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SERMON  
ON THE DEATH OF THE  
HON. WILLIAM PATERSON, Esq. L.L.D.

ONE OF THE  
*ASSOCIATE JUSTICES*  
OF THE  
SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES,

WHO DIED ON THE NINTH OF SEPTEMBER, EIGHTEEN  
HUNDRED AND SIX, IN THE SIXTY-FIRST  
YEAR OF HIS AGE :

PREACHED IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, IN NEW-  
BRUNSWICK, (NEW-JERSEY) ON THE TWENTY  
FIRST DAY OF SEPTEMBER.

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BY THE REVEREND JOSEPH CLARK, A. M.  
MINISTER OF SAID CHURCH.

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“ Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright :  
“ For the end of that man is peace.” — Ps. xxxvii. 37.

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NEW BRUNSWICK :  
PRINTED BY A. BLAUVELT.

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1806.

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RESOLVED, That the thanks of this Board be presented to the Rev. Mr. Clark, for his well adapted discourse, preached on the death of the Honourable Judge Paterson—and that he be requested to furnish a copy thereof for publication.

Extract from the minutes of the Trustees of the Presbyterian Church, in New-Brunswick, Sept. 22, 1806.

JOHN NEILSON, *Clerk.*

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SERMON.

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2. SAMUEL, III. 38.

*“And the king said unto his servants, Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?”*

THE loss of men, truly great, has ever been considered, in all countries, a public calamity. When such men fall, a country is called to mourn!

An occasion of this kind drew from the pious king David the words before us.

Abner, the son of Ner, had been commander in chief of the armies of Saul; a man of an enlarged mind, possessing, in a high degree, the talents of a great military commander; strongly attached to the interests of his country, and faithful to his sovereign.

Saul was now dead; his son, a weak prince, early discovered that he possessed not talents equal to the task of governing;

the affairs of the house of Saul were tottering, and the hearts of the men of Israel were drawing towards David.

In this state of things Abner became fully sensible that, to continue any longer the struggle in favour of Saul's house, was vain: ---that the good of the country required, that the whole tribes should be united under David, whom he perceived the Lord had chosen to be king over his people Israel. A personal affront from Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, determined him to hasten an event which he saw to be of so much importance to the peace and welfare of his country. He accordingly repaired to king David, communicated to him his views, and pledged himself to do all in his power to bring about a union of the tribes, and to establish the kingdom in David's hands. The interview resulted in a manner most agreeable to his benevolent views. He took his leave of the king, and was just set out to execute with patriotick ardor, the generous enterprise in which he was engaged, when Joab, the chief captain in the armies of David, returned from pursuing an hostile troop.

Joab was informed of the interview; --- was told that Abner had been entertained

by the king in the most friendly manner, and was gone away in peace. Burning with jealousy in the view of such a rival, and stung with rage on account of the death of his brother Asahel, who had fallen in battle by the hands of Abner, Joab immediately dispatched messengers, and brought back Abner to the city, where, in the most base and treacherous manner, he thrust him through with the sword that he died!

The whole of this base and inhuman business had been transacted without the king's knowledge. But when it came to the ears of David, he was affected with the deepest grief. He put on the garments of mourning, and commanded all his servants and all the people to mourn for Abner. As a mourner he followed the bier; and at the grave he wept and lamented over him, as did all the people. "And the king said unto his servants, Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?"

From the language here used it is manifest that, the king considered the fall of Abner as a loss to the nation; and that, on this account, as well as from the respect he had for the character of the deceased, he wept and lamented over him.

The words before us are not chosen on this occasion, with any view to a comparison of the character of our deceased friend, with his alluded to in the text; but as a declaration of the high importance truly great men are to their country; and the great loss their country sustains, when such men are removed.

Treating the subject in this view, I shall consider,

- I. What constitutes the truly great man.
- II. The high importance of such men to their country.

I. I shall consider what constitutes the *truly great man*.

Certain it is that, neither wealth, nor rank, nor titles, nor splendid equipage, can confer true greatness. Nor can he ever merit the noble distinction who, through the lust of a boundless ambition, disturbs the peace of the world; deluges countries in blood; robs weaker nations of their independence, and renders them tributary to an insatiable avarice. Well were it for the world, could the memory of such greatness for ever rot! and its footsteps be never more found amongst the dwellings of men!

