

T H E

AMERICAN PREACHER;

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COLLECTION OF SERMONS

FROM SOME OF THE

MOST EMINENT PREACHERS,

NOW LIVING,

IN THE UNITED STATES,

O F

DIFFERENT DENOMINATIONS

IN THE

CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

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M.DCC.XCI.

S E R M O N X X .

DEATH THE CHRISTIAN'S GAIN.

B Y

T H O M A S R E E S E . A . M .

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P H I L I P . i . 21 .

To die is gain.

IT is not a very uncommon thing for pious people, and especially pious ministers who are useful in the church, to be sometimes in such a situation, that, were it left to themselves, they would be much at a loss whether to choose life or death. This appears to have been the case with the apostle Paul, when he penned the words of the text. When he considered of what great importance his presence was to the church, he desired to continue in the body : On the other hand, when he looked forward and took a view of that glory and immortality to which he was fully persuaded death would open him a passage, he was seized with an ardent desire to depart, and to be with Christ. This conflict he

expresses in the 23d and 24th verses. *For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better; nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.* Under these impressions, he comforts himself with a full assurance that, whether he lived or died, Christ would be glorified in him. *Christ*, says he, in the close of verse 20th, *shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or death. For to me to live, is Christ, and to die is gain.* My motive to live, is the service of Christ; he is the supreme end of my life; for his honor only, I desire to live; and to die for him, I count my greatest gain.

The single point I have in view, in discoursing from these words, is, to shew in what respects death is gain to the true Christian: And,

I. In the first place, death is gain to the Christian, because it delivers him from the remains of sin.

It is not the design of God, that the Christian should be absolutely perfect in the present life.—He hath reserved this happiness for the state beyond the grave. The relics of a corrupt nature continue in the best of men, while they sojourn here in this world. Scripture and experience both conspire to evince the truth of this. *There is no man who liveth and sinneth not. In many things we all offend. He, who saith he hath no sin, is a liar.* That man must be blind indeed, a great stranger to his own heart, and to the purity, extent, and

spirituality of God's law, who thinks himself perfectly free from all sin. Such persons plainly discover that they are imposed upon by the deceitfulness of their own hearts; and are so far from full perfection, that they have not reached even the lowest degree of it. Every good man is actuated by two different and opposite principles; a principle of sin, and a principle of grace. *The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and these two are contrary the one to the other.*

And though the principle of holiness predominates in every good man, he is, notwithstanding, liable to fall into sin, through the remains of the old man, which are never wholly eradicated in the present state. These two warring principles produce a continual conflict in the Christian, which lasts during life. Hence the Christian life is, in scripture, frequently compared to a fight, and a race; things which require the most strenuous efforts. *I have fought the good fight, saith the apostle Paul, I have finished my course, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of life.* Now, there is nothing which gives the true Christian such real and deep concern, such continual sorrow, as the remains of sin which dwell within him. There is nothing from which he so ardently, and uniformly desires to be delivered. These are the great burden and sorrow of his life. How does it pierce a good man to the heart, when he reflects upon his folly and ingratitude, in provoking his heavenly father, in yielding to the temptations of satan,

wounding his own conscience, and grieving the holy spirit! He deeply feels the obligations he is under to his Redeemer, and bitterly laments that he so often falls into sin, and violates the most tender and endearing ties. Hear how passionately the apostle Paul cries out under the burden of in-dwelling sin.—*O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death!* Death is, therefore, great gain to the Christian, because it delivers him from that burden, of which the apostle so eminent in holiness, here complains.—After death the Christian's conflict is at an end; all his dangers are over; all his toils past. He is then freed, fully and completely freed, from all the remains of sin, which gave him so much pain and sorrow while he continued in the body. All his lusts are subdued, all his enemies conquered. He has no longer any need to toil and labor, to run and fight. Satan can no longer tempt; the world can no longer allure, nor his unruly passions hurry him into sin. His victory is decisive, his triumph complete. That the Christian will be made completely holy after death, is a plain doctrine of scripture. The apostle Paul, speaking of the saints in Heaven, calls them the *spirits of just men made perfect*. The word of God teaches us to believe, that the righteous after death will be completely happy. But this would be impossible, were they not delivered from all the remains of sin. As it is natural for them, above all other things, to desire such deliverance, should they not

