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**S E R M O N,**

**OCCASIONED BY THE DEATH**

**OF THE**

**REV. JAMES SPROAT, D. D.**

**DELIVERED Nov. 17th, 1793.**

A

S E R M O N,

OCCASIONED BY THE DEATH

O F T H E

REV. JAMES SPROAT, D. D.

Late the Senior Pastor of the Second Presbyterian  
Congregation in the City of Philadelphia :

WHO DIED OCTOBER 18, 1793.

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BY ASHBEL GREEN, D. D.

Remaining Pastor of said Congregation.

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1794

## A D V E R T I S E M E N T:

**T**HE Author of the following Discourse thinks that it may not be improper to inform the Reader, that, in consideration of the mournful Circumstances, in which a great Number of his Hearers were placed, by the late awful Calamity, he designedly presented a wider and more general View of his Subject, than would have been given, if a single Death had, alone, been in Contemplation.

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S E R M O N, &c.

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PSALM CXVI, 15.

*Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.*

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*My brethren,*

**D**EATH has been, for a considerable time, the subject of many of our thoughts and much of our conversation. Those who had been accustomed to forget it, have lately been compelled to reflect upon it. Those who had often and seriously considered its approach and its consequences, have seen it come near them, or spread desolation and distress around them, in a form more affecting than they ever expected to behold. They have seen persons of every age and every character, becoming, in multitudes, the undistinguished victims of the king of terrors. His strokes in this congregation—to speak more particularly of ourselves—have been very fore and numerous. Some of the most active, the most pious, and the most useful of our members, have been brought to the dust. And—alas! that it must be added—the shepherd has been smitten with the flock. Our spiritual father, friend, and guide, is among the fallen. He is gone for ever from our af-

assemblies ; he is gone from instructing, warning, and  
 intreating ; from mingling his prayers and his praises  
 with our's ; from interceding in private with his God ;  
 from counselling and comforting the afflicted ; from  
 directing the enquiring ; from sympathizing with the  
 distressed—He is gone—I stand here, spared by the in-  
 dulgence of heaven, to preach on the occasion of his  
 death :—To preach, at the same time, a funeral dis-  
 course over a considerable part of our common charge.  
 People and pastor, we are mourners together. The  
 world cannot, and it ought not to comfort us. But,  
 thanks be to God, we are not left comfortless, if we  
 will seek relief from the source to which he has direct-  
 ed us. In his holy word we find numerous passages,  
 dictated by the Spirit of infallible truth, that offer us a  
 divine support. Among others, the words of our text  
 may be considered, by those who have lost pious rela-  
 tives and friends, as replete with strong consolation.  
 On this account they have been chosen as the subject of  
 the present address—“ Precious in the sight of the  
 Lord is the death of his saints.”—A circumstance in  
 this passage which deserves your particular attention,  
 because it marks the genuine import of the whole, is,  
 that the people of God are said, emphatically, to be  
 “ *HIS saints.*” It is true, indeed, that “ the earth is  
 the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.” He saith, “ Be-  
 hold all souls are mine.” Yet there is a *peculiar sense*  
 in which the saints, and they only, are his people. It is  
 that sense in which possession is put for approbation, af-  
 fection, and delight. Thus it is said—“ Who is this  
 that engaged his heart to approach unto me, saith the  
 Lord. And ye shall be my people, and I will be your  
 God.” In numerous instances, and in various re-  
 spects, is this appropriating language applied by the  
 Deity, to those who truly love and fear him, in the sa-  
 cred writings. According to these, they are his in the  
 everlasting purposes of his love ; they are his by the Re-  
 deemer's plenary purchase ; they are his by the effica-  
 cious influences of his grace, subduing them to himself  
 and uniting them to the Saviour ; and they are his by

their own voluntary choice and solemn covenant engagements. It is in consequence of this relation between the Father of mercies and his chosen people, that he orders all things for their good. "All things are your's : Whether Paul or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are your's ; and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." From this catalogue of benefits the Psalmist, in the text, fixes his attention, solely, on the article *death*. He seems to have done this, because death is an event more interesting and important than any other. If this, therefore, in all its circumstances and effects, be so wisely and kindly ordered by the Deity, in behalf of his people as to become a precious benefit, little doubt or anxiety should remain in regard to any thing beside. This, accordingly, is most clearly affirmed, in the passage before us. The inspired writer declares, that in the sight of God the *death* of his saints is *precious*. As if he had said—"It is a concern of very high importance in his esteem : He, as it were, sets a price upon it : It is a consideration which is very dear to him : It is a matter in regard to which he can never be careless or indifferent. His *sight*—his peculiar attention—is so fixed upon it, that it cannot happen without his order ; and it interests him so tenderly, that he directs every thing connected with it, or resulting from it, in the kindest and wisest manner."

