



3.15.12.

From the Library of

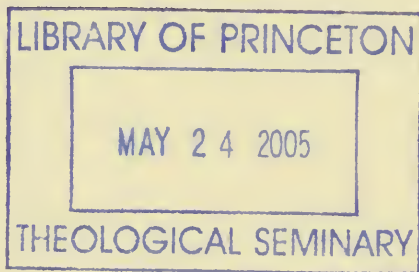
Professor William Miller Parson, D. D., LL. D.

Presented by Mrs. Parson

to the Library of

Princeton Theological Seminary

LB 2325  
.L77



A

# DISCOURSE

OCCASIONED BY

THE DEATH OF THE

HON. SILAS WRIGHT,

LATE GOVERNOR

OF THE

STATE OF NEW-YORK;

AND DELIVERED IN THE

SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ALBANY,

SEPT. 5, 1847.



BY WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.

MINISTER OF SAID CHURCH.



ALBANY:

PRINTED BY C. VAN BENTHUYSEN.

1847

## CORRESPONDENCE.

---

*Albany, Sept. 7, 1847.*

To WM. B. SPRAGUE, D. D. :

Rev. and Dear Sir,

The undersigned, impressed with the value, eloquence and appropriateness of your Sermon on Sunday last on the death of our late distinguished fellow-citizen, Silas Wright, respectfully solicit a copy of it for publication.

Uniting with you in deploring an event, which deprives his friends and his country of one so eminent in statesmanship, and in the moral qualities which adorn and elevate public distinction, we remain,

With the highest regard,

Your friends and parishioners,

ERASTUS CORNING,  
GREENE C. BRONSON,  
THOMAS W. OLCOTT,  
WILLIAM SMITH, Jr.,  
B. R. WOOD,  
JAMES D. WASSON,  
A. McINTYRE,  
JOEL RATHBONE,  
ANDREW WHITE,  
JOHN TOWNSEND,  
E. P. PRENTICE.

---

Gentlemen,

In complying with the request so kindly conveyed to me by your note of the 7th inst. it is due to myself to say that the Discourse referred to was written while I was labouring under bodily indisposition, and partly while suffering severe pain. Such as it is, I cheerfully put it at your disposal, and am glad to join you in any suitable expression of regard for the memory of our departed friend.

I am, Gentlemen, with great regard,

Very truly yours,

W. B. SPRAGUE,

Messrs. E. CORNING, and others.

*Albany, 9th Sept., 1847.*

# DISCOURSE.

---

PSALM CXLVI. 3, 4.

Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth; he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.

It is interesting to observe how constantly the statements of scripture are verified before our eyes; how doctrines are illustrated by facts; how predictions pass into history; how the voice of God in his providence is but an echo to the voice of God in his word. Nor is it in the general course of things alone that this analogy is to be recognised: not an event occurs, however grand, however strange, however appalling, but that if we search the scriptures, we shall either find that it is shadowed forth among the things that are to be, or else shall discover its actual prototype in some recorded reality. It is a profitable exercise thus to compare what we see of God's doings in the world, with what we read of his doings and purposes in the Bible. It is fitted to exalt our

conceptions both of his providence and his word, and to render his utterances in each more distinct and impressive. And if I mistake not, we shall find ourselves thus employed, in meditating on the passage of scripture which I have just read to you, in connection with the dispensation of providence which hath suggested its selection as a subject for the present exercise.

“Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth; he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.” We have here a caution, or if you please, a prohibition, enforced by an argument.

The prohibition is conveyed by the words,—  
“Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man.”

The object which we are here forbidden to trust,—what is it?

