

S E R M O N,

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ON THE DEATH OF

General George Washington.

BY WILLIAM MORISON.

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S E R M O N.

2 SAMUEL, I. 27.

*HOW ARE THE MIGHTY FALLEN, AND THE WEAPONS
OF WAR PERISHED!*

THE affecting vicissitudes of time are so many, and often so great, that to calculate their numbers, or estimate their consequences, is beyond the power of man. Of these, every hour is pregnant, and every moment brings forth, while day and night spread them from East to West, and the revolving seasons, from pole to pole. By the ceaseless progress of time, this world is continually passing; states and kingdoms are dissolved, and the vast arch of all earthly empire finally falls.

Exposed to such fluctuations as these, how vain for *man to trust in man*, or to *make flesh his arm*! How inconsistent to look for durable enjoyments on the tossing wave of time! Coincident with these observations, are the mournful tidings that announce, as with the voice of dreadful thunder, that Washington is no more; a voice that strikes the Continent into
sadness.

sadness how solemn ! into silence how profound ;
and clothes millions in mourning.—

—————“ 'Tis, as the gen'ral pulse
“ Of life stood still, and nature made a pause ;
“ An awful pause ! prophetic of her end.
“ And let her prophecy be soon fulfill'd ;
“ Fate ! drop the curtain ; we can lose no more.”

YOUNG.

From the heavy news of our Hero's death, nothing can so rationally relieve, as a dependence on Him who made us ; and to break our deep silence, no words can better aid our tongues, than, *How is the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished !* The good, the great, the mighty Washington is fallen ! Nor did he fall alone : A political Father in the cabinet ; a Hero in the field of battle ; the Deliverer of his country, and a Friend to man, fell and were entombed in Washington. His name shall be dear to us, and to our children—it shall not, it cannot be forgotten in America. Under deep impressions of the debt of gratitude, we owe the memory of the common Father of our country, we meet together this day to indulge a reasonable grief, and drop a tear for him who is now no more. Contemplating the many blessings we enjoy, by the high instrumentality of his valuable life ; and the unequalled qualifications with which he was endowed for that end, we cannot help joining the Royal Penman of Israel, in repeating, *How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished !* Did David see a greatness in Saul and Jonathan ? A greater than both is here.—Did he lament the loss of an Abner, as a General of high qualities, and a Prince fallen in Israel ? We lament the death of a General of far greater worth. Saul was given to Israel in wrath ; but Washington to America in mercy. Abner was cruel—and in an unjust cause ; but Washington in the cause of virtue, of reason, and of his country, was merciful. Did

David

David indulge a reasonable sympathy with the Thousands of Israel for the loss of their Leaders in arms?—*How are the weapons of war perished!* As if he had said; Who shall give strength to Israel in the day of battle? Who shall wield the weapons of war with such dexterity as Saul and Jonathan? With what superior propriety may we use the emphatical exclamations: How is the sword of America fallen! Where is the man whose presence can enliven and rally her armies of defence like Washington's?—Who with equal influence, can collect the forces of our different states into one?—Who with equal self-possession, magnanimity, and perseverance, could lead an undisciplined peasantry, without arms or ammunition, against veteran troops, in scenes of action, through toils, through dangers, and through streams of blood; to victory, to triumph, to glory, and to peace? Who with superior wisdom, could guide the car of state, when riding high amidst the jarring elements of contending nations, foreign influence, domestic divisions, and insurrections?—When Thousands of well-meaning Americans would have thrown themselves into the bosom of a disorderly, hungry, and insatiable nation, he wisely and faithfully saved us from that destruction. How, O how is the mighty fallen!—Bewail ye soldiers the loss of your General—Bewail ye citizens the loss of your political Father. Ye Fathers and Mothers, ye Sons and Daughters of America, bewail the fall of such an eminent instrument for your defence.

Sunt lacrymæ rerum, et mentem mortalia tangunt. *Virg.*

What mortal tidings pierce our hearts and ears!—

Tidings, extracting floods of public tears.

But let not the tide of our grief swell to an immoderate degree. Though the Hero of America is no more, the God that made him lives as the defence of his people; and gave Washington a good old age,
and

and made him useful to the last day of his life.— For my own part, though I bewail the death of Washington, as the fall of the most honored man on earth; it is a consolation, that he shall never be exposed to the contempt incident to the frailties of helpless old age.

