

THE  
WORKS

OF

JOHN WITHERSPOON, D.D.

SOMETIME MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL AT PAISLEY, AND LATE  
PRESIDENT OF PRINCETON COLLEGE, IN NEW JERSEY.

CONTAINING

ESSAYS, SERMONS, &c.

ON

IMPORTANT SUBJECTS;

INTENDED TO ILLUSTRATE AND ESTABLISH THE DOCTRINE OF  
SALVATION BY GRACE, AND TO POINT OUT ITS  
INFLUENCE ON HOLINESS OF LIFE.

TOGETHER WITH HIS

LECTURES ON MORAL PHILOSOPHY,  
ELOQUENCE AND DIVINITY;

HIS SPEECHES IN THE AMERICAN CONGRESS;

AND MANY OTHER VALUABLE PIECES, NEVER BEFORE  
PUBLISHED IN THIS COUNTRY.

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V O L. I.

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EDINBURGH:

PRINTED FOR OGILBY & AIKMAN; J. PILLANS & SONS;  
J. RITCHIE; AND J. TURNBULL.

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1804.

A C C O U N T

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**W**HEN the works of men, eminent both for their intellectual and moral excellence, are presented to the Public, it is natural to presume that the Public will feel a desire to be favoured with some account of them. It is from a presumption of this kind, that the following brief account has been drawn up of the late eminent Dr WITHERSPOON. Those who take pleasure in acquainting themselves with the history of persons who have been blessed with superior talents, and enabled strenuously to devote themselves to truth, to virtue, and to the best interests of mankind, will feel peculiar interest in perusing a faithful memoir of this eminent divine.

Dr WITHERSPOON was a branch of a very respectable family, which had long possessed a considerable landed property in the east of Scotland. He was lineally descended from that eminent man of God, the Rev. JOHN KNOX, well known as the prime instrument of spreading and establishing the reformed religion in this part of the United Kingdoms. The Doctor was born on the 5th day of February 1722; and his father was, at that time, minister of the parish of Yester, about 18 miles from Edinburgh. His father was a worthy man—eminent not only for piety, but for literature, and for a habit of extreme accuracy in all his writings and discourses. Any propensity, when it has once become characteristical of a race, is peculiarly apt to be propagated by the influence of early associations. The father's example, therefore, may be supposed to have contributed not a little to form in the son that taste and love of correctness, united with a dignified simplicity, for which he was so much and so justly distinguished through the whole of his life.

Young WITHERSPOON was very early sent to the public school at Haddington, where his father spared no expence in his educa-

tion. He had been at that seminary but a little while when he attracted particular notice. He was distinguished for assiduity in his studies, for soundness of judgment, and for clearness and quickness of conception, among his school-fellows, many of whom have since filled some of the highest stations in the literary and political world.

At the age of fourteen, he was removed to the University of Edinburgh, where he continued attending the different Professors with a great degree of credit in all the branches of learning, until the age of twenty-one, when he was licensed to preach the gospel. When a student at the Divinity Hall, his character stood remarkably high for his taste in sacred criticism, and for a precision of thinking, and a perspicuity of expression, rarely attained at so early a period.

He had scarcely left the University when he was invited to be Assistant and Successor to his father in the parish of Yester. However, he chose rather to accept an invitation from the parish of Beith, in the west of Scotland, where he was ordained with the universal consent of the people, and where

he afterwards received many pleasing tokens of their high esteem and cordial affection. It is devoutly to be wished that such happy settlements were more frequent in the Church of Scotland, and that they were not so often prevented by the impolitic exercise of the law of patronage.

From Beith, he soon received a call to the large and flourishing town of Paisley, so celebrated for its various and excellent manufactures. There he resided with high reputation, and laboured in the work of the Lord with uncommon success. There his name will long be held in sacred remembrance.

