

THE
CHRISTIAN ADVOCATE.

DECEMBER, 1833.

Religious Communications.

LECTURES ON THE SHORTER CATECHISM OF THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY OF DIVINES—ADDRESSED TO YOUTH.

LECTURE LXXXIII.

In the sixth petition of the Lord's prayer, which is, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil," our Catechism teaches us that "we pray that God would either keep us from being tempted to sin, or support and deliver us when we are tempted." This answer is in accordance with an explicit promise, made in the Scriptures of truth to the people of God, in the following words—"God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." It is in answer to prayer, it should always be remembered, that God is wont to fulfil the promises he has made to his children. If they neglect to ask the things which he has promised, he usually teaches them their duty by withholding the stipulated benefit, till its loss brings them to cry to him earnestly, both for the pardon of their sin in neglecting to ask that they might receive, and for the conferring of the

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favour which, on account of their neglect, has been justly withheld: and when brought to this temper, they again experience, perhaps in a more signal manner than ever before, the fulfilment of a promise which had seemed to fail.

It is important, my young friends, that you should understand, that the verb *to tempt* has two distinct and very different meanings, in our translation of the Bible—otherwise, the holy Scriptures may appear to contradict themselves. In Genesis *xxii.* 1, it is said explicitly, "that God did tempt Abraham;" and in James *i.* 13, it is declared, in the same unequivocal manner, that "God cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempteth he any man." You will observe then, that in the first of these instances, the verb *to tempt* is of the same meaning as the words *to prove, to try, to put to the test*. Thus when Abraham was commanded to offer up his son, which was the thing in which it is said God tempted him, the faith and obedience of Abraham were *tried, put to the proof, or test*, by requiring him to do an act to which the most powerful objections would arise, in any mind not in the possession of the most vigorous faith and unbounded confidence in God.

There is a pleasaut story told on this subject, relative to an interview between the celebrated Erasmus, and Sir Thomas Moore, when the former was on a visit to England. They were both Catholics, but Erasmus was one of those who felt himself at liberty to question this doctrine of Transubstantiation, or at least to dispute against it, for the sake of an argument. Sir Thomas's great argument was the efficacy of faith; that is, believe that in the Eucharist you eat the very body of Christ, and then you really eat it. Shortly after this dispute, Erasmus returned to Holland, and Sir Thomas lent him a small horse, called a palfrey, to carry him to the place where he was to go on ship-board, and a servant was sent to bring back the palfrey. But the story says, that Erasmus took the palfrey over to Holland, with himself, and sent back these lines to Sir Thomas—

Nonne meministi
Quod tibi dixisti,
De corpore Christi,
Credo quod edis and edis—
Idem tibi scribo
De tuo palfredo,
Credo quod habes et habes.*

OBITUARY.

Died, at his lodgings, in Philadelphia, on the 5th of the present month, (Dec. 1833,) the Rev. EZRA FISK, D. D., Professor of Ecclesiastical History and Church Government in the Western Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church, located in Alleghany Town, in the vicinity of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

* Do you not remember
What you said to me
Concerning the body of Christ,
Believe that you eat it, and you do eat it—
The same thing I write to you
Concerning your palfrey,
Believe that you have him, and you have him.

His funeral was attended by many of his clerical brethren, and by other citizens of respectability, on Saturday the 7th inst., to the burial ground of the 2d Presbyterian church, where his corpse was deposited in the family vault of Dr. John White, who kindly offered it for this purpose. A funeral service was performed on the occasion, in the lecture room adjoining the burial ground: in this service the Rev. Dr. John M'Dowell made the introductory prayer; Dr. A. Green gave out a psalm, and followed it with an address;* Dr. W. Neill followed the address with a prayer; and the service was closed with a hymn and the apostolical benediction, by Dr. Green.