The truly great are indeed rare characters in every country; which makes *their deaths* the more a cause of lamentation! To be *truly great*, men must possess great natural talents, talents that are solid, and suited to advance the best interests of mankind;-----a strong comprehensive understanding----a sound judgment---a firmness of purpose---a mind, elevated by noble dignified views---a prudence in conduct; or a natural facility in accommodating to the occasion, and improving times and circumstances to the best purposes; and a majesty mingled with mildness, that both inspires veneration and creates esteem.

These natural talents must also be improved by literature and science.

On this foundation, laid by nature and improved by science, must be erected the moral and Christian virtues, to direct and adorn the whole-----a profound veneration of the majesty of heaven and earth!----a reverence for his authority, institutions and laws----a deep respect for the august tribunal of heaven, where all characters and every deed done in the body shall be finally tried----a rejoicing in the divine government; a dependence on the divine aid; a sincere regard to the divine glory in every

undertaking, and an integrity and uprightness of soul that detests deception and fraud in all their forms, and aims always to preserve a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man !

Sentiments like these give a noble elevation of soul ; and, in persons of distinguished stations, afford a sufficient security that, *no trusts* will be betrayed ; *no private rights* sported with ; no publick interests treacherously sacrificed ; no encroachments made on the rights of conscience ; nor any contempt or disregard manifested to the sacred laws of religion. While men of the greatest natural talents, if destitute of the principles of religion, are but so much the more calculated to be publick scourges ; and are the more likely to live, either the contempt, or the dread of mankind !

The truly great man lives, not for himself alone ; his enlarged mind embraces the general interests of his country, and of mankind. It is his glory to be extensively useful. “ The liberal soul deviseth liberal things.” Raised above sordid selfishness, every useful, every great and benevolent object meets his warmest patronage, and his liberal aid.

Is he entrusted with the management of publick affairs; no base regard to popularity, to his own personal aggrandizement, or to serve the interest of a party, will ever make him swerve from the paths of rectitude. *A love of right*; a greatness of mind that *dares to do what is right*, will ever lead him to pursue what he deems the correct line of his duty, unswayed by the frowns or the flatteries of any. As the servant of God; the friend of man; the lover of truth, righteousness and peace, he employs his talents, exerts his skill, and uses all his influence to promote those things that have the honour of God, and the good of mankind as their great object. *Such is the truly great man*

I am II. to consider, The high importance of such men to their country.

And, indeed, such is their importance that, no country can be great and happy where such men are wanting.

The respectability----the security----the prosperity----the internal peace----and the the moral and religious order of a nation must depend, under God, on the aid and influence of such men.

There are concerns to be managed, and

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interests to be promoted in every country, to which the weak, the ignorant, and the little minded are totally unequal.

Who shall devise the plans; adapt the means; call forth the energies of the nation, and employ them all successfully for the national honour, its security and defence? Who shall discern and open all its true sources of improvement and wealth, and give a spring to the spirit of enterprize? ---Can minds of inferior mould reach to undertakings like these? No! *These* are the work of *superior minds!* And to every country *these* are all undertakings too important to be overlooked, or neglected; wherever they are neglected, or injudiciously managed, the character of a country is degraded and sinks!

In short, the respectability and prosperity of every country are in exact proportion to the weight of talents and character called forth to direct and manage its publick concerns.

Where, but to the great, the wise and the good, can a country with safety and with certainty look for wise and wholesome laws, adapted to its exigencies, and calculated to promote its best interests? On whom, but on such, can a country rely to

preserve pure and unsullied the fountains of justice? To whom but to such, can it ever look for a wise and vigorous administration of its government and laws? And such only are truly qualified to guard the majesty of religion, and preserve the respect due to its sacred institutions.

Let these seats of high responsibility be degraded by weak and insufficient men; let these fountains of power and influence be corrupted by unprincipled, time-serving, and self-seeking men; let magistrates, strangers to the influence of religion themselves, cease to be a "Terror to evil doers, and a praise to them that do well," and who can calculate the mischiefs that, in such a state of things, must inevitably flow in upon, and overwhelm society! "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when the wicked bear rule, the people mourn."