In the most general sense it is “the son of man,”—the race of man,—all the dwellers upon the earth who possess the same faculties with ourselves. Not that I would derogate aught from the dignity which man can reasonably claim; for whatever be his degradation, there is greatness, there is nobility,



pertaining to him. He was the last of the creations of God. He was constituted by his Maker the lord of this world; and hence we find that all the inferior orders of being render him either a voluntary or an involuntary tribute. Time was when, though a creature, he was a sort of miniature divinity. God Himself acknowledged that his own image was shining out upon him; and even now, amidst his present ruin, there is that about him that marks him clearly enough as a child of the skies. Let man then receive all the homage to which he is justly entitled. I may reasonably admire him as a glorious piece of the divine workmanship. I may venerate him, savage though he be, outcast though he be, for the traces of the divine image which I can still recognise in his intellectual and immortal nature. I may love him for the excellence which he exemplifies or the benefits which he confers. But there is a sense in which I may not yield him my confidence; for he is a "son of man;" and of such an one God hath said, "Put not your trust in him."

But suppose it be conceded that mankind as a *race* are not to be trusted, — yet is it not at least possible that this general rule may have

its exceptions? There are some great spirits in the world;—great, I mean, when compared with the mass. There are men who stand out from the race for the vastness of their intellects, the loftiness of their purposes, the intensity of their efforts in the great cause of the world's regeneration. And these men, not unfrequently, are exalted to high places, and have a large dominion meted out to them by the providence of God, and their influence presses upon you, like an all pervading element, from every direction. Be it so that you may not trust the vulgar herd; be it so that you may not trust even men of ordinary intellectual and moral stature,—yet are not these *nobles* among the race fairly entitled to your confidence? Not so long as God says, “Put not your trust in princes.” He allows you to reverence them; as the case may be, he even requires you to obey them; and it is at your peril that you withhold from them suitable regards; but after all, you may not, you can not, trust them, unless you will incur the divine displeasure.

Nevertheless, this statement needs to be qualified: it *is* qualified by the general tenor and spirit of the Bible. If we will understand God's word aright, we must view it in its con-



nections, comparing spiritual things with spiritual ; and by the aid of this principle of interpretation, we quickly arrive at the conclusion that the prohibition in our text is to be taken in that restricted sense, which renders it quite consistent with the cultivation of that mutual confidence among men which is enjoined as a virtue, and which is essential to the well-being, — I may say, to the existence, of society. If the child were not to trust the parent nor the parent the child, the magistrate the subject nor the subject the magistrate, the master the servant nor the servant the master ; — if a universal distrust were to be diffused through all the marts of commerce, and all the halls of legislation, and all the walks of social and domestic life, the very elements of society would part ; and the same winds that would unfurl the standard of universal anarchy would be Heaven's own requiem to human peace and joy. What the text forbids, therefore, is an *ultimate* reliance on an arm of flesh, even the most powerful ; — a trust that goes beyond man's ability, virtually attributing to him qualities which he does not possess ; — a trust that brings dishonour upon the Highest, overlooking his supreme control. The amount

of the prohibition then is this : — you may put your trust in man within certain limits defined by his character and his condition ; but you may not trust him in respect to the ultimate disposal of any thing ; you may not trust him in any way that is inconsistent with rendering due honour to the supreme agent ; and in trusting him at all, you are to regard him only as an instrument in God's hand for carrying into effect the great ends of his administration.

But why is it that we may not put our ultimate trust in men, — even in princes ? Let man stand forth and show himself, and in every feature of his character I can find a reason, why he should not be the object of my highest confidence. Prince though thou art, yet inasmuch as thou art a son of man, thou art a short sighted creature, liable to mistake even in thy most confident calculations, and therefore not to be trusted. Thou art a mutable creature, often vacillating where thou wast expected to stand firm, showing thyself alternately the advocate and the opposer of the same cause ; and who can assure me that to-morrow will not find thee a different man from what thou art to-day ; and therefore how can I put my trust in thee as if I knew that

thou wouldst never change? Thou art a selfish being; thou carest for thyself too much and for others too little; and how am I to know that my interests may not suffer, even perish, if they are committed to thy keeping? And thine arm is very feebleness; when nerved to the utmost, it is scarcely a match for an insect; and even though thine heart may be good for some great and worthy achievement, conscious weakness may lead thee to turn thy face the other way. Each of these were a sufficient reason for not giving to man our ultimate confidence. But I shall content myself with having barely alluded to them, and dwell only on the reason which is suggested by the text;—viz: the fact that man is mortal. There is “no help” in him, because “his breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth, in that very day his thoughts perish.” Let him possess whatever other qualities he may, so long as he has the sentence of death in himself, it were madness to trust him as if he were to live forever.