THE ADDRESS delivered on the occasion was as follows—

FRIENDS AND BRETHREN,

Death seldom seizes on a victim, whom, if permitted, we should more earnestly desire to rescue from his grasp, than in the instance in which he laid his corpse-making hand on the dear brother, whose funeral rites we now celebrate. But we are to remember that death is God's messenger; and as it is not in our power, so it ought not to be our desire, to interfere with his arrest, whenever we perceive that he has received a commission to strike—Least of all should we do this, or be disposed to repine, however great may be our loss, when death is sent to call an eminent friend and servant of God, from his labours and sufferings on earth, to his rest and his reward in heaven—

* In this address, when delivered, there were some inaccuracies and omissions, which are corrected and supplied in the publication. Nothing, however, is changed or added, which at all affects the general character of what was orally delivered; and if any apology be necessary for the changes made, it is amply furnished by the unavoidable and extreme haste with which the address was prepared.

"Why do we mourn departed friends,
Or shake at death's alarms;
'Tis but the voice that Jesus sends
To call them to his arms."

The Rev. DR. EZRA FISK, whose mortal remains are now before us, was born in the town of Shelburn, state of Massachusetts, in January 1785; and in Williams' college, of the same state, he received his academical education. He was graduated in 1809; having been, during his college course, one of the little band of pious youth that met frequently for prayer, with a special reference to evangelical missions; and of which the well known and much lamented Mills and Richards were leading members. His classical studies, previously to his entering college, and his theological studies afterwards, were prosecuted under the Rev. Dr. Packard, the pastor of a Congregational church in the town of his nativity; and for whom he ever retained the greatest love and veneration, as the man whose early instructions had imbued his mind with those principles, and given him those views, which had effectually preserved him from the pernicious errors, both in philosophy and theology, which have recently obtained a lamentable currency.

Having preached as a licentiate for about a year, he was ordained as an evangelist in 1810. His labours in this character were principally performed among the numerous destitute congregations, then in the state of Georgia; and here, in March 1812, he entered into the marriage relation, with a daughter of the venerable Dr. Francis Cummins. In the autumn of the same year, though debilitated by his residence and labours in the south, he preached as a missionary for some months, in this city. In August, 1813, he was permanently settled in the ministry at Goshen, in the state of New York—so that he appears to have sustained the pastoral relation

to his beloved people, a little more than twenty years.

An affection of the lungs compelled him to intermit the greater part of his ministerial duties, in the autumn of 1832, and to seek relief by a winter's residence in the more genial climate of Georgia. During his absence, he unexpectedly received the appointment of Corresponding Secretary and General Agent of the Board of Missions of the General Assembly; which, on his return, he declined to accept; under a conviction that his health was not such as would enable him to endure the labours, hardships, and exposures of the appointment.

He was recommended in May last, by the Directors of the Western Theological Seminary, to the last General Assembly of the Presbyterian church, for the appointment of Professor of Ecclesiastical History and Church Government, in that seminary. After his election to the designated professorship by a vote of the Assembly, he visited the Seminary at Alleghanytown, and having inspected its state and prospects, he accepted the professorship assigned him. His separation from the beloved people of his pastoral charge was, both to them and to himself, a most trying occurrence. His farewell sermon to his brethren of the Presbytery of which he was a member, is published, and remains to them, and to the attached people of the congregation that he left, as a memorial of his affection, and the depository of his wise counsels.

On his way to Pittsburg, he arrived with his wife in this city, on Saturday, the 2d of Nov. last. In the evening of the next day, the Sabbath, he preached his last sermon, in the lecture room where we are now assembled. His text was, *Col. i. 12: "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of*