To expand, a little more fully, the general truth which has now been explained, I will endeavour to show that the death of his saints is precious in the sight of the Lord,

I. In respect to its time.

II. In regard to its circumstances : And

III. With reference to its effects or consequences.

In entering on the discussion here proposed, it may be proper to remark, that it is obviously of such a na-

ture, as to need and to admit of but little argument. The truths to which your attention is invited, while they are highly important, are, also, extremely plain. They are so clearly implied in the doctrine of a divine providence, and so abundantly taught in the word of inspiration, as to leave little room, in the minds of those who believe in this doctrine and allow the authority of this word, either for doubt or controversy. In speaking to such a subject, propriety requires that I should rather endeavour to furnish matter for serious and profitable meditation, than consume your time in unnecessary reasoning or superfluous illustration. Such inquiries, indeed, as may be supposed to arise in a believing and reflecting mind, it may be proper to answer, and the sentiments which shall be suggested, I shall endeavour to support by the evidence of scripture. But more than this the subject before us does not demand, and the feelings which occupy our minds render unseasonable.

WE are then, agreeably to the arrangement already stated, to consider,

I. THAT the death of the saints is precious in the sight of the Lord, in respect to its time.

THE providence of the Almighty extends to all the works of his hands. Even a sparrow falleth not to the ground without our heavenly Father. Whether men, therefore, be the friends or the foes of God, their life, while it continues, is upheld by him, and their death, when it happens, takes place by his direction or permission. But here is the important difference in their lot. The time of death is assigned to the sinner in the displeasure of him who is the sovereign disposer of it: To the saint it is assigned in tender mercy and loving kindness. In regard to this interesting concern, therefore, their situation and prospects are the opposites of each other. They are the situation and prospects of an enemy and of a friend, when the same party is to

dispose of both. The great Arbiter of life and death, often, no doubt, forbears with his enemies, that they may become his friends. While their enmity, however, remains, they can have no evidence of this, and if it continue beyond the period of his sufferance, they certainly fall beneath his wrath. But those who are actually his friends, have the present and comfortable assurance, that he watches over them with a special and paternal care. The divine glory in this, as in all other respects, is coincident with their own supreme desire and highest advantage. Their life, therefore, will be preserved as long as they themselves, if they were fully enlightened, would ever wish for its continuance, and their death will be ordered at the most seasonable time that can possibly be devised. Infinite wisdom, <sup>ru-</sup>led with infinite goodness, is engaged to choose them *the best period* for their departure from the world.

WHILE God has work for his servants to perform, he will effectually protect them against all the assaults of death, however formidable they may appear, or however closely they may press. The methods in which preservation is afforded are, indeed, various. If his providence lead his people into the most hazardous and critical situations, and their labours be not accomplished, their destruction shall never be effected. Daniel in the den of lions, and the three children in the fiery furnace, are safe, because God is their keeper, and the service and obedience of Him had brought them thither. Miracles, indeed, we are not now to expect. But preservations little short of miraculous, and wholly unaccountable, have frequently and lately been experienced by those who have been brought, in the pursuit of evident duty, into circumstances which rendered them necessary to safety.\* In some instances, those whom God will spare are carried wide of the danger which threatens to destroy them, by the remarkable interpositions

\* Why drew Marseilles' good bishop purer breath,  
When nature sicken'd, and each gale was death?"

or calls of his providence. Sometimes he blesses in a singular manner, the ordinary use of means for their preservation. When special dispensations are necessary he manifests them; when they are not necessary he will not waste them. Our Almighty Redeemer, on one occasion, miraculously confounds the Jews, and passing through the midst of them goes his way: on another, exercising common prudence, he will not walk in Jewry, because the Jews seek to kill him. At one time, the apostle Paul is released from prison by an earthquake: at another, he is let down by the wall in a basket, and escapes from the city where his life was in jeopardy. At Ephesus, he is prevented by his friends from throwing himself among the incensed populace; but he will not yield to their entreaties when he is bound in the Spirit to go up to Jerusalem. History informs us, that from one place he is sent away by night for safety, that at another, he remains and is stoned to an apparent death, but restored by a miracle. Sometimes, preservation is conferred in a mixed dispensation. Hezekiah's life is assured him, but a fig must be laid on the boil before he recovers. Paul, in the prospect of a dangerous shipwreck, is made certain that not a life among those who sailed with him should be lost, and yet he declares, that if the sailors should depart the company could not be saved. The most absolute determinations of the Deity, we are to remember, do not supersede, but most commonly, include the operation of second causes. We may find it difficult to explain the manner in which these determinations and this operation are, in all cases, connected with each other. But we have no reason to doubt that such a connection exists, and that it exists in a way which renders the purposes of heaven sure in their accomplishment, and the creature free and accountable in his actions. Of both these, therefore, it is proper to speak as unquestionable realities, and to draw from each that instruction and consolation which flows from a firm confidence in its truth. From such a confidence then, it results, that the business of the sincere christian

