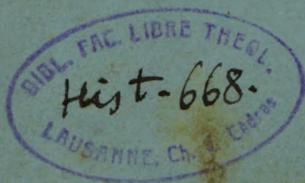

DR. SPRAGUE'S ADDRESS

ON THE

CHARACTER OF WILBERFORCE.



Hist. 668

AN
ADDRESS,
DELIVERED BEFORE
THE LITERARY SOCIETIES
OF
THE WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY,
MIDDLETOWN, CONNECTICUT,

JULY 31, 1848.

BY WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.,
OF ALBANY.



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JOEL MUNSELL, PRINTER,
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CORRESPONDENCE.

Wesleyan University, Aug. 1, 1848.

Rev. Sir:

At a meeting of the Philorhetorian and Peithologian Societies, held this morning, the undersigned were appointed a joint committee to tender you their thanks for your eloquent address of last evening, and to request a copy for publication. Most respectfully yours,

G. F. MELLEN,

LORENZO MARSHALL,

J. LA GRANGE MCKOWN,

Philorhetorian.

WM. C. LAWES,

JAMES COLDER,

J. E. BRADSHAW,

Peithologian.

REV. WM. B. SPRAGUE, D. D.

TO MR. G. F. MELLEN AND OTHERS, *composing the joint committee of the Philorhetorian and Peithologian Societies of the Wesleyan University.*

Gentlemen:

The address to which your note refers, I cheerfully place at your disposal, and beg to assure you of my best wishes for your happiness and usefulness.

Very truly yours,

W. B. SPRAGUE.

Albany, Aug. 5, 1848.

ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN OF THE LITERARY SOCIETIES
OF THE WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY :

After I had accepted the invitation with which you were pleased to honour me, to address you on this occasion, I proposed to myself, in all simplicity, the question, in what way I could make this hour tell most benignly on your intellectual and moral well-being; for I felt that such an hour as this, — an hour that you have distinguished from all other hours of the year, and that has been honoured by, I know not how many generations of your predecessors, must be too precious to be given to any profitless speculations. It occurred to me that the occasion might seem to suggest a purely literary topic; but I confess that I had aspirations in the prospect of meeting you, that a mere literary discussion could not satisfy. I thought of speaking

to you of the incentives to high mental culture growing out of the peculiar aspects of the political world; but here again, I felt that such a subject would shut me up too exclusively to the *intellectual*, whereas I wished to say something that might exert a quickening and improving influence upon *all* your higher faculties. I concluded, therefore, at the hazard of violating what may seem almost a law of the occasion, to hold up before you some illustrious example of intelligence and virtue; some great light in the region of cultivated minds, in which the intellectual and the moral are so admirably blended, as to form an imperfect indeed, but still glorious, reflection of the commingled wisdom and purity and beauty of the Highest. I thank God that the world, bad as it is, furnishes so many specimens of the higher forms of human character, that one may very well pause on an occasion like this, before he makes a selection. I cannot think of an individual in modern times in whom greatness and goodness and usefulness are blended in higher perfection, than in WILBERFORCE; and though the generation to which he belonged has scarcely yet passed away, his name, by universal consent, has taken its place on the list of names that can never die.

Of Wilberforce then I propose now to speak; yet not merely or chiefly of the relation he sustained to the great question of British slavery, but of his whole character, as it came out in his whole life. Of course I can attempt nothing but the most general outline; but even in that, we shall, if I mistake not, see humanity in one of its brightest forms; in alliance with as little of the earthly and as much of the ethereal, as we may expect to find in a world of acknowledged imperfection.

William Wilberforce was descended from an ancient family originally settled at Wilberfoss in Yorkshire, whence the family name was derived: the orthography of the name was changed to *Wilberforce* sometime in the seventeenth century. He was the son of Robert and Elizabeth Wilberforce, and was born at Hull, August 24, 1759. Of his earliest years little is known, except that he was distinguished for the feebleness of his frame, the vigour of his intellect and the warmth of his affections. At the age of seven, he was placed under the tuition of the Rev. Joseph Milner, a clergyman of the church of England, distinguished alike for learning and piety. In consequence of the death of his father in 1768, he was transferred, at the age

of nine, to the care of his uncle William Wilberforce, and was sent to live with him in Saint James's place, London. He, however, returned to his mother at Hull, after about three years, where he remained till he was seventeen, when he became a member of St. John's College, Cambridge.