obtain it, there would be a strong desire unsatisfied, which is inconsistent with perfect happiness. Besides, it is inconsistent with the perfections of God to admit creatures into Heaven who are polluted with sin. *Nothing unclean can enter there.* It is plain, then, that the Christian, at death, will be delivered from all the relics of sin, which remain in him while he sojourns here below. And, as these are the source of his greatest trouble and uneasiness in the present life, and the principal burden of his soul, death must be to him unspeakable gain.

II. Death is gain to the Christian, because it delivers him from all those natural evils and calamities, which are the consequence of sin, in the present life.

That the righteous are not exempted from the common miseries and calamities of human life, is too plain to need any proof. The righteous governor of the world, seems generally to distribute these with a promiscuous hand. *All things come alike to all, and there is no knowing good or evil by any thing that is seen under the sun.* In this world the righteous are blended with the wicked, and suffer with them. Indeed if we carefully attend to the scripture-history, and diligently observe the dispensations of providence, we shall, perhaps, find sufficient reason to conclude, that the greatest portion of suffering is commonly thrown into the cup of the righteous. Be this as it may, certain it is, that the best men in the world are sub-

ject to many evils, and often in such a situation, that they may truly say with the apostle—*If in this life only, we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.* Whilst Christians sojourn in this valley of tears, they are subject to many distressing and painful diseases. *Their bones are chastised with pain, and the multitude of their bones with strong pain. They are made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed unto them.*— Their strength and their beauty are consumed by sickness; and they are frequently brought to the gates of death. They suffer not only pain of body, but much trouble and anxiety of mind. Many are the losses and disappointments, many the afflictive and bereaving strokes to which they are liable: And they must be something more than human, and divested of the common feelings of men, not to suffer under them. They suffer in themselves, and they suffer in others by sympathy. As they have, generally, tender and compassionate hearts, they cannot but be greatly affected with the miseries and distresses of their fellow-men. The husband suffers in the wife, and the wife in the husband; the parent in the child, and the child in the parent; friend suffers in friend, and one relation in another. Add to all these evils, the grief and sorrow which arise from seeing and hearing the abominable deeds and filthy conversation of the wicked. The apostle Peter tells us, that righteous Lot vexed his soul from day to day, with the unlawful deeds and filthy conversation of the

wicked in Sodom. It cannot but give a good man great concern to see vice abounding, iniquity prevailing, impiety triumphing, and like a mighty torrent, ready to bear down all before them. The honor of the Redeemer is dear to every Christian ; his kingdom and interest in the world, lie near his heart ; he loves the souls of his fellow-immortals, and wishes to promote their eternal salvation. This being the temper of every true Christian, it must affect him deeply, and fill him with unspeakable sorrow, to see God provoked, his holy name blasphemed, the Redeemer dishonored, his grace despised, his mercy abused, and all religion turned into contempt and ridicule. For these things his tears flow, and his *soul weeps in secret places*. He sees thousands of precious, immortal souls, running on in the broad way which leads unerring to the abodes of death. He is fully sensible of their danger, and foresees the misery which awaits them, if they persist in their impiety and rebellion. This excites the most painful sensations, and fills him with the deepest regret.

But why should I attempt a catalogue of the various evils and calamities, to which the Christian is subject, in the present life ? They are innumerable, and many of them terrible beyond all description. From all these, death will deliver him ; and therefore to die, must be his gain. It puts a final period to all his afflictions and miseries, to all his sorrows and sufferings. In those blessed mansions