is to make a careful and diligent use of every proper and lawful mean for the preservation of his life, and doing this, steadfastly to pursue the path of duty, and cheerfully to commit the event to God, who will never fail to preserve him till the fittest and most advantageous period for his dissolution be fully come. It follows, too, that when this period has really arrived, the Father of mercies will determinately take his children to himself, however reluctantly those who remain may yield to the dispensation,—however fondly they may have hoped, or however fervently they may have prayed, that it might be otherwise. All prayer is made, or ought to be made, with this qualification, “not my will, but ~~mine~~ <sup>thine</sup> be done.” In the death of his saints, God frequently teaches this important lesson to their surviving brethren, in the most forcible and effectual manner. He teaches them, that the duty of resignation and submission is more extensive than they had ever before realized it to be, and shows them, perhaps, that they were far less prepared to practice it, than they had been ready to imagine. It behoves us, also, to be mindful, that as the Deity will preserve his friends from the most imminent dangers, and by extraordinary interpositions, while his glory and their own good require it, so, when these ends no longer require it, he will cease to interpose, and permit the impending danger to accomplish their death. We are never to consider it as a mark of the divine displeasure, w<sup>h</sup>en such singular deliverances as we have contemplated are not experienced. They may be withheld from the greatest favourites of heaven, and in the exercise of the richest mercy, when their errand into life has been performed. This is the object which God regards. The same angel, which, by a miracle, delivered Peter from the imprisonment of Herod, could, with equal ease, have delivered John the Baptist. But Peter had yet much service to do for his Lord, and hence he is spared: John had completed his mission, and the executioner is, therefore, permitted to dismiss him to his rest. The God of all wisdom is the judge when the

several purposes for which his children live, are attained, and when it is most proper to remove them to the mansions of eternal bliss. We see that the order of his providence, in this respect, is various. Some he calls away in the morning, some in the meridian, and some in the decline of life.

THE eminently pious are sometimes seen to take their departure from the world at an early age. It would seem that, like the first ripe fruit, they are fit for the granary of heaven before their fellows. Their heavenly Father requires of them but a short contest with the trials and sorrows of the world. In their behalf, he takes a space from the labours of time and adds it to the joys of eternity. Many persons of distinguished religion are also cut off in the midst of their years and their usefulness. Of this, alas! the late calamity has furnished us with numerous and affecting instances. The dispensation, in many respects, may be mysterious, and beyond our capacity to explain. We know, however, that God may "take away the righteous from the evil to come." He may, likewise, intend to teach us, that he needs not the instruments, which we esteem the most suitable, to perform his work. He may do it to instruct us, that we should enter on our fondest endeavours, even for the promotion of his own glory, with entire resignation to his disposal, and the lively recollection, that we may not be permitted to finish our designs. But whatever may be his purpose, in regard to the living, we know, that in all such cases, the dead receive a precious benefit. Their anxieties and exertions on earth, are exchanged for an eternal repose in heaven. Some, again, are gathered to their fathers, like our dear departed pastor, full of years. Having borne the burden and heat of the day, they retire in the evening to their rest and their reward,—rendered more desirable, and more sweet, and more abundant, by the numerous toils they have sustained, and the painful services they have accomplished.

SOME of the saints have, also, been detained in the world beyond the period which they could have desired, and after they have been ready to imagine that their lives could be of no use. In this sentiment they have certainly been erroneous. Their example and their prayers may have been even more useful than the active services of others, or of what they may have esteemed their own better days. To *suffer* the will of God in an exemplary manner, is a duty harder to perform, and frequently not less beneficial, than to *do* it. We are incompetent judges in all respects, in regard to our lot, and it is a comfort to think that the disposal of it is not intrusted to ourselves, but to God. He frequently disappoints his friends, in relation to their death, on the one hand and on the other. When, to human appearance, they are on the borders of the grave, when it seems as if they could not escape it, when they expect to be released, when their minds are in the happiest frame for their dissolution, when they even long to be absent from the body and present with the Lord, they are sometimes remanded, as it were, back to life, and to a new conflict with the world. These very persons, perhaps, are actually called away, when they had little or no expectation that their departure was at hand. By this we are taught to have no will but God's, to leave every event with him, not to reckon with too much certainty on any thing that is future, and to be always ready for our summons to eternity.

IN all the varied dispensations we have received, the Father of mercies, we may be assured, still abides in covenant faithfulness with his people. "For we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

II. LET us now consider, more fully, what has been a little anticipated, that the death of the saints is precious in the sight of the Lord, in regard to its circumstances.

WE have no assurance, my brethren, that the circumstances which attend the death of the pious shall be such as are most desirable to our natural feelings. Many of the primitive christians, as well as their Lord and Master, were called to yield up their lives in ways of the most trying and dismaying kind. "My grace shall be sufficient for thee," is the promise on which the believer is to depend, and the truth of which he will not fail to experience, whatever be the circumstances which accompany his dissolution.