Vice, in such a case, will want its vigorous check; virtue, its proper support; society will gradually sink into a sickly, disordered state; and the base and the profligate will become more and more emboldened and hardened in their iniquities: for it is a truth equally confirmed by experience and the word of God that, "The wicked

walk on every side when the vilest men are exalted.”

But it is not in publick stations only ; but in the private walks of life, that truly great men are of so much importance. Skilled above others in the knowledge of men and things, they know better how to reach and move the secret springs that govern human minds ; to control the passions of the turbulent ; to inspire the love of order ; to give a proper tone to the publick sentiment and the publick manners, and unite the common mass in views and habits, essential to their comfort and their peace.

Prompted by their virtue, and love to the best interests of mankind, they seize the occasions of doing good to all as they have opportunity. They exert their influence in frowning upon vice ; encouraging virtue and religion ; in ameliorating and improving the state of society ; establishing or cherishing useful institutions ; aiding the industrious poor ; encouraging genius ; rewarding merit ; providing for the instruction of the ignorant, and the relief of the distressed.

In short, as fathers of the publick family, all the weight of their counsel, their example, their influence, and their benevo-

lent exertions are employed to advance the best interests of their fellow men.

Such is their importance that, should a country be once left destitute of their weight and influence, it would soon become the contempt and scorn of neighbouring nations; and exhibit within itself, a scene of the most pitiable disorder and wretchedness!

And if they are of that importance to a country, which has been now stated, then surely their country have just cause to mourn when any such are called off by death!

My brethren and fellow citizens, we are now called, in the providence of God, to mourn an event of this nature.

*The Honourable WILLIAM PATERSON is no more!* On the ninth instant, and in the sixty-first year of his age, he reached the period of his valuable life, and breathed his last!

Scarcely could death have removed from our country, a citizen of whom it may be more fitly said, "A prince and a great man is fallen in our American Israel."

His life, spent and closed as it has been, has afforded demonstrable proof that, he was truly a great man.

I feel that I hold not a pencil capable to do full justice to his character. But, called to this service, I shall attempt such delineation as my own knowledge and the information I possess may enable me to give.

He was descended from reputable parents, and possessed from nature a strong comprehensive understanding; a clear distinguishing judgment; an elevated imagination, and the powers of a commanding eloquence: and, though amiably modest, he had a native dignity and independence of mind. From his earliest years he was indefatigable in his application to literary pursuits. While a student at Nassau Hall, the honours of which he received as one of its distinguished sons, he was esteemed a youth of more than ordinary talents, and of singular application. At the close of his collegiate course, he entered on the study of the law, under that celebrated law character, the Hon. Richard Stockton, Esq. Mr. Stockton testified a very high esteem of his pupil, and the greatest respect for his talents; and used often confidently to predict that, "Young Mr. Paterson would soon be at the head of his profession." This prediction was indisputably verified; for, notwithstanding the overbearing influ-

ence which, at that time, was used against all rising young men at the bar (not in a certain connection) he very early rose to that eminence that, he was considered the brightest ornament of the profession the bar of New-Jersey could boast. Rising in fame as a lawyer, and revered for his talents and integrity as a man; he was too distinguished to be long unnoticed by his country.

America was, at that time, deeply involved in her revolutionary struggle with Great Britain. She needed the counsels and the aid of her best citizens. Having declared herself free and independent, the several states were necessarily called upon to form their constitutions, or plans of civil government.

A convention, for this purpose, was called by the state of New-Jersey, to which Mr. Paterson was elected, and of which he was a distinguished member, and its secretary. Although, at the time, and ever after, he disliked many of the principles and features of the instrument then formed and adopted, and gave his decided vote against it.

From that time till his death, he was almost constantly employed in important public services. He received an appointment

as commander of a regiment of foot; was elected a member of the legislative council, and appointed attorney general of the state.

In that critical period of our country's affairs, when a general convention of the states was called, to prepare a constitution and form of government for the United States, Mr. Paterson was elected a member of that august body. Here he shone conspicuous, as the real patriot and statesman; and afterwards, for four years, he served as a member of the senate of the United States.