the saints in light." From these words, while addressing his Christian brethren, he undesignedly drew his own character, and described the blood-bought inheritance of his Redeemer, of which, in a few days, he was to be made a glorified partaker. Immediately after preaching, he was taken with great sickness of the stomach, followed the next day by a high fever, and a distressing pain of the head. To these symptoms, on the third day, was added a violent affection of the breast, accompanied by a cough, discoloured and bloody expectoration, and an incessant and exhausting hiccup. In about two weeks, however, all these threatening symptoms disappeared, under the medical treatment he received. He seemed, indeed, to be free from all actual disease, and was in a state of such promising convalescence, as to be encouraged by his physician to hope that the time was not far distant, when he might with safety go abroad, and eventually pursue his journey. But an all-wise, sovereign, and holy God had otherwise ordained. On the night of the last Lord's day, he was taken with a relapse, and although he seemed in a degree relieved, during a part of the next day, yet the following night, alarming symptoms, which seemed to threaten his immediate dissolution, made their appearance; and although some abatement to the violence of his complaint was obtained, yet the oppression of his lungs not only continued but increased, till exhausted nature, on Tuesday last, about four o'clock in the afternoon, yielded the conflict—His death was not painful; he fell asleep in the Lord. I conversed and prayed with him, about two hours before he expired—The hand of death was then on him, although his mental faculties were unimpaired, as indeed they appeared to be to the very last. A

beloved brother,* whom a severe indisposition prevents being present at this time, took my place, shortly after I retired; and spoke to him in a strain of Christian and consolatory address, accompanied with prayer, which is testified by those who heard it (as a number did) to have been of the most appropriate, elevated and animating kind. The eyes of the dear deceased, were steadfastly fixed on the speaker, till they were closed in death—having given previously repeated intimations, in reply to questions asked by his beloved partner, that he understood all that was said. A heavenly composure, or serenity of soul was vouchsafed him, during the whole of his illness. Nor did it in any degree abate, when he knew that he was dying; and it left imprinted on his features, after his spirit had fled from its earthly abode, such a sweetness of expression, as I have never seen in any other countenance, after death. For him, the king of terrors had no terror. He might indeed say with the apostle, "O death where is thy sting; O grave where is thy victory. The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

The intellectual powers of Dr. Fisk were of the solid, more than of the brilliant kind. His imagination was not the distinguishing faculty of his mind. His imagination was indeed by no means barren; it was fertile; but its fertility was that of thought, and not that which is prolific of poetic images, or rhetorical figures. His mind was vigorous, penetrating, discriminating, and judicious. This was its character. He saw truth with a quickness, perspicacity and depth, that was uncom-

* The Rev. Wm. L. M'Calla.

mon; and hence he could separate and disentangle it from error, with a readiness and accuracy that few possess.

His affections were tender and strong, but not violent. In the connubial relation he was exemplary—He imparted, and I know he also received, in that relation, a high degree of the happiness which it is calculated to cherish and bestow. In every domestic relation he excelled as an example. In friendship he was most sincere and unwavering; not affected by a change of outward circumstances; or if he was, he only changed to cleave closer to his friend, when others proved fickle or faithless. Alas! in him I have lost a friend, whose place I can scarcely hope to be supplied.

He was peculiarly grateful for favours received. He spoke frequently, and with much sensibility, of the friendship and kind attentions which, during his illness, he and Mrs. Fisk had received in this city—not only from his clerical brethren, but from many others, both male and female. He said that he knew he had some friends here, but that he had received friendly offices, far beyond his expectations. Modesty and humility were ever distinguishing features of his character.

His integrity was of the most unsullied and unbending kind. He had doubtless adopted the resolution of Job—"My heart shall not reproach me so long as I live." Hence it was, that he acquired the high estimation which he held in the minds of all honourable men who knew him, and enjoyed the peculiar confidence of his brethren in the ministry. He was a man, whom all who were acquainted with him intimately, knew where they would find him, on every question in which truth, and consistency of character and profession, were concerned. It was his integrity, prudence, discretion and firmness,

mingled with a mildness of manner, and so far as duty would permit, a spirit of accommodation and conciliation, which gave him the extensive influence that he confessedly possessed.