“His breath goeth forth.”

Man’s life came with his breath, and with his breath it departs. The operation of breathing is performed by the lungs,—an organ of

extreme delicacy, and liable to derangement from a thousand causes ; some of which are, while others are not, within the range of human discovery. No matter in what part of the system disease may be seated, or how many of the animal functions it may derange or destroy in its progress, it never becomes fatal, till, either directly or indirectly, it reaches the lungs and stops the breath. See you that strong man bowed under a burden that is too heavy for him ; — panting, writhing, convulsed with an agony that pervades every nerve, distorts every feature, vents itself in every breath? Oh, he is undergoing the mysterious process of dying! The ultimate fact that comes within your observation is, that his breath is going forth ; but the visible here is only the representative of the invisible ; — there is an assemblage of great and awful facts of which the senses take no cognizance, that cluster around this one, and that go to make up the whole idea of dying. You cannot judge of the office of death by what you see : the monster himself must become your teacher, and you must become at once his subject and his victim, before you can suitably estimate the work that he performs.

But this expression is significant not merely of death, but of *sudden* death. "His breath goeth forth," as in the twinkling of an eye. Perhaps he sat by your side conversing with you ; a brief pause ensued, and while you were waiting for his answer, you saw that he was dead. Perhaps he retired to his chamber in vigorous health ; and as he appeared not in the morning at the accustomed hour, you knocked at the door of his apartment, and received no answer, as it turned out, because he was dead. Perhaps he was in the pulpit proclaiming God's message, or at the bar vindicating the rights of the injured, or in the senate house speaking to the extremities of the nation ;— he uttered his last sentence with all his wonted earnestness and manliness, and there were no signs of faltering even upon the very last word ; and yet it *was* the last word he was destined to utter : the preacher, the advocate, the statesman was dead. And it is not merely in the more mysterious forms of disease that sudden death lurks, but in the innumerable casualties, as we call them,—unlooked for and appalling occurrences, which enter so largely into the experience of men. How suddenly did that man die, who was awakened at the dead of night

by the fury of the flames or the crashing of the timbers, in the ship that was bearing him across the ocean; and yet he was only one of a host who sunk that night in the great waters. How suddenly did *he* die, who went forth from the midst of his friends, a little while since, to encounter the perils of the battle field: amidst the confusion and terror of the scene, an event occurred little heeded by those around him, but of mighty import to himself;—he fell; his breath went forth, and his armour seemed to be left in the keeping of a corpse; and this instead of being a solitary case, differed in nothing material from hundreds of others. Oh there is not an hour of your life, however free from care, however full of joy, but death may come. There is no pleasure so innocent, no duty so sacred, no condition so safe, no relation so tender, but that it may become identified with death's terrible ministration.

“He returneth to his earth.”

The going forth of his breath is the preparation for this. When the vital principle hath once fled, none but the creating power is adequate to restore it; and it is not too much to say that that power is pledged *not* to restore it till the day of the final restitution of the dead.