Waving an examination of the characters to which our text refers, and fully convinced the words are highly applicable to our deceased General: I shall consider them as a proper subject, for illustrating, First, The character of a great man: And, Secondly, That great men must fall in death. After which I will conclude with some useful reflections. I am,

First, To illustrate the character of a truly great man.

We would observe, that a great man must be a virtuous man. All the greatness that any of the most enterprising characters ever possessed, without virtue, is tarnished with vice: And vice has a meanness, below which no man can descend. The laurels of wicked men, however flourishing in the field of action, mildew and die, under the blasting influence of vice, whether in public or private life.

What is the greatness of the Alexanders, the Pompeys, the Cæsars, and other celebrated warriors of antiquity? What is the greatness of many modern Heroes? Where is their virtue? By what spirit are they animated? They are mere Catalines, and conspirators, in comparison to truly great men—They have sounding titles of honor—They are profanely stiled invincible—Conquerors of the world—Arbiters of peace and war—Defenders of their country, and the like—But in this, their names are transmitted to posterity under the influence of a false blaze.—Their true characters are disguised—Their secret designs are often base and mean, though covered with all the refinements of intrigue, of art, and of eloquence. Could we examine their conduct, and the motives by which such are, and have been inspired, we should find that unbounded ambition, cruel

cruel domination, insolent pride and insatiable avarice were the incentives of all their enterprises, and the mean and poisonous springs of all their glory. A glory like this would be infamy to Washington.

A truly great man is inspired with infinitely more noble motives : Motives flowing from a sense of moral excellence ; founded on a firm belief of the superintending Providence of God, and the reality of religion, as tending to meliorate the heart, ennoble and dignify human nature ; and attended with an earnest desire to establish peace among mankind, as well as a reigning concern for the public good. At the call of God and his country, the great man buckles on his armor, leaves his delightful retirement, and enters the field of battle. The enemies he opposes are pride, violence, injustice, perfidy and despotic sway. To these he opposes a humble dependence on Divine Providence, in the exercise of benevolence, justice and good government for man. With these, in the use of his weapons of war, he fights against his enemy without revenge, conquers without haughtiness, rejoices in triumph without insolence, and gives God the praise. And while his hands are red with the blood of his enemies, his bowels melt, for the misery of the victims of a just vengeance, and his heart reverences that God who commands in the day of such a sad necessity.

Numberless examples might be produced, from the experience of past ages, to shew, that virtue is necessary to the constitution of a great General. While the Roman Commanders, continued uncorrupted by vice, their empire, according to the significant expression of Daniel's prophecy, remained strong as iron. The purity of their manners was one great cause of the success of their arms ; and the grandeur of their Commonwealth was the reward of their temperance, wisdom, and national justice. But how sadly the scene is changed, when the vices and follies of their conquered nations infected the hearts
of

of their Generals ! Their iron immediately mingled with clay, the foundation of their government was soon overthrown, their courage degenerated into cowardice, and their once renowned legions were put to flight by troops of undisciplined barbarians.

No one will deny that firmness and fortitude are necessary for the formation of a great character. But where shall we find them? The breast of the vicious is too polluted a residence for such noble virtues. "True fortitude is seen in great exploits, which justice warrants, and which wisdom guides ; all else is towering frenzy, and distraction." A vicious Commander may be lavish of the lives of others, and foolishly throw away his own ; but that can never give him any just claim to the appellation in our text. The practice of vice destroys the health of the body, and relaxes the vigor of the mind ; fits the man for mean and mercenary actions, and tends to transform Heroes into effeminate cowards.

A truly great man subdues his own passions ; is adorned with meekness and generous compassion even to his enemies. Slavery is admitted on all sides to break the spirits of men, and equally unfits the human mind for the formation and execution of any great designs. What greater slavery, than to be subject to the licentious desires of a vicious heart ; and to the boisterous commands of unruly passions? Solomon, that great and wise Prince, observed, "He who is slow to anger, is better than the mighty ; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a City." A polite writer observes ; "A coward has fought ; and a coward has conquered ; but a coward never forgave." To the same purpose another observes, to a successful warrior, who had shewn uncommon clemency to the vanquished ; "Before, you had conquered all the world ; but now you have more gloriously subdued yourself."