to which he shall be admitted after death, there will be nothing to give him any trouble or uneasiness, nothing to disturb his peace, or break his eternal repose. There he shall rest from his labors, and be freed from all distress and tribulation. In that blessed state, he shall no longer be subject to pain, sickness or disease: for there, *the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick; and the people shall be forgiven their iniquity.* The bodies of the righteous shall, at their resurrection, be purged from all the seeds of disease and dissolution, and made spiritual, incorruptible, and immortal. *This corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality, and death shall be swallowed up in victory.* These vile bodies will then be glorious bodies, and flourish in eternal health, immortal vigor, and undecaying beauty. Death makes a complete separation between the righteous and the wicked. *There the wicked cease from troubling.* They cease to persecute and oppress the righteous, to vex and grieve them by their profane conversation and impious deeds. In a word, the Christian, by death, is perfectly freed from all those evils and calamities which were introduced into the world by sin, and, therefore, to him it must be immense gain. O what a happy exchange does the poor, afflicted, persecuted Christian make, when released from his house of clay! from sickness to health, from pain to pleasure, from trouble to rest, from war to peace, from grief and sorrow to endless joy and ineffable delight! from bondage to freedom, from an earth-

ly cottage to a heavenly palace, from a howling wilderness to a blooming paradise, from a prison to a kingdom, from a cross to a crown! Welcome, thrice welcome death, the end of sorrows, and the beginning of joys!

III. Death introduces the Christian into a much more noble, excellent and happy society, than he can possibly enjoy here in this world; and on this account, is to him unspeakable gain.

After death, the Christian shall dwell with God and Christ, and be the companion of Angels, and the *spirits of just men made perfect*. In the present life, the righteous are frequently obliged to associate with the wicked, and their company and conversation cannot but be disagreeable to them. They can have no true pleasure or satisfaction in the society of loose, profane, and irreligious men. But it is their duty, and their necessary business sometimes requires them, to mingle in the assemblies of the wicked. This cannot be avoided while they are connected with them in a state of civil society. And though they always prefer the society of sober and godly men, *the excellent ones of the earth in whom is all their delight*; yet even among these, they often find such a mixture of sin or infirmity, of passion or prejudice, as renders their conversation not only imperfect, but sometimes very disagreeable. It is as true as it is lamentable, that even good men, in this world, do not always live in that peace and harmony which religion requires,

and which is necessary to their own comfort and happiness. How indeed can it be otherwise in this state of imperfection, ignorance and error? In such a state, men will always be liable to differ in their sentiments. This seldom fails to produce opposition and contradiction, which naturally tend to inflame the passions and excite animosities among weak, imperfect and sinful men. The Apostles Paul and Peter were both excellent and holy men, yet we find they did not always agree; and the contention was once so sharp between Paul and Barnabas, that they parted not on very friendly terms. And this is too often the case with great and good men; and greatly diminishes the happiness which they might otherwise enjoy from the company and conversation of each other in this world. But death will put an end to all those things which deprive us of that full satisfaction and inexpressible delight, which society is capable of affording to such creatures as we are. After death, the righteous shall be for ever separated from the wicked, and no longer obliged to associate with them; consequently, they shall be completely delivered from all that grief and vexation of spirit, of which their wickedness was the occasion. In the state beyond the grave, Christians shall be purged from all sin and imperfection of every kind; and consequently fitted both to receive and communicate the most sublime and exquisite social pleasures. Death will introduce them to the most intimate communion and *fellowship with the Father,*

and with his Son Jesus Christ. In this world, their communion with God is imperfect and interrupted; but in the world of spirits, it will be perfect and uninterrupted. There they *will no longer see through a glass darkly, but face to face.* God will no more hide his face from them, and suffer them to walk in darkness: they shall for ever dwell in his presence where *there is fulness of joy and pleasures for ever more.* All those dark clouds, which interrupted their view in the present imperfect state, shall be dissipated; and they shall behold the Deity in full unclouded splendor. There they shall converse familiarly with the Father of Spirits, the fountain of life and light, the source of perfection and felicity. *In thy light shall we see light.* Their vision is complete, their fruition full. There too they shall see, and for ever dwell with the Lord Jesus Christ, whom having not seen they loved. They shall be admitted to the most intimate communion with him who died for them, and washed them in his own precious blood. They shall sit down with him on the right hand of his Father, where he shines encircled with ineffable glory, for ever behold his mild majestic countenance, beaming with divine love and compassion, and drink in "beatitude past utterance," from his presence. They shall see him as he is, be eternally transported with his love, and *changed into the same image from glory to glory.* Then will that prayer of our Saviour be answered: *Father I will that they also whom thou hast given me be where I am, that they may behold my glory.*