SOME are called out of time into eternity in an easy and gradual manner. Lingered disease, or declining age gently relaxes the thread of life, till at length it separates without any convulsive shock. In other instances, the vital cord is suddenly cut, or violently rent in sunder. Unlooked for accident, or disease speedily mortal, hurries its victim to the tomb. In the departure of some, the pillow of death is smoothed and softened by a thousand alleviations. Every comfort, every attention, soothes the expiring moments of the dying faint. Of kindred and friends, left in health and safety, and placed in circumstances of the most desirable kind, the last farewell is deliberately taken. Others, again, like the venerable minister of Jesus, whose death we now deplore, have an accumulation of trials and sufferings at the very close of life. Conflicting with the billows of distress, which seem to rise higher and fall heavier at every struggle, they are at length overwhelmed, and sink amidst them,—Sink, did I say!—Their divine Master commands a calm by ordering them to his own presence.

IN spiritual as well as temporal respects, there is also, a variety in the circumstances which attend the death of the saints. Some have such clear and animating views of the glorious state on which they are about to enter, that they die in transport. Death is not a dreadful, but the most desirable event that they ever contemplated. Some, though they want these animat-

ing cordials, have still a firm and unshaken confidence in the favour of their God. Some are composed and serene without mental agitation of any kind. Some vibrate between hope and fear. Some, perhaps, are surprized into heaven when they scarcely dared to expect it. And some awake and find themselves there, after a delirium which had benumbed and suspended all the powers of the soul.

Do you ask, if there be such a variety in this most important concern, and especially if such distresses are suffered by the people of God, at the time of their death, how it can be said that the circumstances of it are precious in his sight, and ordered in his mercy. This is the answer—"God seeth not as man seeth." His benevolence is not a weak and changeable pity. Were it so, and did it yield to all the desires and feelings even of his own children, some of them would scarcely enter into rest at all. Like ignorant infants, clinging to a cruel nurse, when they are sent for to a father's house, christians are sometimes seen, in the weakness of their faith, to prefer the sufferings of the world before the joys of an unseen state. Their heavenly Father is obliged, if I may so speak, to force them away,—to force them to be happy. As in this respect we may evidently see the kindness of opposing their desires, so all the distresses which we have been considering, as well as those which they meet with through the whole of life, are frequently the very means which he uses to break their too fond attachments to the things of time. By these dispensations he brings his saints nearer to himself. Driven from the world by the disappointments and dissatisfaction which it produces, they lean more intirely on their God, seek their happiness from him, and desire more earnestly to be with him for ever.

In the various allotments which take place in regard to dying comforts, infinite wisdom may have some purposes to answer which at present we cannot discern. We know, however, that in heaven they all are happy.

and that it is but the difference of a few moments, more or less, that distinguishes any. We also know, that if some have trials which others escape, these trials are opportunities and calls for the exercise of graces which have a speedy reward. We are assured that “these light afflictions which are but for a moment, work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”—Is this an unquestionable truth? Is it a declaration of “the God who cannot lie,” that all the sufferings of his saints shall augment their eternal reward? Here, then, is the full explanation of every difficulty—Moments of pain, compensated by “a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” are a treasure put to the shortest and richest interest. Yes, and could our departed pastor speak to us from the mansions of eternal peace, he would say, “I bless God supremely, for every pain he caused me to endure. His grace sanctified it, and it is now a rich jewel in the eternal crown which he hath placed on my head. I bless him that he called me to so sore a conflict at the close of life, for he gave me the more abundant and divine support. I died. But he made me a dying conqueror, and my songs of triumph will be sweeter to all eternity.”

LET us now take a wider and more distinct survey of the bright prospect to which our attention has just been pointed, by considering,

III. THAT the death of the saints is precious in the sight of the Lord with reference to all its effects or consequences.

To this the inspired penman of the text, had, no doubt, a principal view in the words before us. Precious, indeed, will the God of faithfulness render the fruits of death to all his people. “As it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which he hath prepared for them that love him.” It will take an eternity, my bre-

thren, fully to learn what are the riches of the inheritance of the saints. A part of it, however, is made known in the gospel of Christ. Here it is revealed, that one of the precious consequences of their death, is an immediate cessation of all sorrow. "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away," Oh how happy a transition have the departed spirits of our pious friends experienced, who have gone to heaven during this calamity. Their spirits here were oppressed with grief, and weighed down with sorrow at beholding the scenes of gloomy distress that were passing around them. In the midst of all they fall asleep in the Lord; they awake in his blissful presence; their souls are all serenity, peace, and joy; their grief appears only like a melancholy dream, which serves to heighten the substantial happiness, of which they feel conscious that they are eternally possessed.