During his residence at Paisley, he was invited to Dublin, in Ireland, to take the charge of a numerous and respectable congregation in that city. He was also invited to Rotterdam, in the republic of the United Provinces, and to the town of Dundee, in his own country. But he could not then be induced to quit such a sphere of comfort and usefulness as Paisley afforded him. He rejected also, in the first instance, the invitation of the Trustees of the College of New Jersey, in America. He thought it almost impossible to dissolve connections at home,

which had been so long endeared to him ; to leave a place where he was so much respected and so very happy ; and, in the middle of his career, to bury himself, as he apprehended, in a new and distant country. But, urged by all the friends whose judgment he most respected, and whose friendship he most valued ; hoping too that his sacrifices might be more than repaid by his being made peculiarly useful in promoting the cause of Christ, and the interests of learning in the new world, and knowing that Jersey College had been consecrated from its foundation to those great objects to which he had devoted his life, he consented, on a second application, to wave every other consideration, to cross the Atlantic, and to take the important charge to which he had been called, with the concurrent wishes and the highest expectations of all the friends of the College \*. Their expectations were not disappointed. The reputation and prosperity

\* DR WITHERSPOON arrived with his family in America in the month of August 1768. He was the sixth President of the College since its foundation in the year 1746. His five predecessors were, the Rev. Messrs JONATHAN DICKENSON—AARON BURR—JONATHAN EDWARDS

of the College under Dr WITHERSPOON's administration equalled the highest hopes that even the most sanguine entertained.

New Jersey College was founded, and has since been chiefly supported, by private liberality and zeal. Its finances, from a variety of causes, were in a very low and declining condition, when Dr WITHERSPOON arrived in America. But his reputation excited an uncommon liberality in the Public, and his personal exertions, which extended from Massachusetts to Virginia, soon raised its funds to a flourishing state. The war of the Revolution, indeed, afterwards obstructed its growth, and almost annihilated its re-

—SAMUEL DAVIES—and Dr SAMUEL FINDLEY; men deservedly celebrated for their learning, genius, and piety. Mr DICKENSON and Mr EDWARDS were advanced in life when chosen to the Presidency, and their labours therefore were not of so long continuance.

A little before Dr WITHERSPOON left Scotland, and while he was in great suspense whether it was his duty to leave it or not, a gentleman possessed of a considerable property, and a relation of the Doctor's family, promised to make him his heir if he would not go to America. This fact shews that the Doctor's conduct was directed, not by selfish, but by the most pure and disinterested motives.

sources ; yet much, even then, was the institution indebted to his enterprize and talents.

But the chief advantages which it derived were from his literature, his superintendence, his excellent example, and from the general turn and tone which he gave to the literary pursuits of the students. Formerly the course of instruction had been too superficial, and the metaphysics and philosophy that were taught tinged abundantly with the dry and unedifying forms of the schools. This defect, however, ought not to be imputed to the great and worthy men who had presided over the institution before him ; but rather to circumstances existing from the infant state of the country, over which it was not to be expected that they could, all at once, have a sufficiently commanding power. But true it is, that since the election of Dr WITHERSPOON to the Presidency, learning has received an extension that was not known before in the American seminaries. He introduced into their philosophy all the most liberal and modern improvements of Europe. He made the philosophical course embrace the general principles of policy and public law ; he incor-

porated with it found and rational metaphysics, equally remote from the doctrines of fatality and contingency; from the barrenness of the schools, and from the excessive refinements of those contradictory, but equally absurd and impious classes of sceptics, who either wholly deny the existence of matter, or maintain that nothing but matter exists in the universe.

The numbers of men of distinguished talents, in the different liberal professions, who received the elements of their education under Dr WITHERSPOON, demonstrate how eminent his services were to the College of New Jersey. Under his auspices have been formed a great proportion of the Clergy of the American Church, and to his able instructions America owes many of her most distinguished patriots and legislators. Above thirty of his pupils have arisen to the honour of being members of the Congress, and among these are to be found some of the first characters for reputation and usefulness.

Dr WITHERSPOON continued directing the Institution of which he was President with increasing success, till the commencement of the American war. But that calamitous

event suspended his functions and dispersed the College. He then entered upon a new scene, and appeared in a new character. Still, however, he shone with his usual lustre. Knowing his distinguished abilities, the citizens of New Jersey elected him as one of the most proper delegates whom they could send to that Convention which formed their Republican Constitution. In this Convention he appeared, to the astonishment of all the Professors of the law, as profound a *civilian* as he confessedly was a *philosopher* and *divine*. What an exhibition this of the extent and variety of the powers of his mind !

From the revolutionary committees and conventions of the State, he was sent early in the year 1776, as a representative of the people of New Jersey to the Congress of United America. He was seven years a member of that body, which, in the face of innumerable difficulties and dangers, secured to Americans the establishment of their Independence. Dr WITHERSPOON was always firm amidst the most gloomy and formidable aspects of public affairs, and always discovered the greatest reach and presence of mind in the most embarrassing situations.