And with the extinction of life begins the process of decay. At first it may not be perceptible. The lips, though sealed, look as if they might still perform their office. The features, though fixed and motionless, have settled down into a smile. The limbs, though cold and rigid, seem to the eye just as when they were nerved with life. And the mourner sometimes will have it that his friend is there ; nay, will even embrace that lifeless body, as if it were expected to give back some wonted token of endearment. But soon, in obedience to a law of his nature, he begins to return to his earth. Not only is he deposited in the earth as his final resting place, but he gradually becomes assimilated to the clods that press about him, until, after a few generations, he may himself constitute the clods in which other bodies shall lie embosomed. I would never speak or think of this humiliating feature of our condition, without giving God thanks that Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life. Let me have this blessed truth as a lamp to my feet, and I will not fear to traverse death's darkest dominion ; — for what matters it though I find my own dearest friend there, where the worm revels ; what matters it though all my friends and kind-

red are there, an assemblage of corpses passing ages of unbroken silence together; — what matters it, so long as I am permitted to know that the Lord of the sepulchre is there too; that they are only undergoing the Heaven-ordained process in preparation for their putting on immortality; and that because they have died in Jesus, they sleep in him, and he will bring them with him at his second coming?

“In that very day his thoughts perish.”

Every man has his thoughts, his purposes concerning the future. This results alike from the constitution which God has given him, and the condition in which He has placed him. These purposes, as they exist in different individuals, exhibit an almost endless variety; but they all have respect to the body or the spirit; to the life that now is or that which is to come. But be they what they may in their character and tendency, when the breath goeth forth and man returneth to his earth, in that very day they perish. Suppose it be one of the princes of the earth that hath died, — what a perishing of purposes is there in *him*!

If he had *ambitious* purposes, *they* perish. The love of influence is an essential element of our nature; and it is only where it becomes

perverted through excessive self-regard, or where it sinks into the ignoble desire of mere personal ascendancy for the sake of mere personal gratification, that the indulgence of it is to be condemned. But the world abounds with examples of such perversion ; — cases in which this desire, instead of being kept within its legitimate limits, mounts up into the ruling passion, and arms itself with mighty power, and defies every opposing influence. And besides these extreme cases, there are many others in which this passion is steadily at work, where its operations are, in a great measure, unperceived. It nerves many a hand that you would say was moved only by generous or patriotic impulses. It breathes in many a speech that you would suppose was dictated by unmingled good will to man. It is the soul of many a purpose that would seem to have been originated by some influence from above. But wherever this spirit exists, and whatever may be the purposes which it dictates, they all perish in the day of death. There may be plans formed for enlarging the sphere of one's influence or one's dominion, that appear entirely practicable ; but what nothing else seemed likely to defeat, death defeats in a moment.

The individual may have felt himself so great and strong, that he thought there was no cause to fear from any thing ; but in his estimate of adverse agencies, he forgot the irresistible power of the king of terrors. No matter what wreaths or diadems might have been within his reach, if he had lived, they all fade upon his dying eye, and the experience of his last hour stamps vanity as well upon what he had aspired to as upon what he had attained.

If he have had *patriotic* purposes, these perish also. He may be a man of comprehensive and lofty aims ; he may have cherished during his whole life an earnest devotion to his country's welfare ; he may have been placed in circumstances especially fitted to keep the fire of patriotism alive and glowing in his bosom ; dark clouds may be lowering in the national horizon, and the time of need for the action of great and heroic spirits may have come ; and his own prolific mind may be teeming with purposes of safety and honour to his country ; but here again, with the going forth of his breath all his noble purposes perish. His mind is still active indeed, but it is employed upon other objects and amidst other scenes. God may take care of his country ;

but other instruments than himself must be used for its preservation.

Or if he have had *humane* and *benevolent* purposes, they too must, with equal certainty, perish. He may have had a naturally philanthropic spirit, — an ear that was quick to catch the notes of sorrow, — a heart that beat instinctively to every tale of wo : though he may have occupied a lofty station, he may have descended with the utmost grace into the hut of poverty or the chamber of sickness to soothe and to comfort ; he may have been the centre of intellectual or social improvement to the community in which he lived ; and his liberal mind may have been intensely occupied in opening new channels of public or private blessing ; but stern, inexorable death arrests him ; and all his purposes of good, — where are they ? Oh *he* can labour no longer for their accomplishment ; for already he has returned to his earth. Public spirit and philanthropy that put in requisition his services once, are now weeping around his grave.