His literary attainments were highly respectable. Of the original languages of the Sacred Scriptures, he had acquired a better knowledge and a greater familiarity, than is possessed by most of the clergy of our country. He loved science in almost all its departments; and in some, not often cultivated, he had made a desirable progress. In mental philosophy, I do not know his superior, in the church to which he belonged. He loved this study. It accorded with that close and discriminating investigation, to which his faculties were adapted, and in which he delighted. His was the true Baconian system of philosophy, applied to the mind—a system in which facts, and fair inductions from facts, stand for every thing; and hypotheses and fanciful speculations stand for nothing. Such alone was the philosophy which had charms for our departed friend. He considered a plain declaration of the word of God as establishing a fact, to which all speculation was implicitly to bow and submit; and not busy itself in perverting, disguising, or endeavouring to explain away the announced fact—a fact resting on the declaration of Him who cannot err.

His theology was that of the Protestant Reformation, as embodied in the doctrinal standards of the Presbyterian church. In every department of this Theology he was an adept. He had carefully examined its foundations, and all its bearings: And he was prepared to defend and maintain the system, on the grounds both of reason and Scripture.

The piety of Dr. Fisk was truly eminent. It was not a flighty and

fluctuating principle in his mind, or in his life. It was a deep, solid, consistent, tender and well examined principle; influencing his judgment and his affections, more than his imagination; and it was carried out into all his connexions and intercourse with the world, directing and animating him in every duty. Hence, as I have learned from his beloved and bereaved consort, he had attained, and for years in succession preserved unshaken, what is denominated in Scripture, *the full assurance of faith*.^{*} He could say with the apostle, "I know in whom I have believed, and that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." In the very near and certain approach of death, the friend of his bosom, as she told me yesterday, asked him, whether his hope of heaven was as firm as it had usually been. His answer was—"I have not a doubt." When she inquired of him, not five minutes before he breathed his last, whether he felt *perfectly* happy—emphasizing the word *perfect*—he distinctly answered "*yes*." No wonder that his countenance beamed with joy in death, and left its impress on his clay cold features.

As a preacher, our deceased brother was in a high degree impressive. He sometimes held his audience in almost breathless silence, and very often melted them into tears. Yet his, in general, was not that showy eloquence, in which many delight, and consider as the charm of pulpit addresses. His manner indeed was always free, and dignified, and solemn, and affectionate. But his preaching was peculiarly doctrinal and instructive; followed, in almost every sermon, with close application, and sometimes with strong appeals to the conscience and the heart. He was abundant in pulpit

labours. To these labours, sometimes beyond his strength, is probably to be attributed that disease of the lungs, which in two instances produced hæmoptosis, and still oftener interrupted his publick preaching, and has at length terminated in death. His preaching was eminently blessed. Few ministers of the gospel have had more seals to their ministry than he. At one period, he had a revival of religion, which continued, with very little fluctuation, for more than four years. A most remarkable revival, of which he gave me personally an account, took place among the people of his pastoral charge, not long before he was attacked by the pulmonary complaint, which entirely silenced him for a time; and from which he sought and found relief, in the journey to the South, from which he returned but a few months since.

The preaching and pastoral services of Dr. Fisk falsify completely, the wild notion of those who think that there must be a resort to new measures, and a new mode of preaching, if a minister is to expect a revival of religion among his people. He adopted no new measures—he disapproved of them utterly. He used no new mode of preaching. He preached as I have stated—in the old fashioned way, and in maintenance of old fashioned doctrines—the doctrines taught in the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of our church—To these he steadfastly adhered; these he lucidly explained and powerfully enforced; and these the Lord blessed, to bring into his church—not hastily, but after time to examine and prove them—such a number of hopeful converts, as are seldom seen to crown the most faithful labours, in the service of Him whose blessing alone gives the success. I have been credibly informed, that when Dr. Fisk settled in the congregation of Goshen, the

^{*} Heb. x. 22. πληροφωρία πιστεύουσ.

communicating members of his church were in number between ninety and a hundred; and that when he left them, they exceeded five hundred; beside more than two hundred, who had been dismissed to join other churches, or had been removed by death.