To be intirely free from the remainder of sin, is another of the happy consequences of death to the saints. This is, indeed, implied in their being free from sorrow. Never can a real christian cease to mourn till he ceases to offend. The most heart-felt grief that he ever experiences, arises from his offences against that saviour to whom he feels himself so deeply indebted, and from that lamentable imperfection which is mingled with his very best performances. But death is his happy deliverer from this greatest of all enemies and evils. When it destroys the body it destroys all sin and imperfection. The soul rises pure and spotless to the God and the mansions of immaculate holiness. Here it is admitted to the immediate vision of God and of the Lamb. The heaven-entered spirit experiences an access to, and a communion with the Father of spirits, which language cannot describe, or thought conceive.—Think, oh christian! of thy happiest hour. Think of an hour when thy soul has made its nearest and most delightful approaches to thy God, when the light of his counte-

nance was most lifted upon thee, when the veil of sense was most removed, when unbelief was most extinguished, when spiritual things appeared to be the most substantial realities, when God in all his attributes appeared an immensity of inconceivable excellence, when his government and dispensations appeared the wisest and best administration, when his will appeared to be all the choice and desire thou wouldst have, when his glory appeared the best object and most worthy of being supreme, when the plan of redemption in all its parts beamed upon thy mind as a system of divine wisdom, grace, and beauty—ineffable, when thy blessed favour in all his work and character was seen unspeakably amiable and infinitely adorable, when thy heart expanded with glowing love to him and benevolence to men whom he came to save,—when thy soul, in still and sweet and solemn vision of these things, told thee it was “good to be here” and that moments of such enjoyment were not to be exchanged for ages of the highest sensitive pleasure;—this is heaven upon earth. Imagine all these exercises to be purified and sublimed; the capacities of the soul enlarged so as to take in a greater measure of them, and strengthened so as to endure a perpetual continuance of them; and this, it may be, is as just a view of the heaven to come as our minds can take at present. To see God and the Saviour “face to face,” to be “filled with his fulness,” and “bear his likeness,” to go “no more out,” and not to fear any termination of the beatific joys or separation from them, seem to constitute the scripture representation of a glorified state.

As we have every reason to believe that all the powers of the soul will, in a better world, not only be preserved but invigorated, it is pleasing to think how the memory will be employed in the mansions above. It will, no doubt, often carry back the glorified saint through all the past scenes of this militant state. He will review, and surely with wonder, his engagements with the world and the needless and foolish anxieties

which agitated his mind in regard to the things of time. He will review, with pity, his unreasonable fears and groundless apprehensions. He will recollect with astonishment, and, I had almost said, with grief, the prevalence of his unbelief, his want of trust and confidence in God, and the deficiency of his zeal and animation in the service of his Master. He will see that it was all of divine and sovereign grace that he was ever arrested in his career of sin, that his heart was renewed and sanctified, and that he was constantly supported through the whole of the spiritual life. He will see the kind designs of a faithful God in all those providences which, while he was here, appeared hard and dark and inexplicable. He will see that they all were necessary, and that, in very deed, all things have worked together for his good. And while he surveys these things, he will recollect that they are now the things which are past—forever past—but that the sweet fruits of them remain, and shall eternally endure. Such contemplations will animate the glorified spirit to raise high the notes of praise to the fulness of redeeming love, and to the abundance of that unmerited grace, which made so weak and worthless a creature, “a conqueror, and more than a conqueror” of all the powerful and insidious enemies that were leagued against him.

“THEY that have turned many to righteousness shall shine as the stars forever and ever.” The creation of God appears to be a system of subordination. There are different orders of angels, and there will be different orders of saints. But this, where the will of the Creator is the spring and fountain of happiness, will give delight to all and not diminish it in any. Those who have laboured, and loved, and suffered much in the cause of God will be greatly distinguished. They will appear as stars of the first magnitude in the heaven of unfading glory. Among these our departed friend, it is reasonable to conclude, will possess a conspicuous place. For more than fifty years he had been a laborious and faithful servant of Jesus Christ; and those

who knew him best, will be the readiest to testify the piety and purity of his life, and the conscientious discharge of his ministerial duties. Time will not permit me to give so full

## A SKETCH OF THE LIFE AND CHARACTER OF DR. SPROAT

as my inclination would lead me to attempt. You knew him well; and as the principal things which will be mentioned fell under your observation as well as mine, you will be witnesses that what I speak is the unexaggerated truth.

AT the college of Yale, in the state of Connecticut, he early received a liberal education. While he was pursuing his academical studies, he met with that change in his temper and views, which determined him to devote his life to the ministry of the gospel, and which, we doubt not, has prepared him for the exercises and enjoyments of the heavenly state. The instrument of this work lies there before you sleeping in the dust.\* Or, to speak more properly, is now rejoicing, with him whom we lament, in the kingdom of glory. His own relation to me, of the circumstance here alluded to, was nearly thus. "Mr. Gilbert Tennent, the founder of our church, in his memorable tour through the eastern states, preached, among other places, at the college, where I then was—a careless unthinking youth. I had never seen or known of him before. But the power of God seemed to go with him wherever he went, and the first sermon that I heard him deliver made impressions on my soul that have never been effaced." It is pleasing to remark and remember such a circumstance as this:—To observe how one faithful minister of the gospel is made instrumental in raising up another, and of providing himself with an immediate and pious successor, in a place far distant from the scene of his stated ministrations. As this event also happened a considerable space before the congrega-

\* Mr. Tennent is interred in the broad aisle of the church.

tion of which they both had the charge, and which was so dear to both, was organized or collected, we are led to observe how the great head of the church takes care for its supply and edification beyond the utmost reach of human views; and that a laborious servant of Jesus Christ may perform some of his most essential services at a time and in a manner wholly unknown to himself.