A really great character engages not in war, from hatred and revenge ; To push a conquest to the gratification

ification of such mean and rancorous passions, is foreign from his mind; and it is a certain indication of the contrary character. Humanity and benevolence are essential ingredients of his heart: And such a General knows how to enlarge his glory, by setting bounds to his victories. Nor is he more ready to encounter a haughty foe in arms, than he is to do him good when by his valor he has subdued him to his mercy.

A clear head and a penetrating understanding, as well as a firm, virtuous, and courageous heart, are necessary to the constitution of a great character. Without these, the most virtuous and firm mind in high offices will be in danger of many errors. Innumerable are those situations, both in the field and cabinet, in which there may be neither precept nor example to direct men's conduct. In such difficulties, if the first men in a nation are destitute of resources in their own minds, they may become an easy prey, with their country, to the devouring sword of an enemy, the intrigues of foreign nations, or the destroying influence of domestic factions, divisions, and "unreasonable discontent." Men without any singular talents may walk secure, in private life, and be useful to their fellowcitizens; and should they be even vicious, the injury may be principally to themselves: But when men without virtue and firmness, without wisdom and sagacity, are raised to command in the field, or to important seats in government; while the influence of their vice slides, with an easy descent, to the moral injury of the community; their errors in public conduct arising from pride and ambition on the one hand, or from ignorance and want of judgment on the other, are productive of incalculable calamities to their country. To this truth many examples in history, both sacred and profane, attest. And to the confirmation of this truth; what a striking contrast there is, between our great and beloved Washington, and the mighty plunderers and tyrants

tyrants of Europe ! If the latter have any safety for their guilty heads, from the just vengeance of their own injured country, it is in the arm and power of despotic sway ; but the former had a security in the conscious rectitude of his conduct, and in the heart and affection of his country, which no length of time, nor change, can consign to oblivion. The wickedly great, and falsely splendid tyrants of the earth, have their fears in life, and the curses of generations to come, in death ; but our truly great Washington had our love in life—has our grateful remembrance in death ; and generations to come shall rise up, and call him blessed.

To fill up a great character, knowledge of letters, of men and of the world is necessary. Innumerable are those occurrences in life, especially in eminent stations, in which ignorance or inexperience of these, betray either trepidation or rashness of mind, very inconsistent with illustrious characters. Men invested with high offices resemble a city *set on a hill, which cannot be hid*. Their elevated situation casts a light around them, that exhibits equally to public view, their ignorance and their knowledge ; their imperfections and their worth.

To these I add, that a sense of religion is necessary to the formation of a truly great man. To honor men, as completely great, who are destitute of this high qualification, is certainly not judicious. The belief of the existence of a Deity ; our moral obligations to him ; the immortality of the soul ; the importance of its salvation by Jesus Christ, are so indispensable to the man we are describing ; that he who fails of this mental trait, fails of a really great mind, as much as time fails of being equal to eternity. He that conceives himself, according to our new philosophers, as having done with life, when his breath is expired, must labor under a meanness of mind, that levels him with irrational animals, in point of duration. This blackest of French infidelity,

ity, destroys the best motives for action, and must at once unfit the mind for those noble achievements that the man of real religion is inspired to perform. He that circumscribes the consequences of his great actions within the narrow limits of a life that is but a hand breadth, or a span ; must fall as far beneath those who act upon a theatre preparing for eternity, as this little opaque earth is inferior to the expanded light of heaven.—There is no comparison. While the *former* as soon as he is born, is beginning to die (and an attempt to act as a Hero may effect his death, and eternally bury his triumphs in non-existence ;) the *latter*, in dying only begins to live

“ The life of Gods, O transport ! and of man.” *Young.*

And should his death take place even in the field of battle, it speedily translates him to join uninterrupted triumphs ;

“ Where momentary ages are no more !

“ Where time, and pain, and chance, and death expire !

“ Where Seraphs gather immortality,

“ On life’s fair tree, fast by the throne of God.”

Young.

Of this last class of Heroes, we trust was our beloved Washington : And to this, his patronising religion, his discountenancing and reproofing vice, his strict regard for the sabbath, his attention to public worship, with his respect for the ministers of religion, and his own purity of conduct, attest.

That Washington was not of the Heroes who confine their views to the limits of time only, and that he had a deep sense of the importance of morality and religion, is very evident from his own language, recorded in his affectionate farewell address to the people of America ; in which he has displayed, in the most masterly manner, “ the dignity of his mind, and the unrivalled benevolence of his heart.” Thus says this great man :

“ Of

“Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens. The mere politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect, and cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connexions with public and private felicity. Let it be simply asked, where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if a sense of religious obligation desert the oaths which are the instruments of investigation in courts of justice?—Reason and experience both forbid us to expect, that national morality can prevail, in exclusion of religious principles.”