I have spoken of the perishing of the thoughts or purposes of the individual who is himself the subject of death ; but it must occur to you at once that in *his* death, other

purposes than his own perish. If he have been an exalted patriot, his country has had her eye upon him as a helper in great and pressing exigencies : she has expected to take counsel of his wisdom, to repose in his firmness and integrity, and perhaps to outlive some fierce storm for which the political elements may seem to be combining themselves, because she looks to him to ride in it and direct it. Or it may be, it almost certainly will be, that his country is divided in respect to important principles of national policy ; and the party to which he belongs may have identified him, if not with its continued existence, at least with its highest prosperity. Or if he have been largely endowed with generous and humane sensibilities, if he have been signalized as the friend of the sick and the destitute, if he have been ever ready to enlarge the circle of philanthropic effort within his sphere, then, rely on it, there are multitudes who have been looking to him as a benefactor ; there are hearts which expected to have been soothed by his charities, and other hearts which expected to have been improved and guided by his wisdom ; and the whole community have identified him in some way or other with their



hopes of general progress. But all these various purposes, no matter to what they relate, and no matter by whom they are cherished, perish in the very moment of the going forth of his breath. The political party in connection with which he had laboured receives a shock, as if the balance wheel in her machinery were gone. The country at large which had revered him for his great and patriotic qualities, acknowledges that an armour-bearer hath failed her. Those who had been blessed with his kindness in the hour of need, and those who had relied upon his counsel in times of difficulty, and those who had felt their labours lightened by his generous smile or his voluntary co-operation, — all realize that they had had purposes associated with him, of which perhaps they had not before been conscious; — purposes, the perishing of which, it may be, hath arrayed the future in respect to them, in deep darkness. That great man, that prince, died like any other of the sons of men; but in the going forth of his spirit there was a blow struck that vibrated to unnumbered hearts: in the perishing of his thoughts, the thoughts of millions perished also.

Pause now and see whether we have not

gathered the materials for a most convincing argument against trusting in the son of man,— against trusting even in the princes of the earth. Yonder is a man of undisputed greatness. The God of nature made him great; and the God of providence has added largely to his stature by the influences with which He has surrounded him. And he is amiable and generous and public spirited, as well as sagacious and far seeing: his integrity not less than his intelligence renders him an object of public respect. His country, as might have been expected, has found him out, and lifted him into one of her loftiest stations, and almost told him that she had nothing to give but what she was willing should be his. He has no sickly constitution to embarrass him in his efforts for the public weal; and if the physician visits him, it is in a social and not in a professional way. You see there the full vigour of a gigantic mind, and the strong pulsations of a patriotic heart. You see laurels that have been already placed upon the brow, and these perhaps only a pledge of yet brighter laurels which are to come hereafter. You behold a frame so erect and robust as not even to suggest to your mind a thought about mortality.

And yet while you are looking at that prince, what is it that forces itself upon you but the appalling fact that his breath is going forth? You may call for medical aid; but when the physician comes, he has to do only with a corpse. You may anxiously enquire if it be not faintness instead of death; but they who are the wisest in such matters, answer 'No.' You may raise up the great man from the spot where death hath laid him, in the hope of gaining some evidence that the vital spark is not clean gone; but you cannot resist the conviction that you are putting yourself in contact with a clod. All his purposes, and all your purposes in connection with him, have perished. And now I ask whether the son of man, whether even a prince, is to be ultimately trusted. Is it not rather madness than folly to put our trust in any amount of human wisdom, or human firmness or human integrity, so long as it must always be associated with human mortality?