But further, The Christian, after death, shall be admitted into the blessed society of Angels. Those glorious and happy spirits will be his companions. They will welcome him to the realms of light and glory; and without envy admit him to partake of their honors, and share in their felicity. The righteous shall mingle with those morning stars, shine with them, and with them shout aloud for joy. They shall hold high converse with those sons of God; and with them contemplate the wonders of redeeming love. With them they shall rejoice, and with them adore.

The spirits of just men made perfect, will also be the companions of the Christian in a future state. When he dies, he shall be taken *to the general assembly of the first-born, whose names are written in Heaven.* There, my brethren, if you *die the death of the righteous and your last end be like his,* you will not only see and converse with all those, who are now your companions in tribulation; but with all the good men, who have lived in the different ages of the world. There, in that happy country to which you will be translated by death, you shall converse with all the Patriarchs and holy men of old. There you shall be the companions of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and all the holy Prophets, of whom this world was not worthy. There you shall see the harbinger of your Redeemer, who was a burning and a shining light in this world; but who glows with an intenser flame, and shines with a brighter light in the world above. There you shall form

one society with the twelve Apostles, who shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. There you shall see Peter who denied his master, but afterwards suffered for him, raised from an ignominious cross to a bright eternal crown. There you shall behold the beloved Disciple feasting his eyes with the vision of his much loved and loving Lord. He burns with the ardor of a Seraph, and is swallowed up in the heavenly flame. There too, you shall see the apostle Paul, who of a persecutor became a preacher, enjoying the full reward of all his labors and sufferings, and confirming the truth of his assertion in the text—*To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.* He fought the good fight, he finished his course, and now a never-fading crown of glory flourishes upon his head. In those bright regions, you shall see the glorious army of martyrs, who were slain for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus, clothed in white robes, with crowns of gold upon their heads, and palms of victory in their hands. *These are they who came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.* O my brethren, what unspeakable happiness must it be, to be admitted into such a society! What exquisite happiness do good and wise men enjoy, from the society of each other, even here upon earth, when they are united in the bands of friendship, and have only an imperfect similarity of tempers, dispositions, and sentiments! With what ardor do they embrace each other! How do their features lighten up, when

they meet, and their souls spring forward, as it were, to salute each other! What a feast of love and joy do their presence and discourses afford! How much happiness do they give, how much receive! How do they entertain, how do they please and instruct each other! What sweet counsel do they take together! Now, if the company and conversation of pious friends, upon earth, can afford so much delight and mutual satisfaction, how great beyond all expression must be the felicity of the blessed company above! In that happy society, an entire oneness of heart reigns. They are all united in the most perfect concord, the sweetest love and harmony. Their sentiments are all one, their affections one, their joys one. There is a perfect similarity of tempers, dispositions and inclination. That celestial flame, in which they all glow, melts and mixes their souls into an entire union. Every one shares in the felicity, and adds to it. The happiness of all is the happiness of every one, and the happiness of every one the happiness of all. This seems to be the import of our Saviour's prayer, *That they may be all one as thou Father art in me, and I in thee, that they may be one in us.* It is said of the primitive Christians at Jerusalem, that they were all of one heart and of one soul. But how much more close and intimate is the union of the saints in the heavenly Jerusalem, where every one loves another as himself! Historians relate, that as Alexander entered the pavilion of the mother of Darius, with Hephe-

tion his friend and favorite, she kneeled to the latter, as being the more majestic of the two; but being informed of her error, she humbly asked pardon. To whom Alexander replied, "You did not mistake mother, for this too, is Alexander." This is but a faint image of that endearing friendship and transcendent love which reigns in the hearts of the blessed in Heaven. How ravishing must be the conversation of such friends! how sweet their intercourse! With what rapture do they pour out their hearts to each other, and converse of the works and ways of God! With what delightful admiration do they recount the inestimable blessings they mutually enjoy! With what transport do they adore, with what extacy do they join, in celebrating the wonders of redeeming love! O happy company! O blessed society! may the Christian say, when shall I mingle in your assembly? When shall I be delivered from this prison of clay, burn in your flames, and join in your songs?