We have another testimony of Washington's piety and regard for real religion, in the concluding passage of his Circular Address, at the time when he resigned his military command; which we insert in his own words.

“I now make it my earnest prayer that God would have you in his holy protection; that he would most graciously be pleased, to dispose us all to do justice, to love mercy, and to demean ourselves with that charity, humility, and pacific temper of mind, which were the characteristics of the divine Author of our blessed religion; without a humble imitation of whose example in these things, we can never hope to be a happy nation.”

In fine, were I to give a summary of a real great man, I should say, that he possesses a virtuous, firm, nobly generous and intrepid heart—a clear and penetrating understanding—extensive knowledge—sound summate wisdom and enterprise—unfeigned faithfulness in high offices—a sincere concern for the public good—accompanied with a just sense of religion, and the superintending Providence of God.—

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These are leading features of a great character. And if a singular dignity of manners and address can add any thing to the above, they were all found in Washington.

From good authority,* I have been informed that in private life the General was regular in his family, to an exemplary degree. His words were few, his conversation was moral.—Hospitable to strangers—Good to the poor—Sociable with his friend—Forgiving, though reserved, to his enemy—An affectionate husband—Kind to all—flattering to none—and familiar with few.

In viewing the most illustrious characters of other Heroes whether more ancient or modern, even their friends must draw a veil of tenderness over some imperfections in their conduct, while they applaud their virtues; but the character of our deceased General can bear a full examination, and appears spotless, as well as splendid, in the sight of his enemies.

The greatness and goodness of his mind evidences the care of a kind Providence towards America, in furnishing him with such abundant gifts for performing high services to his country. A just sense of his worth should excite the exercise of correspondent gratitude to God, who gave Washington to America; while the same reflection deeply affects our minds, under an impression of our important loss in his death.

In his death, *the mighty is fallen!*—that distinguished character which has drawn the attention, commanded the respect, and excited the admiration of kings and conquerors in Europe; and filled the minds of millions in America with joy. His memory shall remain embalmed to posterity, while the name of virtuous liberty shall have any friends on earth. *How evident in his death, that great men must die!*

* Dr. Fullerton, who resided ten years in the vicinity of Mount Vernon.

die!—How is the mighty fallen!—fallen beneath the power of the king of tyrants—the conqueror of conquerors, whom neither talents resist—tears soften—nor dignity disobeys. What shall we conclude but, at thy command, O Death! the stars are finally blown out—and the sun himself may cease to shine.—What art thou? How ghastly thy looks! how cruel thy weapons! how extensive thy dominion! how despotic thy sway! Whence art thou? that with equal ease, and lordly pride, dost throw the prince from his throne, and the peasant from his humble cottage? Art thou that cruel messenger, by whose unrelenting power the loving mother and tender babe, the indulgent husband and beloved wife, are clasped in icy arms, and become the repast of worms and reptiles in the grave?—At thy control, the soldier and the citizen lie in undistinguished ruin; and a mighty Washington mingles kindred dust on a level with the lowest in the house of silence. Is it at the doleful tolling of thy bell, O Death, that we hear the sound of thy grating instruments, covering the rich and the poor, the oppressor and the oppressed deep in the dust, to awake no more, till the morning of the resurrection? By the ample sweep of thine enormous scythe, the nations are cut off; and the number of the living is far inferior to that of the dead.

“How populous! how vital, is the grave!

“*This is the desert, this the solitude.*” *Night Thoughts.*

To the propriety of these observations, the language of inspiration, and the experience of all ages fully assent. Long since, the doom of man was announced by his Maker; “Of dust thou art; and to the dust shalt thou return.” Our fathers are not, nor did the prophets live forever—We are continually informed that God will *bring us to death*; to the grave, the house appointed for all living—*Man in his best estate is vanity—His breath goeth forth; to his earth he returns,*

returns, and that day his thoughts perish, as to us. All flesh is as grass, and the glory of man is as the flower of the field; the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof knoweth it no more. Nor need we look for death only in the field of battle, in the billows of the ocean, nor in cities of pestilence; the air we breathe, the food we eat, are fraught with death, and have quivers full of the arrows of destruction. To meet with death, we need not explore the wilds of the forest—expose ourselves to the inclemency of stormy elements, nor wait years, and dread it only in old age; we see it in our common walks; it may follow us to our closet, it may arrest us on the couch of repose; while it consigns Thousands from the breast and womb to the congregation of the dead. We are incessantly seeing *man going to his long home, and the mourners going about the streets.*

