faculty for governing, and of exciting the emulation of the young gentlemen under his care, contributed to give success to all his designs, for perfecting the course of instruction. The numbers of men of distinguished talents, in the different liberal professions, in this country, who have received the elements of their education under him, testify his services to the college. Under his auspices have been formed a large proportion of the clergy of our church ; and to his instructions, America owes many of her most distinguished patriots and legislators*.

Thus he proceeded, guiding with uncommon reputation and success the course of education in this institution, until the war of the American revolution suspended his functions and dispersed the college.

* More than thirty members of the congress of United America, since the formation of that illustrious body, have been sons of the college of New-Jersey ; and amongst these, some of their first characters for reputation and usefulness.

Here he entered upon a new scene, and appeared in a new character; widely differing from any, in which he had been heretofore presented to the public. Yet, here also, he shone with equal lustre; and his talents as a legislator and senator shewed the extent and the variety of the powers of his mind. There are few foreigners who can, with such facility as he did, lay aside their prejudices, and enter into the ideas and habits of a new country, and a new state of society. He became almost at once an American, on his landing among us, and in the unjust war which Great-Britain waged against us, he immediately adopted the views, and participated in the councils of the Americans. His distinguished abilities soon pointed him out to the citizens of New-Jersey, as one of the most proper delegates to that convention which formed their republican constitution. In this respectable assembly he appeared, to the astonishment of all the professors of the law, as profound a *civilian*, as he had before been known to be a *philosopher* and *divine*.

From the revolutionary committees and conventions of the state, he was sent, early in the year 1776, as a representative of the people of New-Jersey to the congress of United America; he was seven years a member of that illustrious body, which, under providence, in the face of innumerable difficulties and dangers, led us on to the establishment of our independence. Always firm in the most gloomy and formidable aspects of public affairs, and always discovering the greatest reach and presence of mind, in the most embarrassing situations.

It is impossible here to enter into all his political ideas. It is but justice however to observe, that on almost all subjects on which he differed from the

majority of his brethren in congress, his principles have been justified by the result. I shall select only one or two examples. He constantly opposed the expensive mode of supplying the army *by commission*, which was originally adopted; and combated it, until after a long experience of its ill effects, he, in conjunction with a few firm and judicious associates, prevailed to have it done by contract.*

He opposed, at every emission after the first or second, and even hazarded his popularity for a time by the strenuousness of his opposition, that paper currency which gave such a wound to public credit, and which would have defeated the revolution, if any thing could.†

In the formation of the original confederation, he complained of the jealousy and ambition of the individual states, which were not willing to entrust the general government, with adequate powers for the common interest. He then pronounced inefficacy upon it. But he complained and remonstrated in vain.‡

* Congress at first supplied the army by allowing a certain commission per cent. on the monies that the commissioners expended. This invited expence. At length they were induced to agree to the mode by contract; or allowing to the purchaser a certain sum per ration.

† Instead of emissions of an unfounded paper, beyond a certain quantum, Dr. Wither spoon urged the propriety of making loans, and establishing funds for the payment of the interest; which in the temper of the public mind, he thought could then have been easily effected. America has since regretted that she had not pursued that policy. The doctor afterwards, at the instance of some of the very gentlemen who opposed him in congress, published his ideas on the nature, value and uses of money, in one of the most clear and judicious essays that, perhaps, was ever written on the subject.

‡ He particularly remonstrated against the tardy, inefficient and faithless manner of providing for the public exigencies and debts, by

Overruled however, at that time, in these and in other objects of importance, he had the satisfaction of living to see America revert, in almost every instance, to his original ideas—Ideas founded on a sound and penetrating judgment, and matured by deep reflection, and an extensive observation of men and things. But I forbear to trace his political career farther; and shall only add here, that while he was thus engaged in serving his country in the character of a *civilian*, he did NOT lay aside his *ministry*. He gladly embraced every opportunity of preaching, and of discharging the other duties of his office, as a gospel minister. This he considered as his highest character, and honor in life.

The college having been collected as soon as possible after its dispersion, instruction was recommenced under the immediate care of the vice-president.* Dr. Witherspoon's name, however, con-

requisition on the several states. He insisted on the propriety and necessity, of the government of the union holding in its own hands the entire regulation of commerce, and the revenues that might be derived from that source. These he contended would be adequate to all the wants of the United States, in a season of peace.

* *The reverend Dr. Samuel S. Smith, who was unanimously chosen Dr. Witherspoon's successor, on the sixth day of May, 1795. This gentleman's character needs no eulogium in this place. His several publications, and particularly his ingenious essay on "The causes of the variety of complexion and figure of the human species," delivered before the Philosophical Society, in Philadelphia, February 23rd 1787, afford sufficient testimony of his genius and learning. The last mentioned work has distinguished him in the estimation of the literati, both in Europe and America. As soon as it made its appearance in Europe, it was read with avidity—it shortly passed under more editions than one in Great-Britain—it was translated into the French language, and published, with great eclat, at Paris—and has been since translated into the German language, and published with annotations, by a professor of moral philosophy, in one of the universities of that empire.*

tinued to add celebrity to the institution ; and it has fully recovered its former reputation.

The glorious struggle for our liberties drawing to an honourable period, and the doctor feeling age advancing upon him, was desirous of resigning his place in congress : and would have fain retired, in a measure, from the burdens of the college.

But notwithstanding his wish for repose, he was induced, through his attachment to the institution, over which he had so long presided, once more to cross the ocean to promote its benefit. The fruit of that voyage was not indeed answerable to our wishes ; but we are not the less indebted to his enterprise and zeal.

After his return to this country, finding nothing to obstruct his entering on that retirement, which was now become more dear to him ; he withdrew, in a great measure, except on some important occasions, from the exercise of those public functions that were not immediately connected with the duties of his office, as president of the college, or his character as a minister of the gospel.

Accustomed to order and regularity in business from his youth, he persevered in his attention to them through his whole life. And I may add, there was nothing in which his punctuality and exactness were more sacredly observed, than in the devotional exercises of the christian life. Besides the daily devotions of the closet, and the family, it was his stated practice to observe the last day of every year, with his family, as a day of fasting, humiliation and prayer : and it was also his practice, to set apart days for secret fasting and prayer, as occasion suggested.

Bodily infirmities began at length to come upon him. For more than two years before his death, he was afflicted with the loss of sight; which contributed to hasten the progress of his other disorders. These he bore with a patience, and even a cheerfulness, rarely to be met with, in the most eminent for wisdom and piety. Nor would his active mind, and his desire of usefulness to the end, permit him, even in this situation, to desist from the exercise of his ministry, and his duties in the college, as far as his health and strength would admit. He was frequently led into the pulpit, both at home and abroad, during his blindness; and always acquitted himself with his usual accuracy, and frequently, with more than his usual solemnity and animation. And we all recollect the propriety and dignity with which he presided at the last commencement. He was blest with the use of his reasoning powers to the very last.

At length, however, he sunk under the accumulated pressure of his infirmities; and on the 15th day of November, 1794, in the seventy third year of his age, he retired to his eternal rest, full of honor and full of days—there to receive the plaudit of his Lord, “well done thou good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, be thou ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”