On the death of that truly eminent man, Governor Livingston, Mr. Paterson was unanimously elected to be his successor, as Governor of this state, and received, on that occasion, the most respectful and affectionate addresses from all classes of his fellow citizens. This high office he held, with honour to himself and his country, till he was appointed one of the Associate Justices in the Supreme Court of the United States. In this honourable station he continued, the boast and the glory of his country, till death, at once, put a period to his labours and his life! The elevations of office he never courted; nay, he

modestly declined the acceptance of stations more distinguished than those he held. Strongly was he urged by the immortal Washington, that discerning judge of real merit, to accept the high office of Secretary of State; but, without hesitation, he declined the honour, preferring the more retired duties of judicial office to all the pomp and eclat of the department of state.

Motives of delicacy led him, at another period, to decline the offer made him to fill the office of Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. On all occasions he appeared to be governed by the wish, rather to do honour to office by an able and faithful discharge of its duties, than to receive honour from it. From his prevailing desire to be extensively useful, it seemed to be his great maxim, *To lose no time.*

Amidst all his other labours, and the fatigues of office, he undertook, at the request of the legislature, to revise, digest, and make supplements to the code of laws of this state; and which, though considerably altered from the original spirit and form in which it came from his hands, still bears his name. For this work he received, through the legislature, the publick thanks of the state. .C

He was the distinguished friend and patron of literature ; took a lively interest in promoting literary institutions, and every species of valuable improvement in our country. For several years, he was an active and highly useful member of the Board of Trustees of the College of New-Jersey.

When the plan was adopted, by the General Assembly of our church, for promoting evangelical missions to the rising settlements on our extensive frontiers, and to other destitute parts, he entered with zeal into the views of the Assembly, and was ever ready to contribute, in the most generous manner, to that important work.

Indeed, it is not too much to say that, his pen, his purse, his counsels, and his influence were employed in every way, in which he saw it probable that he might benefit the interests of society.

It was his lot to live in times that tried men's souls ; but he *never wavered*.

In all the fluctuations and heats of party; he was temperate, but *stood firm*. He had a soul above the low arts of popular intrigue ; and he cordially abhorred every thing like *cunning* and *duplicity* ! True honour appeared to mark the whole course of his life, and the love of his country to be his ruling passion.

On the subject of religion he read and studied much. Few men, not of the clerical profession, appeared better to understand the doctrines both of natural and revealed religion. For the sacred scriptures he had the highest reverence, and was thoroughly satisfied with the evidences of their being of divine inspiration. He was a constant and serious attendant on the publick worship of God, and manifested much concern for the reputation and support of the gospel ministry. Certain doubts, respecting himself deterred him from making, in the usual way, a publick profession of religion, and joining in the communion of the church; a circumstance he greatly regretted in his last moments: nor could he leave the world in peace, till he solicited the privilege and, on his dying bed, united with some pious friends in receiving the holy communion. And, in giving his dying advice to his son, he urged this duty on him in the most impressive and affectionate manner.

I need not remind you, my hearers, of his virtues as the neighbour, the citizen, and the friend. You knew him well; and the grief you manifest for his loss is the best evidence, how affectionately you remember his virtuous example---his distin

guished prudence--his love of justice---his fidelity in friendship---his readiness to oblige---his kindness to the poor---his generous hospitality, and the dignity of his deportment, tempered with all the mildness of the amiable citizen, the agreeable, the interesting, and ever instructive companion.

Passing all further notice of the virtues that adorned his private life, let me lead you to the last scene, and shew you this great man, *truly great* in death.

For more than a year he had been gradually sinking under the weight of complicated disease, which he sustained with truly Christian fortitude and resignation. Seeing his end fast approaching, he sent for a particular and intimate friend, from whom I have been favoured with the account of this last interesting interview.\* When his friend arrived he found him in the full exercise of his reason, entirely tranquil; but evidently near his death.