DR. SPROAT was first ordained a minister of the gospel at Guilford in Connecticut. During the revival of religion in this country, between forty and fifty years ago, he was abundant in labours, distinguished in his zeal, highly popular, and greatly blessed. From Guilford, the call of this church brought him to this city, and gave us the advantages of his piety and fidelity in his Master's cause. Between his first congregation and his second, his life, as a minister, was almost equally divided. Nearly the exact space of twenty-five years was spent in each.

In his natural temper he used often to tell me he was easily susceptible of passion. If it was so, it is certain that, like the sage of antiquity,\* *he was remarkable for his victory over it*, and for those virtues which are its opposites. Patience, moderation, indulgence, and forbearance were leading features in his general character. Meekness and affection distinguished him highly. Not only in the near relations of husband, father and master, did they render him most dear and exemplary; but in all his intercourse with the world they shone out in the mildest and most amiable light. His candour, charity and tenderness, appeared on all occasions, and gained him in a peculiar degree, the respect and affection of almost all descriptions of persons. He was free from all disguise. He was "an Israelite indeed in whom there was no guile." You saw, at once, the man you would always see. Such a man was peculiarly formed for lasting friendship and unreserved con-

\* Socrates.

sidence. They could scarcely be avoided by one who was often with him. Between him and myself, therefore, they subsisted in a manner which fills me with a mournful pleasure to recollect, and the loss of which I most sensibly realize and deplore. In a collegiate charge of nearly seven years not one cold, or distant, or formal word, every passed between us; not the slightest alienation interrupted our harmony. On all occasions he treated me like a father, and like a father I can truly say, I loved and honored him. His usual appellation, in addressing me was, *my son*:—And had I been his son by the ties of nature, as well as in the bonds of the gospel, he could scarcely have treated me with more affection, or more sincerely regarded my interest as his own. These declarations are the tribute of justice, of duty, and of gratitude, which I owe to his memory. I owe it indeed, a thousand times more than this—a thousand recollections of kindness fill my mind and affect my heart while I am speaking of him. I can never forget them;—but I must now forbear to speak farther of them.——

In scholastic attainments he was a good proficient. Of those which are denominated the learned languages he was a considerable master. He loved all the pursuits and interests of science; and I have heard him lament, that his urgent calls to active service in early life left him so little time to become accurate in some of the departments of literature.

In the study of divinity he had made a progress which was truly great and enviable. It was his delight and he pursued it incessantly. A man has seldom been seen who had a more complete knowledge or a more familiar acquaintance with the holy scriptures. His great readiness in quoting and applying them in a pertinent manner, in his public addresses, you have all observed, and many of you, I trust, will remember, as the means of your spiritual edification. He had made deep researches into systematic, casuistic, and polemic

divinity. On these subjects he read much in some of the last years of his life. "My own sentiments, (said he) in regard to the essentials of religion, I believe are fixed. But I find much entertainment and, I think, some advantage in reading books of this description."

In his discourses from the pulpit he loved to dwell on the fundamental and peculiar doctrines of the gospel, which he regarded as a system of pure grace and mercy, abasing the sinner to the dust and exalting God in the highest. When the train of his address led him to speak on the experimental part of religion, he was excellent and edifying in a singular degree. "He shunned not to declare the whole counsel of God," intreating, warning, and persuading souls in the most serious, plain, affectionate, and pressing manner to "flee from the wrath to come." His public prayers were remarkable for a vein of piety and fervour seldom equalled. He had a certain copiousness of expression, and engagedness of manner in this divine service which could arise from no other source than the familiar intercourse of his own soul with heaven.

In his personal religion he was truly eminent. His life and example exhibited a most amiable view of the influence and efficacy of the gospel principles on the human heart and character. Unfeigned humility, that ornament of every other grace, had become a habit of his soul, and appeared in all his deportment. Having studied long and made great proficiency in the school of Christ, he had learned the hard lesson of thinking in a very lowly manner of himself. His charity for others was uncommonly extensive. It led him to hope the best where there was any probability on which hope could be founded. His faith was built on the sure foundations of the gospel, and it supported his soul in the most trying hour. In some of his last moments he said, "All my expectations for eternity rest on the infinite grace of God, abounding through the finished righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ." He was

pattern of patience and resignation. The painful infirmities of age, under which he laboured for a considerable time before his death, he bore with a cheerful fortitude. Since the twenty third day of August last, he had been looking for death, and ripening for it with uncommon speed. On that day he compleated half a century of years in the character of an ordained minister of the gospel; and thence forward, to the time of his death, the larger portion of his waking hours were spent in the immediate acts of devotion, or of devout meditations and aspirations of soul.\* He endured the severe distress which was inflicted on his family without the least repining.† At the funeral of a dear son he might with peculiar propriety use the language, for he eminently possessed the spirit, of Job.‡

His death was easy, and he was rational to the last. A short time before he expired, and after he had lost the power of speech, being asked if he felt the supports of religion, he answered by the signal of lifting up his hand and his eyes to heaven.