Let us then improve the solemn dispensation that has called us together, as an incitement to prepare for our own death. Let us *number our days so that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.* The Proprietor of time has now closed another annual circle of days and months, and brought us to the beginning of that year, with which he shall shut up the ample round of the present, and which terminates in the commencement of another Century. Under such important progressions he has closed the very useful life of our beloved Patriot. As we have received good by his life, let us now improve by his death. *All things work together for good to them that love God.* Let us be habitually and actually prepared for death. The disappointments incident to us in the present world, are great and many. The changes that may come upon us in the present year may be such as our wisdom can neither foresee, nor our power be able to prevent; though of the last importance to ourselves and country. What may be hid in the womb of Providence with respect to us as individuals, who can tell? Who can ascertain his preservation from death.

death for one month, one week, nay, for one hour? A few minutes may involve the mind of mortal man in a scene more important to him than Millions of worlds.

Let us then seasonably contemplate the unknown regions of immortality, and look out for the approach of the king of terrors. Can any of us baffle the power of death, since Washington is dead? Can honor, can affluence, can love of friends or of country, can an assemblage of virtues, or usefulness in the world, can health of body, or strength of mind save us from death, since He is no more? Can dignity of address, a commanding appearance, added to the most brilliant achievements and the most splendid triumphs, avert the arrows of that inevitable Archer, since they have pierced the life of the highest Hero of America and of the world? Will death respect the most shining dress, the epaulette, the lace, the sword or superb habitation; since the shroud, the coffin, and the grave were prepared for Washington? Can our feeble efforts resist the arrest of death, since that arm which (under God) subdued fleets and armies, has yielded to its control. Under impressions of that high command, "*Be ye also ready,*" may we prepare to follow, *having our loins girded about, and our lights burning, and ourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord.* Let us look above, and beyond Washington, to Jesus, the blessed author of our religion, who has destroyed death. In him, and in him only, we may glory over this king of terrors, and rise superior to his fears. In Jesus we stand composed at his approach, and smile at the shaking of his spear. In Christ we may anticipate an enlightened chamber for death, and victory over the gloom of the grave. He has stripped death of its terrors.—He is *the resurrection and the life.*—In him, *life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel.*

Let us improve this high dispensation, to guard us against every appearance of moral evil. To this les-
son

for the example of the deceased, as well as the constant voice of inspiration, directs. Sin is the cause of death—*Sin has entered the world, and death by sin.* While the pride, avarice, and ambition of many great men in the world, serve as shades to set off the character of our beloved Hero ; that himself should not live, is a striking evidence of the dreadful nature of sin in its mortal effects and consequences over the best of men—We shall never be *truly* immortal, until we be *really* sinless. And though such a high attainment, is not the lot of any, even the best, in the present life ; it is however, our duty to shun sin as dishonorable to our Maker, injurious to ourselves, and as greatly unfitting for answering the end of our creation in this life, or enjoying real happiness in that which is to come. It is only where there is no sin, that there can be no sorrow.

Let us also improve this most humbling Providence, by way of gratitude to God, that at the most important crisis our country ever saw, we had not only a Washington alive ; but a Washington in the strength of body, and vigor of mind, added to the degree of experience, which form the aggregate of human life.

And when we contemplate the dangers to which the government of our country, has been, and is still exposed, from foreign influence, intrigues, and domestic faction ; and at the same time realize our loss in being bereaved of the man whose voice stilled the tumults of insurrection ; let us be thankful to the supreme Ruler of the Universe, that our counsel in the cabinet and command in the field, are committed to such able hands as an Adams, and a Hamilton—and let me add, to a Gilman, whom with pleasure I mention as a signal favor and ornament to our State.—May we never be destitute of such emblems and successors of Washington to direct the affairs of our state and nation. And may all ranks of citizens, in the
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exercise

exercise of virtue, piety, and real religion, be influenced by a spirit of knowledge, firmness, and faithfulness to our country's good. Then, the happiness of America may rise, spread, and endure, till the stars shall cease to shine.