If Socrates, a heathen, could comfort himself before his death, with the hope that he was going to converse with Homer, Hesiod, and other heroes and sages of antiquity; should not the Christian much more rejoice at the approach of death, which translates him to the society and conversation of the blessed in Heaven? What abundant consolation should it afford, that in the state beyond the grave he will be *brought to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly of the church of the first-born, whose names are written in Heaven, and to God*

the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant?

With such bright and glorious prospects before him, how can he not reckon death immense and unspeakable gain? And how truly may he adopt the language of the apostle in the text, *To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain?*

IV. The employments of the Christian after death will be much more noble and excellent, than they are in the present life; and therefore, to die, is to him gain.

While the Christian is in his state of pilgrimage here upon earth, a great part of his time is commonly employed about things of a temporal nature. While he is in the body, it is his duty to provide for the body; and this engrosses much of his time and thoughts. This obliges him often to be engaged in matters which are very disagreeable to him, though necessary in his present circumstances. Care and anxiety about the things of the present life, too frequently break in upon him and disturb his peace. Even the small portion of his time which he devotes to the performance of religious duties, is but seldom spent in a manner entirely to his satisfaction. His best religious performances are very imperfect, and mingled with sin. The world often intrudes; sensible objects press upon him, and draw off his mind from the work in which he is engaged. His heart often wanders, and his thoughts start aside from those

important spiritual objects on which they ought to be fixed. He finds great reason to lament his coldness, deadness and formality in the worship of God. It is but seldom he feels that flow of affection, that fire of love, that life, that vigor, in the service of his God which he so earnestly desires. The praises of his redeemer often dwell upon his tongue, when he has no deep penetrating sense of his love, and feels but little of the heavenly flame in his heart. And when he looks back and reflects upon the time spent in the worship of God, he finds many deficiencies, and sees abundant cause of sorrow and regret, of shame and confusion of face. But after death, it will not be so. The whole of his time will then be employed in the immediate worship and service of God. This will be his sole work; and it will be performed in such a manner as to yield him the highest satisfaction, the most sublime pleasure. He shall no longer experience the least sin or imperfection in his duty. He shall be like a flame of fire, all activity, life and love, in the service of God. There will then be nothing to call off his mind from the divine work in which he shall be employed.—No earthly thoughts—no worldly cares—no carnal objects. He will then have all those dispositions and affections in their highest perfection, which God requires, and which are necessary for performing his work in the most perfect and acceptable manner. In Heaven the saints suffer no interruption in their sweet employment. *They stand before the throne of*

God, and worship him day and night in his temple. They cease not day nor night, crying holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty! The glorious perfections of God displayed in his works of nature and of grace, are the subject of their unceasing contemplation, and most profound admiration. They continually celebrate, and continually adore the stupendous plan of redemption, where all the divine attributes so beautifully harmonize, and shine with such unparalleled lustre. The wonders of rich, free, and sovereign grace in the salvation of sinners, the immense, unfathomable love, of a bleeding, dying, Saviour, are their eternal theme. *The angels desire to look into these things.—The rapt Seraph adores and burns;* and the glorious company of there deemed above, shall with rapture celebrate them through eternal ages. The entire union, and perfect concord of those blessed spirits, in the work of praise, greatly enhance their pleasure. Among the countless millions who compose this vast, this happy assembly, there is not one cold heart, one dissenting voice, one discordant note.

“Ten thousand thousand are their tongues,
But all their joys are one.”