During his residence at college, he was not greatly distinguished as a scholar; though every one saw that he possessed powers which, with ordinary application, might have given him a high rank. It was his misfortune to be the center of a circle of gaiety: his uncommon powers of music combined with his attractive manners and social and generous dispositions, rendered him a universal favourite; and as an illustration of his hospitality, it is related of him that he was in the habit of keeping a large Yorkshire pie in his room, and that every student who came in was at liberty to help himself *sans ceremonie*. He was flattered in respect to his fine powers, even by his tutors; who used indiscreetly to say in his hearing that what others got by fagging, he knew by a sort of intuition. Every one who has watched the developments of the youthful mind, and especially who is familiar with college life, must perceive that, during this

period, he was in circumstances of great jeopardy; and though the trial certainly, for the time, proved unfavourable to the culture of his intellect and the extent of his acquisitions, it did not result in the formation of any vicious habit. It was a proof of his conscientiousness, even at that period, that he refused for a considerable time to subscribe to the articles of the established church, on the ground that he had not bestowed upon them sufficient attention to do it intelligently; notwithstanding this refusal cost him, for the time, his degree. He subsequently, after mature examination, gave his assent to the articles, and his degree was conferred.

Mr. Wilberforce, having inherited a large estate from his uncle who died in 1777, had resolved, before leaving college, to enter at once on public life. Accordingly, having just come of age before the general election in 1780, he commenced a canvass for the representation of Hull, his native town; and he succeeded, notwithstanding his extreme youth and the powerful influence of his competitors. In 1784 he was again chosen as the representative of his townsmen, and at the same time was returned as one of the members for the county of York; when he elected in favour of the latter. This was the

largest county in England, and the responsibility of its representative, greater perhaps than of any other: of course his election to such a place, unconnected as he was with nobility or aristocracy, was the highest testimony that could be rendered to his intelligence and patriotism.

In the autumn of this year (1784) he made a tour on the continent in company with Isaac Milner, afterwards Dean of Carlisle, and several female relatives;—a tour that was rendered memorable by the commencement of a great revolution in his feelings on the subject of religion, which he ever afterwards regarded as the most important epoch of his life. Milner was a strong minded, intelligent man; and though, by no means, an earnest Christian, yet he had too much regard for serious religion to hear Wilberforce, as he occasionally did, treat it with a levity bordering upon profaneness, and withhold all reproof. Accordingly, Milner entered into a discussion with him in regard to the more practical and vital bearings of Christianity; and the impression which his remarks made upon his young friend, was not a little aided by Wilberforce's happening to fall in, at that time, with a well known work of Doctor Doddridge,*—a

*Rise and Progres of Religion in the Soul.

work which he read and re-read and pondered with the most earnest attention. At the same time, the Scriptures, which had hitherto been with him, to a great extent, a neglected book, he made the subject of his daily study, while he earnestly looked for an influence from on high to enable him to feel their sanctifying power. At no distant period, the great principles of his conduct, and the whole purpose of his life, seem to have changed: in every thing that he did, he was under the influence of the powers of the world to come; and even those who made light of his religion and regarded him as an enthusiast, were constrained to acknowledge that he was an honest, devout, benevolent and happy man. He was aware, from the beginning, that this change in his religious character would subject him to no small degree of obloquy, as there was but little of serious religion, at that time, in the higher circles, into which he was chiefly thrown; but he resolved that, in all circumstances, and at all hazards, he would show himself the consistent, practical Christian. He availed himself of an early opportunity to inform Pitt, his most intimate and most attached friend, of the change that had come over him; and though he was apprehensive that Pitt would be

only shocked and disgusted by the communication, he was immediately relieved by an answer which, while it showed Pitt's inability to comprehend the importance of the change, evinced the utmost respect for his feelings and the deepest interest in his welfare.

During his attendance at Parliament in 1787, being deeply impressed with the general prevalence of immorality throughout the nation, he set himself to devise some means for its suppression; and the result was the establishment of the "society," somewhat after the model of one that had existed more than a century before, "for the reformation of manners." Notwithstanding he was violently opposed in this effort, he succeeded in enlisting in its behalf several of the more prominent bishops and a considerable number of the nobility; and it was but a short time before it was in active operation, with the Duke of Montague at its head. This was the first in the series of those great philanthropic institutions, which now stand forth in such a glorious cluster on the page of modern British history.

But it was not merely the society for the reformation of manners with which he was occupied during this year: this was also the period

at which he first gave himself fully to the great enterprise which emphatically constituted the business of his life. It would seem that, from his early childhood, he had been strongly impressed by the accounts which he had heard and read of the horrors of the slave trade; and when it came to be a matter of mature reflection with him, especially after he had yielded himself to the full control of religious principle, his spirit burned within him to do something to arrest this fearful traffic in the bodies and souls of men. He did not address himself to the work without having first counted the cost: he saw that the evil he was about to attack was fortified by the prejudices of a large part of the nation; that the public mind had been so little directed towards it that the public conscience was asleep; while those who were immediately concerned in the trade would bestir themselves in opposition to the movement on the ground that their craft was in danger. He knew full well that all that cold-blooded selfishness and avarice and malignity could do, he should have to encounter. But none of these things moved him; neither counted he his ease, or his fortune, or even his life dear to him, if the accomplishment of this great object of philanthropy should require