Such a man, my brethren, as he of whose character I have sketched the outline, and given a few of the principal lineaments, was surely qualified, in an eminent degree, to be a theological professor—to have the superintendence and instruction of youth, while under training for the gospel ministry: And having received this appointment, as you have heard, how mysterious seems the providential dispensation, that while going to the field of his destined engagements, full of hope, and cheered with the prospect of future and extensive usefulness, he should fall by the way—that his life should be cut off in the midst—that an infant seminary should have its raised expectations blasted at once, and be clothed in sackcloth, instead of the habiliments of joy and gladness. O my brethren! the death of such a man, in such an exigent time as the present, such a critical period in the existing state of our church, and such a dearth of men qualified to fill the station which he was about to occupy—O it is a loss indeed! Is it a frown upon our church? Is he taken away from the evil to come? The Lord knoweth; and what his people know not now, they shall know hereafter. We prostrate ourselves before Him, who doth all things well. We say, “thy will be done;” and we ask to be enabled rightly to improve the dispensation that afflicts us.

Bereaved partner of the deceased—Yours is the greatest immediate trial. But under it, you have every consolation of which your situation admits. You not only do not mourn as those who have no

hope, but you mourn with the full confidence of hope; a confidence that he to whom your heart was knit, has already exchanged *his* hope for fruition: And you also, I know, cherish for yourself, a hope full of immortality—a hope that as your husband is not lost but gone before—so that you will shortly join him again, in those blessed abodes where the inhabitants “go no more out;” where they no more say, “I am sick;” where God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and an eternity of unutterable bliss, shall be spent in the beatific vision of your redeeming God and Saviour. Look to him to sustain and comfort you—to comfort you with those consolations of his Holy Spirit which are neither few nor small. On your Heavenly Father “cast all your cares, for he careth for you.” He will not leave you comfortless; he will be to you the widow’s God and husband; his providence will provide for and protect you; and his grace will be sufficient for you; and will conduct you to those mansions, into which the beloved of your soul has already entered; and from which, if a wish could do it, you would not draw him, to another conflict with this world of sin and sorrow. You have all our sympathies and our prayers—May the Almighty God be your refuge, and have underneath and around you continually, his almighty arms of protection, love and guidance.

Brethren in the gospel ministry—The death of our brother is loudly and affectingly monitory to us. Its language is, “work while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work.” With our best exertions, we render but a scanty tribute of gratitude—and gratitude is all we have to render—to that Saviour, who, we trust, has not only called us out of darkness into his marvellous light, but has “counted us faithful, putting us into the ministry.” Our Mas-

ter has indeed honoured us; but it is with an honour which is accompanied with a fearful responsibility. The charge of souls, is the most weighty charge with which a mortal can be entrusted. It is, (said one of the fathers of the church)—“it is a burden which angels might tremble to take upon them.” “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.” Yet never, never should our feebleness be made an excuse for the lack of fidelity. We are to be as active, as diligent, and as earnest, as if success depended on ourselves alone—while yet, we are constantly to recollect, that “neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase.” The unexpected departure of our lamented brother, teaches us that we may be preaching our last sermon when we least expect it; and when our prospects of usefulness seem most bright and flattering. Let us then live every day, and perform every service, as though it were our last. Let the desire of winning souls to Christ absorb our minds—Let us, in our preaching, “know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified;” and count it our best honour, and highest happiness to spend and be spent in his service—ever endeavouring to hide our worthless selves behind our blessed Lord. And whether it be little or much, that we are doing, or can do, let us seek to be sincerely and unreservedly devoted to him, and to the advancement of his precious cause, in the salvation of our perishing fellow sinners. While God is calling one and another of his faithful ministers away from the field of labour, he is, let us remember, leaving the more to be done by those who remain. Whatsoever, therefore, our hand findeth to do in the vineyard of the Lord, let us do it with our

might, knowing that “there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge in the grave,” to which we are fast hastening. May God of his mercy grant, that we may so acquit ourselves—so fulfil our ministry—that when we come to die, whether it be by a sudden arrest, or by lingering decay, we may—like him for whom we mourn—have no fear of death; have nothing to do but to die; to fall asleep in Jesus and be for ever with the Lord.