It is impossible here to enter into all his political ideas. It is but justice however to observe, that on almost all subjects on which he differed from the majority of his brethren in Congress, his principles have been justified by the result. It is sufficient to select only a few examples.

He constantly opposed the expensive mode of supplying the army *by commission*, which was originally adopted ; and combated it, until after a long experience of its ill effects, he, in conjunction with a few firm and judicious associates, prevailed to have it done by contract \*.

He opposed, at every emission after the first or second, that paper currency which gave such a wound to public credit, and which would have defeated the revolution if any thing could †, and even hazarded his popularity for a time by the strenuousness of his opposition.

\* Congress at first supplied the army by allowing a certain commission per cent. on the monies that the commissioners expended. This invited expence. At length they were induced to agree to the mode by contract ; or allowing to the purchaser, a certain sum per ration.

† Instead of emissions of an unfunded paper, beyond a certain quantum, Dr WITHERSPOON urged the proprie-

In the information of the original confederation, he complained of the jealousy and ambition of the individual States, which were not willing to intrust the general government with adequate powers for the common interest. He then pronounced inefficacy upon it. But he complained and remonstrated in vain\*.

Over-ruled however at that time, in these and in other objects of importance, he had the satisfaction of living to see America revert, in almost every instance, to his original

ty of making loans, and establishing funds for the payment of the interest ; which, in the temper of the public mind, he thought could then have been easily effected. America has since regretted that she had not pursued that policy. The Doctor afterwards, at the instance of some of the very gentlemen who opposed him in Congress, published his ideas on the nature, value, and uses of money, in one of the most clear and judicious essays that perhaps was ever written on the subject.

\* He particularly remonstrated against the tardy, inefficient and faithless manner of providing for the public exigencies and debts by requisition on the several States. He insisted on the propriety and necessity of the government of the union holding in its own hands the entire regulation of commerce, and the revenues that might be derived from that source. These, he contended, would be adequate to all the wants of the United States, in a season of peace.

ideas ; ideas founded on a sound and penetrating judgment, and matured by deep reflection, and an extensive observation of men and things. But it is needless to trace his political career farther ; it is enough to add, that while he was thus engaged in serving his country in the character of a *civilian*, he did not lay aside his duty as a *minister*. He gladly embraced every opportunity of preaching, and of discharging the other duties of his sacred office. This he considered as his highest character, and honour in life.

The College having been collected as soon as possible after its dispersion, instruction was recommenced under the immediate care of the Vice-president \*. Dr WITHERSPOON'S

\* The Rev. Dr SAMUEL S. SMITH, who was unanimously chosen Dr WITHERSPOON'S successor, on the sixth day of May 1795. This gentleman's character needs no eulogium here. His several publications, and particularly his ingenious essay on " The causes of the variety of complexion and figure of the human species," delivered before the Philosophical Society in Philadelphia, February 28. 1787, afford sufficient testimony of his genius and learning. The last mentioned work has distinguished him in the estimation of the literati, both in Europe and America. As soon as it made its appearance in Europe, it was read with avidity. It

name, however, continued to add celebrity to the institution ; and it has fully recovered its former reputation.

The American struggle for liberty drawing to a period, and the Doctor feeling age advancing upon him, was desirous of resigning his place in Congress ; and would have fain retired, in a measure, from the burdens of the College.

But, notwithstanding his wish for repose, he was induced through his attachment to the institution over which he had so long presided, once more to cross the ocean to promote its benefit. He again visited Britain, but the fruit of his voyage was not indeed answerable to the wishes of his American friends, yet they felt not the less indebted to his enterprise and zeal.

From the very learned and splendid appearances which Dr WITHERSPOON was enabled to make, both in the College of New Jersey and in the Congress of United Ame-

shortly passed under more editions than one in Great Britain. It was translated into the French language, and published with great éclat at Paris : and has been since translated into the German language, and published with annotations by a professor of moral philosophy, in one of the universities of that empire.

rica, he was doubtless much indebted to the operation of circumstances in which he was placed previously to his departure from his native country. While a member of the councils and courts of the Church of Scotland, he took a most active and decided part in ecclesiastical politics. To this may be traced, in some measure, the illustrious display which he afterwards gave of his diversified talents for being a man of business, a financier, and a public speaker.