The celestial flame of love, like ethereal fire, is communicated from heart to heart; the heavenly harmony catches from tongue to tongue; every heart joins with every tongue, and glory to God and the Lamb, is the united, repeated acclamation. Angelic harps and voices join the heaven-

ly concert, swell the bold and solemn note, and complete the full music of Heaven. Loud Hallelujahs crowd every song, and anthems of ceaseless praise *to him who loved us and gave himself for us*, resound through all the heavenly palaces.

O my hearers, could we only hear some faint touches of this celestial harmony, some imperfect echos of those songs which saints and angels sing, how would it inflame our desires to join in that blessed work! *Blessed are they, O Lord, who dwell in thy house, they will be still praising thee.* If such are the employments of the Christian after death, so noble, so excellent, surely death must be to him exceeding gain.

We shall now conclude with a few brief inferences from the subject.

I. From what hath been said, we may see how little reason the sincere Christian has to be afraid of death. Death is indeed dreadful to the wicked. To them it is the king of terrors; it is the end of all their joys, and the beginning of sorrows. No wonder then if they recoil, and horror and amazement seize upon them at the approach of the grim tyrant. But to the righteous, this king of terrors, is transformed into a messenger of peace. He comes as a kind angel to strike off his fetters, unlock the doors of his prison, and conduct him home to his father's house. The day of his death is the day of his deliverance; the day of his birth, into a glorious, an immortal and blessed life. It

is his great pay-day, his rich harvest, when he reaps the fruit of all his labors, and is put into possession of a crown which fadeth not away, a kingdom which shall never have an end. Why then O Christians! should you shrink back at the thoughts of death, which to you is such unspeakable gain? The stroke may be rough which dashes into pieces your vessels of clay; the valley may be dark and gloomy through which you must pass; but it will soon open to you a bright and glorious prospect, and usher you into the regions of light, and life, and liberty. Why then should we linger about these mortal shores, and dread to cross the cold stream which separates us from the promised land? We have had a view of the heavenly Canaan; the blooming prospect lies before us; and shall we be backward to launch away and take possession?

“ Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood,
Stand dress'd in living green;
So to the Jews old Canaan stood,
While Jordan roll'd between.”

2. Let the Christian learn patiently to submit to the will of God, as to the time of his departure from the body.

There are Christians who sometimes appear impatient of life, and discover too much anxiety to leave this mortal stage. Tired of their confinement in a prison of clay, sinking under a load of years, and pressed with various calamities, they long for deliverance. Having, as they apprehend,

ceased to be useful here, and pointing the eye of faith to that *exceeding and eternal weight of glory*, which awaits them beyond the grave, they are solicitous to quit their present station, to depart and be with Christ. But let all such remember how much it is their duty to submit to the divine disposal, and with patience and entire resignation, wait their appointed time. God's time is the most proper time. He has wise and gracious designs, in continuing his servants here in this valley of tears; though they may not be always able to comprehend them. The reward which he has promised is free and unmerited; and the time of conferring it ought to be wholly submitted to himself. And remember for your consolation, the period is not far distant which will crown all your wishes. The days of your tribulation will soon have an end; the conflict cannot last long. You will soon rest from your labors, in the fair mansions on high, far above those storms which tossed you here on the troubled ocean of life; where your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw its light; and the days of your conflict and mourning shall for ever have an end.

3. Let us all endeavor so to live, that to die may be *our gain*. *Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his*, is the language of all who believe in a future retribution. All wish to die comfortably. If then you would die the death of the righteous, you must live his life. There is nothing more absurd, more repugnant to reason

and scripture, than for men to imagine, that they may live all their days under the power and dominion of sin, serving divers lusts and passions; and at last receive the reward of the righteous. *Shall not the judge of all the earth do right, and discriminate between his friends and his enemies, between his loyal subjects and disaffected rebels? Be not deceived, my beloved brethren; God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth that shall he reap.* It is the unalterable decree of the great *eternal*; it is the voice of reason and revelation, that *without holiness no man shall see the Lord*. Let these words be deeply engraven on each of our hearts; and as we desire to be happy hereafter, let us consecrate ourselves to the service of God whilst here. Christ came into the world not to save his people *in* their sins; but to save them *from* their sins. Let us then, *denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works.*

THE END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.