THE respect which was shewn to his remains, at a time which precluded it in almost every other instance, was a proof of the high esteem in which he was held.§

\* This is confirmed not only by the observation and testimony of those who were most about him, but by what appears in his own diary. This diary exhibits one of the most instructing views of the exercises and temper of a christian, especially when under affliction, that perhaps, has ever been seen.

† His eldest son with his wife, and his youngest daughter, died within the space of a month. The doctor himself, and Mrs. Sproat, were added to the number in less than a month afterwards.

‡ Enfeebled and trembling with age, the Dr. followed the corpse of his son to the grave, and after it was deposited, leaning on his staff, he pronounced only these words,—“The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.” Amen!

§ During the late distressing scenes which were witnessed in this city, the almost universal mode of conveying a corpse to the grave was in a hearse or a cart; and the attendants consisted only of the

It was a proof also, that there are circumstances in which acknowledged and distinguished piety will secure that which wealth cannot purchase, nor worldly influence command. To the generous Africans who carried him to his grave, I here make a return of public thanks. Thus lived, and thus has died, the late worthy pastor of this church. His life was filled up with piety and fidelity, and the last scene of it was closed with peculiar honour and dignity. Having never fulfilled the profession which he made, or the character which he bore, he retired from the world like a venerable champion of the gospel of Christ. One of his brethren, considerably advanced in life himself, writing to me on the subject of his death, says, "I sincerely mourn with you and the churches the death of your colleague. But he had lived to a good old age.\* He had lived a life of usefulness and reputation, and, what was a rich blessing, he had not out-lived his usefulness. Oh, let us double our diligence and work while our day lasts."

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ALAS! how delusive is human expectation. It was my hope and intention to dedicate this discourse—this testimony of respect for my revered predecessor and friend—to his mourning consort. But, instead of this, I am called to speak of her death on the same occasion with his own. In their lives they were one, and in their

person who drove the carriage, the grave digger, or a negro hired for the purpose, and, in a few instances, two or three mourning friends. But in the case of Dr. Sproat, there was a procession and bearers of the dead;—which, as it was more striking to the beholders, in the circumstances in which it happened, than the most splendid funeral that perhaps, the city ever produced, so it was a much stronger proof of the affection which was felt for the deceased, than the greatest parade, in ordinary times, can possibly be. The pious people who had met at the church for prayer, formed a procession of about fifty persons, and some religious negroes voluntarily offered themselves to carry the bier.

\* Dr. Sproat entered on his 72d year in April, 1793. He was born at Situate, in the state of Massachusetts, April 11th 1722, O. S.

deaths they have scarcely been divided—She has not long been left to mourn. She has gone to rejoice with the partner of all her sorrows and her joys. In every respect she was a help-mate to the man whose life and death we have been contemplating. She had received from nature a temper of mind remarkable, almost beyond example, for composure, calmness, and fortitude; and it had been improved and brightened by distinguished piety, till it presented an example of self-possession and command singular indeed. I have heard the doctor affirm, that, in the conjugal relation for the space of near fifty years, he had never seen her ruffled by passion, or discomposed by accident. Yet she possessed a feeling, tender, and sympathetic mind. In all the duties of a wife, a mother, a friend, and a christian, she was truly eminent. When the information was brought her of her husband's death, she said to her daughter, "Do not grieve. Your father has been wrestling with his God for a long time, and now he has prevailed."—Happy spirits! Ye are again united, never more to part.

SURVIVING relicts of the deceased: There is not a heart but feels most sensibly for your situation. It is indeed mournful. But is it not a sweet alleviation amidst all your grief, that you do not "sorrow as those who have no hope"? Is it not also, comfortable to reflect, that "the covenant keeping God" of your parents lives? He spared them long. He made them bright examples of piety to you. Their instructions are in your remembrance, and their prayers are before the throne of grace. Devote yourselves unreservedly to the service and glory of God. Seek direction from him in all your straits. Go to him in every time of need. Chuse him for your friend and portion. Chuse his son for your saviour. Chuse his spirit for your sanctifier, guide, and comforter. Put your trust and confidence in him, and he will never fail or forsake you. Follow the example of those who have gone before you, and it will not be long before they wel-

come you to those blest abodes from which no accident shall ever be able again to separate you.