It cannot, I think, have escaped you, as we have passed along, that each division of our subject has a most striking practical illustration in the life and death of that eminent individual whom this state and this nation have

just been so suddenly called to lament. I am aware of the supposed delicacy of introducing into the pulpit notices of individuals who have been identified prominently with either of the great political parties of the country; but my own past experience has furnished me with evidence that here at least it is safe to do it; that whatever may be your political preferences or prejudices or even asperities, they do not render you insensible to whatever is praiseworthy and of good report in the character of the illustrious dead. Besides, in the present case, I rejoice to observe that the clamour of party is hushed, and even the newspapers which sometimes show fiery tongues, and are used to hard and bitter words,—nay the very newspapers that dissented most earnestly from his political creed, seem, under the subduing, healing influence of the grave, to have forgotten that he was their opponent, and are doing honour to themselves in their efforts to do honour to him. But the circumstance which has seemed to me to render it imperative that I should speak of him thus publicly, is that he was a member of this congregation up to the time of his recently leaving the city; so that it must seem to you almost as if I were speak-

ing of one of your own number. Many of his most intimate friends are here; and this whole congregation, I may say this whole community, have been afflicted by the tidings of his death.

I am sure that I shall not put myself even upon doubtful ground in the estimation of any of you, in saying that the citizen, the statesman, the friend whom we lament, may justly be reckoned among the princes of the land. Endowed with a commanding, well balanced and versatile intellect, vast in its comprehension, clear in its perceptions, calm and safe in its judgments; possessing a heart made of frankness and tenderness and generosity; favoured with the advantages of a correct moral training under the parental roof, and subsequently with the advantages of an excellent liberal education; he gave early promise of the distinction which he ultimately reached. Shortly after he was settled in the legal profession, he was introduced on the arena of political life. His services were first put in requisition as a member of the Senate of this state; and in the progress of his public career, he became successively a member of the House of Representatives in Congress, Comp-

troller of the state of New-York, member of the Senate of the United States, and finally Governor of this state, whose servant in some capacity or other he had been for more than twenty years. In each of these several stations, he was distinguished for his prudence, dignity and earnest devotion to the duties of his office. It was probably in the United States' Senate, where he was brought not only in contact but in conflict with the greatest minds of the nation, that he attained his highest distinction. I believe it will not be questioned by any competent or impartial judge, that he stood in the foremost rank in that venerable body, and that when he rose to speak, the ablest of his opponents felt that there was work about to be made ready for them. I have been credibly informed that the man who has been for some time the acknowledged leader of the adverse party in Congress and in the nation, — a man whom the whole civilized world has recognised as belonging to the very highest rank of intellectual aristocracy, has more than once borne a testimony to the exalted powers and qualities of our departed friend, such as might reasonably satisfy the most ardent of his political admirers.



Having spoken of the offices which he actually held, it is proper to advert to the fact that there were other offices of equal or even greater importance, proffered to his acceptance, which he thought proper to decline : I refer to the offices of Secretary of the treasury, and Judge in the supreme court of the nation, including also a nomination to the Vice-Presidency of the United States. Whatever may be the speculations of politicians upon his conduct in this respect, the obvious construction of it would warrant the conclusion, — a conclusion fully justified, I think, by his general character, — that disinterestedness was a leading element in his patriotism, and that his heart was set, far less than that of most political men, on personal exaltation.

What Mr. Wright was in private, most of us know from actual observation ; for he passed several years in the midst of us, and he was always perfectly accessible to the humblest man in the community. He was gifted with an uncommon perception of the fitting and graceful in all the relations of life. While he had a high respect for plebeian honesty, and could, as occasion required, put on the plebeian himself, there was no circle of society so

polished or elevated, but that he was as much at home in it, as if it were the only sphere in which he had ever moved. In his intercourse with his friends he was open and confiding; always happy in their society and always on the alert to gratify and oblige them; and even the stranger who saw him but for a moment, was not likely to forget the dignity of his manner and the kindness of his smile. To the neighbourhood in which he had his home and in which he finally died, he sustained the most grateful relations; mingling with them freely as a judicious counsellor, a sympathizing friend, and even an active labourer. He was specially gifted with those qualities which render one's presence welcome at the bed side of the sick; and his services in this department of social duty, were not unfrequently proffered and rendered with the most cordial and winning alacrity. He hesitated not to address himself to manual labour in aid of any object that was likely to benefit the neighbourhood or the community; and it has even been intimated that excessive effort of this kind, within the last few weeks, was the proximate cause of his death. In a word, I may say with confidence, he was

respected, honoured, beloved, in every relation.