The Church of Scotland is well known to be divided into two parties, the one differing widely from the other in their ideas of ecclesiastical management. The one have declared themselves abundantly zealous to confirm and even extend the rights of *patronage*; while the other wish either to abridge these rights, or to confine their operation so as to extend the influence and secure the consent of the people in the settlement of ministers. The popular party are considered as more zealous for the doctrines of grace and for the articles of religion in all their strictness, as contained in the national Confession of Faith. The opposing party again, who may be denominated the *unpopular* one, seem willing to allow

a greater latitude of opinion, and generally preach in a style that seems less evangelical, and less fitted to affect the hearts and consciences of the hearers. They designate themselves *moderate men*, and therefore strenuously oppose what they call the *wildness of orthodoxy, the madness of fanaticism, the frenzy of the people*. To the conduct of their opposing *moderate* brethren, the *popular* clergy attribute most of the unhappy religious divisions which have taken place in Scotland; and could they be but persuaded to relinquish their unpopular measures, it is believed that most of the sectaries would in time be brought back to the communion of the Established Church.

Dr WITHERSPOON, while he remained in the Church of Scotland, was strenuous in his efforts to bring about this consummation, so much to be desired by all her serious and enlightened friends. He laboured to make his clerical brethren lay aside their unchristian feuds, understand their own true interest and the interest of the flocks committed to their charge. He wished to see them co-operating as men of one heart and of one mind. He longed to witness the death and burial of division; to witness the Church of

Scotland rejoicing in the reconciliation of her sons ; to witness the wandering flocks brought back to the fold, and peace and love, the sound characteristics of the religion of Jesus, thoroughly established in the land.

In promoting these views, he thought it his duty to act, in the Church Courts, with those of his brethren, who are usually denominated the *orthodox*. Acting with *them*, as he did with all, from conviction, and at the same time evincing uncommon knowledge and wisdom, he soon acquired such an influence in their councils, that he was considered at length as their head and leader. Before he had acquired this influence, their councils were managed without union or address, while the measures of the *moderate party* had, for a long time, been artfully conducted by some of the greatest literary characters in the nation. It had happened among the orthodox, as it often does among scrupulous and conscientious men who are not much versed in the affairs of the world, that each pursued inflexibly his own opinion, as the dictate of an honest independent mind. They thought, that in no case were they to accommodate any thing

to the views of others. They thought that all address and policy were inconsistent with religion. Hence resulted disunion of measures and consequent defeat. But the enlarged mind of Dr WITHERSPOON, eager to overcome contention and unite the parties contending, refused not to combine *the wisdom of the serpent with the harmlessness of the dove*. Do him the orthodox clergy of this church are principally indebted for that concentration of views, that harmony of design and system of operation, which they now possess, and which it is to be wished they possessed to a still greater degree. One day, after Dr WITHERSPOON had completely baffled, in some important questions in the General Assembly, the celebrated Dr ROBERTSON, at that time the leader of the opposite party, the latter said in a pleasant and easy manner, "I think you have your men better disciplined than formerly." "Yes," replied Dr WITHERSPOON, "by urging your politics too far, you have compelled us to beat you with your own weapons."

Thus, from the habits which he had acquired in his native country, Dr WITHERSPOON was duly prepared for appearing with

such magnificence and success in the ecclesiastical and civil assemblies of America. Few men have ever shewn themselves more able to seize at once the right point of view on every question, to disentangle the most embarrassed subjects, and by clear and conclusive reasoning to bring every discussion to a speedy and decisive termination.

Towards the close of life, however, he felt and gratified an inclination to retire from the political scene on which he had long acted with uncommon dignity and usefulness. He withdrew in a great measure from the exercise of all the public functions that were not immediately connected with the duties of his sacred office.

Every day he felt his bodily infirmities fast increasing. For more than two years before his death, he suffered the loss of his sight, which contributed to hasten the progress of his other disorders. These he bore with a patience and a cheerfulness rarely to be met with even in those eminent for wisdom and piety. His activity of mind, and anxiety to be useful, would not permit him, even in this depressing situation, to desist from the exercise of his ministry, and his duties in the College. He was frequently

led into the pulpit, both at home and abroad, during his blindness, and he always acquitted himself, even then, in his usually accurate, impressive and excellent manner. He had the felicity of enjoying the full use of his mental powers to the very last. He died on the 15th day of November 1794, in the 73d year of his age. The College of New Jersey lost in him a most distinguished President, America one of her ablest Politicians, and the Church of Christ one of her most valuable Ministers.—“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord: they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them.”