With the utmost composure he observed to his friend, "I have now done with the world, having disposed of all my affairs in it--I have no longer a wish

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\* Mr. Paterson died at Albany, at the house of his son-in-law, the Hon. Stephen Van Ransalaer, where he arrived, a few weeks before his death, on his way to try the effect of the waters of Balls-Town.

to live, nor a wish to die ; desiring only that my Heavenly Father may do with me as seems good in his sight. For some years past, my mind has been more than ordinarily imprest with the subject of religion. Often was I almost persuaded to make a publick profession of it, and join in the communion of the church. I regret that I did not do this : but” added he “ my whole trust is in the atonement and merits of the Lord Jesus. Here rest all my hopes of eternal life. I know in whom I have believed, and I feel firmly persuaded that he will not disappoint my hope.”

Thus did this truly great man resign his departing spirit into the hands of his Saviour and his God, in the full belief of the Christian religion, and died without a struggle and without a groan !

Such was his end. We presume not to say, he was perfect. He knew, he felt the reverse. Perfection belongs not to man in this life. He doubtless, with others, had his imperfections, and often erred ; but whatever his imperfections were, a life so far blameless and so highly useful to men, has the fairest claims on our Christian charity.

My country, it is thy glory to have en-

joyed the labours of such men; nor is thy virtue so low as not to lament when such men fall!

The real patriot hears the sad tidings with grief, and lets fall the tear of sorrow and respect. The bench of justice weeps that he, who so ably and so faithfully aided to preserve her dignity and her lustre untarnished, is now no more!

Learning, religion, and publick virtue weep, that so distinguished a friend, so bright an ornament is gone!

His connections, his friends, his family mourn his loss; but O! consoling thought: to them his life has bequeathed respect; to them his death administers instruction, consolation and peace!

This church mourns the zealous friend, that so actively aided to rear these walls, to maintain God's worship here, and that has so often united with us in the solemnities of these sacred courts. No more shall we see him taking his seat with us, in this earthly sanctuary. But Heaven forbids us to repine: he has gone to worship in the courts above!

*Ye real patriots of '76; ye tried friends of virtue and your country, how are your ranks fast thinning away! How are your numbers, one by one, melting down.---He*

that stood by you; that went with you that jointly lent his best efforts to promote our country's prosperity and glory, has now finished his course!---Let not the patriotic flame be extinguished in your bosoms. Be it your chief concern, like him, to pursue, undeviating, the paths of rectitude, and be faithful to the death.

Citizens of New Brunswick, while you remember, *emulate* his virtues. Let not publick spirit wither; let it appear that we have profited by his great example.

Ye youths, the rising hope of your country, what a model has his life afforded for your imitation! Like him, *live to be useful*. And cherish, while you live, that virtue and piety, essential to a character truly great; and that can alone prepare you for a peaceful and a happy death. Ye that have hitherto thought too lightly of religion, let a death so instructive teach you its infinite importance! Ah, let me lead you to the death-bed of our much honoured friend! Let the dying Paterson speak! Methinks I hear him address you! "Friends, companions, acquaintances of my former days, let not a vain world deceive you. That religion, to which Heaven hath set its seal, claims your first, your most serious attention. Death will soon place you, like me, on the verge

of eternity! Soon, from the borders of the grave, must you take your retrospect of life! Preparation for this momentous period admits no trifling nor delay. Let a dying friend conjure you to fly, without delay, to the sanctuary of the Redeemer's grace---to make the religion of Jesus the great business of life! Possessing this religion, you have an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast. You will descend, undismayed into the valley of the shadow of death; and, when every earthly joy is parting forever from you, you will enjoy a heavenly peace, of which not death itself can rob you."

Believers in Jesus, another noble testimony is given to the truth and eternal importance of that religion you profess. The peace, the serenity of soul, and the last words of our departed friend, like a voice from Heaven, bids you "Not to be ashamed of the gospel of Christ;" but, "To hold fast the profession of your faith, without wavering, unto the end."

Let scoffing infidels boast no more the long ranks of sceptick philosophers that mock at the Christian's hope.---In *this hope*, with a soul tranquil as the summer's setting sun, and beaming with heavenly joy, the wise, the learned, the truly great Pater-son breathed his last!

With such a death in view, who would not join in the wish, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" *Amen.*

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