PEOPLE of the congregation. Many of you are also mourners. In consideration of this circumstance, I have endeavoured, in the foregoing part of this discourse, to speak in a more general manner, and to hint at a greater variety of cases, than I should otherwise have done. If you have lost pious relatives, you must perceive, that the subject which has been before you, administers strong consolation. What could you desire for your dearest friends more than that infinite wisdom and goodness should be engaged to determine the period of their continuance here, the time and circumstances of their departure, and to confer upon them, at death, the choicest and most durable riches of the heavenly world? This has actually been done for all who have died in the Lord. The circumstances of their death may have been singular or afflictive. But could you have chosen better than God? Would you have it placed under your own direction rather than under his? No. Reason is satisfied, and tells you that the very best wishes you could form for those whom you have loved most tenderly, are actually accomplished. Endeavour then, to bring your hearts to acquiesce in these truths. Look to God to bow them to a sweet submission to his holy will, to sanctify to you the death of your kindred and the death of your pastor, and to make every affliction the means of ripening you the faster for the glories of a better state. Oh, how empty is this present world! How worthless, how transient, how despicable, have all its prospects and its promises appeared, during the late distresses! How wonderful did it seem, that the trifles and toys of time could ever engross our attention, could seduce us to seek happiness in them, could make us forget that dread eternity into which we saw so many of our neighbours and acquaintances plunging, and on the brink of which we seemed to be standing ourselves. Let us endeavour not to forget these views. They may again open upon

us, in a still more dreadful manner, if we now refuse to become familiar with them. Yet we should be apprised, that we are in great danger of losing these just and useful apprehensions. It seems in a serious hour—in many such hours as some of us have lately passed—as if we could never forget these things; could never be so infatuated again as to let the little concerns of this passing world, crowd from our sight that vast eternity, of which we then had such lively perceptions. But alas! this is not the case. Our hearts are deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. The world easily seduces them, easily engages and engrosses our affections, easily blinds us anew and cheats us into our old attachments to itself. Nay, unless, we are kept by the power of divine grace, this will certainly and speedily be the fact. A few fleeting days will carry away all our impressions, and we shall become as stupid and as much deluded as ever. Let us beseech of God, therefore, to fix and preserve them, to keep eternity before us, to enable us to live for it and not for time; that when we are called to make our entrance into it, we may do it without surprise or alarm; may venture our souls, with well founded confidence, into the presence of our Creator, and to the bar of our Judge, relying on the infinite merits of that blessed Saviour with whom they shall have been united by a living faith, and who will never fail “to keep that which is committed to him against that day,” and to own it as his “in the presence of his Father and of the holy angels.”

PROFESSORS of religion. We have all had a most solemn warning to arise and trim our lamps. Let us take the warning, and resolve, henceforth to live only for God. Let us remember the exhortations, the consolations, and the example, of our departed pastor. Let us pray fervently and perseveringly, that all the dealings of divine providence with our guilty city may be sanctified; that the afflictive providence which we have now been considering, may, in a peculiar manner, be

sanctified to this congregation; so that the death, as well as the life of him whom we mourn, may be rendered a precious blessing to the people. “Brethren, pray for us.” Let me entreat you, never to forget, at the throne of mercy, the weak and unworthy instrument who still remains to dispense the word of life among you, and on whom a weightier burden now devolves, than ever yet he has sustained. Pray that he may be strengthened of God, to do something for his glory, something for the good of precious and immortal souls, while he is continued with you. Pray that his labours may be blest. Pray that he may be directed in every ministerial duty, by that blessed Spirit who guides into all truth. Pray, that he may be found faithful—“faithful unto the death, that he may receive a crown of life.”

I CANNOT conclude, long as I have detained you, till I have addressed one word, in particular, to those who have remained unreconciled to Christ under the ministry of the deceased. His labours with you are now finished, but oh! remember that your concern with him is not finished. It is yet to be solemnly settled. You are to meet him again: You are to stand with him before the tribunal of God: There you are to answer for all the faithful warnings which he has repeatedly given you, for all the offers of the gospel which he has so abundantly held forth, and for all the pressing invitations to accept of life and salvation, which he has so tenderly and so frequently urged upon you. If you meet him there without an interest in Jesus Christ, he will be a swift witness against you, that you have “rejected the counsel of God against your own souls.” This is a most awful thought. I tell you of a serious reality. I tell you, that this event will, assuredly take place, unless you embrace the Saviour. Your late pious minister sends you, as it were, this his last warning, through my lips. I entreat you to regard it. I conjure you, by all the worth of your souls, to break off your sin by repentance. I conjure you, by the

hopes of heaven and the fears of hell, that you make no delay in this concern. Delay has ruined, for eternity, the far greater number of those who people the regions of despair. You now have a space, but it may be only a very small space, to prepare for death. God has spared you, while thousands have died. He may have done it because the great Intercessor has said in your behalf, "Let them alone this year also." Try them a little longer. "If they bear fruit, well, if not, after that, thou shalt cut them down." If they will take warning by the most alarming providence that ever their country knew, they shall have the opportunity of doing it. If not, they will then be ripe for destruction. Then every mouth will be stopped. Then it will be evident that though one had gone unto them from the dead they would not have repented. May the spirit of grace fasten these thoughts on your consciences, and make you in haste to "flee to your strong hold" while yet you are "the prisoners of hope." Amen.

F I N I S.