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OF DR WITHERSPOON'S character as an *author*, it is not necessary to say much. His Writings are before the Public; and to every serious intelligent reader, they must discover an uncommon knowledge of human nature, and a deep and intimate acquaintance with the Holy Scriptures. They generally strike us, as being at once eloquent and convincing, grave and attractive, profound and plain, energetic and simple. They evidently shew that the author's

learning was very extensive ; that God had given him a great and understanding mind, a quick apprehension, and a solid judgment.

Dr WITHERSPOON's talents were various. He was not only a serious writer, but one who possessed also an uncommon fund of refined humour, and delicate satire. A happy specimen of this is seen in his *Ecclesiastical Characteristics*. The edge of his wit in that performance was directed against certain corruptions in principle and practice, prevalent in the Church of Scotland ; and no attack that was ever made upon the *moderate* clergy gave so deep a wound, or was so severely felt. Dr WARBURTON, the celebrated Bishop of Gloucester, mentions the *Characteristics* with particular approbation, and expresses his wish that the Church of England too had such a corrector.

As a *preacher*, Dr WITHERSPOON's character stood remarkably high. In this department, he was, in many respects, one of the best models on which a young pulpit orator could form himself. It was a singular felicity to the students in the College of New Jersey that they had such an example constantly before them. Religion, from the manner in which it was treated by him, al-

ways commanded the attention of the hearers, even when it did not savingly reach their hearts. An admirable textuary, a profound theologian, an universal scholar, simple, yet dignified in his manner, and intimately acquainted with the human heart; he brought forth all the advantages derived from these sources, to the illustration and enforcement of divine truth.

Though always solemn, affecting and instructive, he was by no means the most fervent and animated orator. A peculiar affection of his nerves, which generally overcame him, when he allowed himself to feel very keenly on any subject, obliged him, from his earliest entrance on public life, to impose a strict restraint upon his sensibility. He was therefore under the necessity of substituting gravity and seriousness of manner in public speaking, in room of that warmth and fire of which he was so capable by nature, and which he so much admired in others when managed with prudence.

It was impossible to hear him without attention, or to attend to him without improvement. He had a happy talent at unfolding the strict and proper meaning of the sacred writer, in any text from which he



chose to discourse ; at concentrating and giving perfect unity to every subject which he treated, and presenting to his audience the clearest and most comprehensive views of it. His sermons were distinguished for judicious and accurate division, for profound remarks on human nature and human life, and for luminous illustrations of Scripture. In his discourses, he delighted to dwell chiefly on the great and distinguishing doctrines of the gospel. And these he brought, as far as possible, to the level of every understanding, and to the feelings of every heart. He seldom chose to lead his hearers into speculative discussions, and never to entertain them by a mere display of talents. All ostentation in the pulpit he viewed with the utmost aversion and contempt. During the whole of his Presidency, he was extremely solicitous to train those studious youths who had the ministry of the gospel in view in such a manner, as to secure the greatest respectability, as well as usefulness, in their sacred profession. It was his constant advice to young preachers, never to enter the pulpit without the most careful preparation. It was his ambition and his hope to render those in the holy ministry the

most pious and exemplary body of men in the American Republic.

His *personal religion* is well known. Few men were ever more anxious to walk close with God, and by a sober, righteous, and pious life, to adorn the doctrines of the gospel. Besides the daily devotions of the closet and the family, he regularly set apart, with his household, the last day of every year, for fasting, humiliation and prayer. He was also in the practice of spending days in *secret* exercises of this kind as occasion required. He was enabled, while on earth, to "continue patiently in well doing," and he is now in heaven enjoying his everlasting reward.

"The memory of the just is blessed."—  
May we all be adorned with their character,  
and admitted to their happiness.

Canongate, Edin. }  
August 1804. }

N.B. The materials of this Memoir have been chiefly derived from a sermon preached in consequence of Dr WITHERSPOON'S death, by the Rev. Dr RODGERS, senior minister of the United Presbyterian Churches, in the city of New York.