There is a fact or two in his history, to which I cannot forbear to advert, illustrative of at least a highly respectful regard to the institutions of religion. One is, that during his residence in Canton, while the church at which he stately attended, was without a pastor, he was accustomed to aid in the maintenance of public worship, by reading a printed discourse, the devotional service being conducted by the officers of the church. And during the time that he has been at the head of our state government, we are all witnesses with what regularity he attended here, and with what apparent earnestness he listened to the preaching of the word. I mention these things only for what they are worth ; but they certainly reflect honour upon his character as a public man, while they come with the force of a rebuke to many other public men, who find an apology for habitually turning their backs upon the sanctuary, on the ground that they are burdened with the cares of the state or the nation.

But if the language of the text fairly represents the character and the rank of our

departed friend, — if, by common consent, he has taken his place among the princes of his country, we have only to look a little farther to find language equally expressive of his sudden, and to his friends at least, awful, exit. At a moment when he seems full of life and gladness, when his vigorous and elastic step speaks of health to all his neighbours, and no suspicion of approaching evil lurks even in the innermost sanctuary of domestic affection; — at a moment when he has just completed his preparation for an important public service, and is making his arrangements to come among us again as a friendly visitor; — Oh at this most unexpected moment “his breath goeth forth!” It seemed to those who looked on as if it must be some fearful illusion that had overtaken them; or else as if the breath had gone only to come again; but it was no illusion; — it was no temporary suspension of the vital energy. Death, as if to show how he could sport with the strongest, had held that prince in his grasp but a few moments, before he bid the agonized lookers on take notice how thoroughly he had done his work. And before the vital warmth has fled, the lightning is put in requisition to bear

the heavy tidings over the land ; and the sun in whose morning beams our friend rejoiced, has not sunk beneath the horizon, before the state, I had almost said the nation, is putting on her habiliments of mourning, because she shall see his face no more. He is said to have spoken, a day or two before, to one of his friends, of sudden death, as not in itself undesirable ; but whatever his own thoughts may have been in respect to himself, the event certainly took all others by surprise.

And the consequence of his death, — how well the text describes *that* : — “in that very day his thoughts perish.” What his own expectations or purposes in respect to the future were, I know not ; but who does not know that there were in many minds expectations and purposes in respect to him of the highest moment ; — that a large portion of the party to which he belonged, as well as many of the party to which he did not belong, were anticipating the time when he would be crowned with the highest honours of the nation ? But see, ye men of calculation and of foresight, see how your thoughts have perished. Before you had time to invest him with the robe of supreme authority, or even to present him to



the nation as a candidate for it, his race was run, — his days were numbered. When the humblest individual dies, the thoughts of some perish in his death ; but such a withering of human expectations as the monster here accomplished, occurs but rarely in an age.

But does not the passage on which we have been meditating suggest, still further, the legitimate use to be made of this afflictive event? Does it not rebuke with awful emphasis that excessive confidence in the wisdom or the power of man, in which consists so much of our national guilt, and from which arises so much of our national danger? “Put not your trust in princes.” It has become, I fear, one of the most distinctive features of our character as a nation, that, in rendering homage to party, we overlook the homage that is due to God. You select an individual from the mass as a candidate for office, who possibly has little personal ability or personal worth, to distinguish him from thousands from amidst whom he is taken. But the fact that you have thus designated him as your candidate, seems to you to have separated from his nature every element of mediocrity, and to have given him an undisputed claim to extraordinary intel-