Hearers of every class and character present—Be admonished, on this occasion, of your responsibility, as hearers of the gospel. When its messages are delivered to you with fidelity, they become “a savour either of death unto death, or of life unto life,” to your souls. Be reminded that those who perish from under a faithful gospel ministry, perish with no ordinary condemnation. You and your ministers are to have another meeting at the final judgment. If they have been instrumental in bringing you to glory, you will hear them say, with unutterable joy, “here are we, and the children thou hast given us.” But if their ministrations have been neglected to the loss of your souls, they will appear as swift witnesses against you; and all their misimproved warnings, admonitions, and entreaties, will only serve to sink you into deeper perdition. Listen then to the gospel call, as to that which calls you from sin and hell, to holiness and heaven. Avoid delay in attending to your immortal interests. Delay has peopled the mansions of the damned. Let not the present solemnity pass unimproved. Lay your own mortality to heart. Make now an honest estimate of your character, state and prospects. Are you, in your own account, prepared for death? If not, be assured of one thing—it is, that you are likely to die such as you now are, unless it be your purpose, in the strength

of God, *immediately* to give all diligence to make your salvation sure. Beware of satisfying yourselves lightly, in this most important of all concerns. Be assured, that nothing short of the regeneration of the heart, will qualify you for the heavenly joys. Such, remember, is the declaration of the Saviour himself—"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." The graces of repentance and faith, are found only in those who are born of the Spirit. Supplicate his almighty aid, in every purpose you form, and in every effort you make, in returning unto God. To him, without any farther procrastination, devote yourselves—your hearts, your life, your all. Be of the number of those who resolve, that let others do as they may, as for you, you will serve the Lord. Never will you regret such a determination, if you form it sincerely and keep it faithfully—May God dispose and enable you to do it—"And to him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy—To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever—Amen."

We readily comply with a request, to give publicity in the Christian Advocate to the following interesting letter.

A Letter from the First Presbyterian Congregation in Goshen to Mrs. Esther Fisk, Widow of the late lamented Ezra Fisk, D. D.

Goshen, Dec. 9, 1833.

Mrs. Esther Fisk,
Madam,

On hearing of the lamented death of your husband, their late respected pastor, the congregation

over which he presided in this place, held a meeting, at which we were appointed a committee to express to you their sympathy and condolence, in the severe loss you have sustained, and the heavy affliction you have been called on to bear.

We are directed by the congregation to ask your permission, to have the remains of their late friend brought to this place for interment; supposing that no spot could be so appropriate as that where so many of his years were passed in the able and faithful discharge of the functions of his high calling. Sure are we, that in no other place can the last offices of friendship be more feelingly performed; and no where could his remains be more piously guarded.

We are also charged by the congregation, to invite you to reside with them, as their guest, during the winter; that they may be enabled to administer to your comfort and happiness, under the severe bereavement which, in the dispensation of Providence, you have so recently sustained.

This letter will be handed to you by Messrs. Wilson and Harris, appointed by the congregation to visit you on this melancholy occasion, to superintend the removal of the remains, should their request be complied with; and to wait on you to this place.

With our best wishes for your happiness, and our kindest sympathies in your distress, we are, madam, very respectfully, yours,

SAML. J. WILKIN,
WM. HORTON.

The strokes of death seem to be falling in rapid succession on the ministers of the Presbyterian church—on men of promise and of eminence—and of every age; as if to impress us with the truth, that at any period of our ministe-