lectual and moral qualities. You stand committed now to his exaltation ; and you go about testifying to the world that the safety of the state or the nation is bound up in him. And when your object is gained, and you have actually succeeded in lifting him to the desired elevation,—if you will notice the progress of your own mind in respect to him, you will find that indifference was exchanged for preference, that preference was matured into admiration, and that admiration has finally become idolatry. You are suffering that poor mortal to supplant the great God in your regards as the controller of events ; and though you would shudder at being called an atheist, yet in this matter of national prosperity at least, God is not in all your thoughts. Yes, I repeat, party spirit has made idols of our rulers ; and God is now chastising us for our idolatry. He is showing us the arm of flesh palsied, broken, that we may lean upon it no longer. Men of every class and every party, open your ears, I pray you, to the teachings of the tomb. See how much your idols are worth, when they are thus broken in a moment before your eyes. Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's ; but forget not to render also to God the things

that are God's. Let your rulers receive the homage which is due to them ; but remember that if your country is preserved and blessed, God must be its preserver and benefactor ; and you need not marvel if your own efforts for its exaltation, provided they are put forth in any other spirit than that of ultimate dependence on God, should be found to have in them the elements of a curse rather than a blessing.

Is not this dispensation in connection with the subject we have been contemplating, strikingly illustrative also of the awful mystery that pervades the counsels of Heaven? Man has his purposes ; and he imagines perhaps that they are in full accordance with the purposes of God ; and possibly finds in this reflection the most powerful motive to labour for their accomplishment. And yet God has higher purposes, which can be best answered by his causing the thoughts, the designs of men to perish. In the individual who has just died, multitudes had centred their hopes of the nation's growth and glory ; they had prospectively identified with him measures of supposed utility and perhaps reform ; and it seemed to them as if the continuance of his life were

almost certain, because it was so necessary ; but He who sees the end from the beginning, saw that the great ends of his government would be best accomplished by his removal ; and therefore he hath returned to his earth. Oh how the wisdom of the Unsearchable mocks at all the force of human calculation ! When it seems to short sighted man as if God were defeating his own designs, He is actually moving forward, in all the majesty of omnipotence, to their accomplishment. He may trample on human hopes, in his progress ; He may overturn magnificent structures that the heart of charity hath originated and the hand of skill hath reared ; He may seem to leave behind Him naught but desolation and dismay ; and still when the day of final revelation comes, wisdom, perfect wisdom, will be found inscribed upon every part of his procedure. Let this reflection hush the rising spirit of complaint in the hour of public or private calamity. When God raises up eminently useful men and continues them, and when He changes their countenances and sends them away, He is working in the one case as well as the other, for the ultimate triumph of good. He may not only send princes, as it

would seem to us prematurely, to the grave, but He may dash kingdoms to pieces as a potter's vessel, and yet nothing will have occurred but will help to form the mighty mirror that will reflect his glory upon an admiring universe to all eternity.

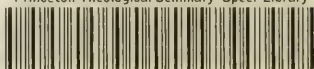
I must not close the discourse without suggesting a caution. Let no one imagine from any thing in the preceding train of remark, that there is any just ground of glorying save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. I have spoken of the graces of nature and commended them; and so I have a right to do, for they are the gift of God. I have spoken of the dignity that pertains to rank, and the homage that is due to rank; and here again, I am sure that I offend not against the spirit of the Bible. But I should be chargeable with treason to Him whose servant I am, and with criminal unfaithfulness to you whose servant I also am, though in a far lower sense, if I were not most distinctly to proclaim that in the great matter of the final meeting with God, nothing can avail but a conscience sprinkled with the blood of Christ, and a heart purified by his Spirit. The badges of earthly distinction become worthless, if not burdensome, amidst the shadows of

death. The plaudits of the multitude pall upon the spirit that is just rushing forth to meet its God. The prince may have scorned the beggar's poverty and the beggar may have coveted the splendour of the prince; but both must enter Heaven by the same strait and narrow way, or else incur the reprobate's doom. Whether ye are men of high degree or of low degree, I would that it might fall like thunder upon your ear and upon your heart, "Without holiness *no* man shall see the Lord."

LB2325 .L77

Obituary addresses delivered on the

Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library



1 1012 00085 2162