the sacrifice. During the preceding year, while yet the public mind had not become agitated on the subject, he had conversed freely with many African merchants, whose communications to him being made without a suspicion of his purpose, were comparatively unreserved; and while they supplied him with much important information, they greatly strengthened his conviction of the importance of his contemplated enterprise. Pitt seems to have been the first person to whom he communicated his intention; and he at once expressed a high sense of its importance, and assured Wilberforce of his prompt and cordial coöperation. About the same time, there were about a dozen humane individuals in London, chiefly Quakers, with Granville Sharp at their head, who formed themselves into a committee to collect information, and raise funds, and circulate publications, in aid of the same object. Thomas Clarkson, who had the year before, published a prize essay on this subject, now became acquainted with Wilberforce; and it is hardly necessary to say that they were ever afterwards fellow helpers in this glorious cause.

Wilberforce having given public notice of his intention to move Parliament on this subject,

a general interest was almost immediately awakened in relation to it throughout the country: associations were formed in almost every town of any importance, and petitions poured in from every quarter, in aid of the great object; though there was at the same time a waking up of the enemies of the cause to a proportionally vigorous opposition. At this juncture, notwithstanding the administration as a body were in favour of the cause, Mr. Pitt, the minister, with a view to procure the evidence necessary to a successful result, consented to issue a summons to the privy council, to examine as a board of trade, the state of their commercial intercourse with Africa. While this examination was going forward on the one hand, and the friends of the cause were preparing their evidence and marshalling their witnesses on the other, Wilberforce was taken suddenly ill, and there was great reason to apprehend, for a time, that he was finally withdrawn from this and every other field of earthly labour. Finding it absolutely necessary to retire, at least for a season, he obtained from Pitt a promise that he would charge himself with the interests of the cause during his absence; and upon this he went off on an ex-

cursion for his health, which, happily, had the effect of restoring him to his usual state.

In 1789 we find him again in Parliament, opening a debate on the question of the slave trade, in a speech of great eloquence and power,—a speech of which Burke and Pitt and Fox all spoke in terms of the highest admiration. Each of them also supported his motion in a separate speech, declaring that the slave trade was *the* foul spot on the character of the British nation. Wilberforce writes in his private journal, that “that was a glorious night for the country.” But though the question before them, involving a condemnation of the slave trade, was carried without opposition, yet there were many obstacles still to be encountered before the ultimate result upon which his heart was set could be reached. Accordingly in 1791, when he moved for leave to bring in a bill to prevent the further importation of African negroes into the British colonies, he was defeated by a majority of seventy-five. In 1792 he made another attempt, supported by the rival statesmen, Pitt and Fox, and so far succeeded as to carry a resolution for the gradual abolition of the slave trade, with only eighty-five dissenting voices. In the years 1795, 96, 98, 99, 1802, 4 and 5, we find

him pressing this question upon the attention of Parliament, with various degrees of encouragement, but it was not till the year 1807, during the short administration that followed on the death of Mr. Fox, that he was permitted to see the full effect of his labours in the passage of a bill for the abolition of the slave trade through both houses of Parliament. Of his subsequent efforts in the cause of emancipation, — of the earnestness with which he attempted to influence foreign powers on the subject, and of his strong convictions and cogent reasonings in favour of the principle of compensation as a matter of justice to the slave owners, the time does not permit me to speak; suffice it to say that the history throughout is one of the deepest interest, showing at every stage the operations of a great mind and a benevolent heart.

In what remains of the history of his life, I can only hint at a few of the most prominent events, and must refer you to his biography for the filling up of the outline; — a work, by the way, which, however creditable it may be to filial affection, is so cumbrous and diffuse and disconnected as to be utterly unworthy of its exalted subject. It happens to many a great man that, in the eagerness that is felt to display

and embalm his virtues after he is dead, there is actual injustice done to his memory; but, fortunately, in the present case, the subject is one that is as truly proof against the mistakes of filial fondness as against the aspersions of prejudice and malignity.

The war which broke out between France and England in 1792, was the occasion of a difference between Wilberforce and Pitt, which, by the close of the next year, had ripened into an open separation. The minister was strongly in favour of the war, and of the adoption of the most active and decisive measures in regard to it; while Wilberforce was deeply impressed with the conviction that it was unnecessary, and that the government had not done what became them in order to avoid it. However, after it was actually commenced, — circumstances having previously prevented his open opposition to the measure, he tacitly yielded his objections, and supported the king's government as far as he could. It was not long before Pitt and himself were restored to their accustomed friendly relations; and it was much to the honour of the minister that, during the brief period of their separation, he was still ready to lend his influ-

ence in favour of the cause for which, more than any other, he knew that Wilberforce lived.

It was during this year (1792) that he commenced his *tract*, as he called it,—which resulted in his well known work on Practical Christianity. This work occupied him at intervals till 1797, when it was first given to the world. One object in writing it was to explain to his friends the secret of the change which they had seen in him in regard to religion; to bring out to their comprehension those principles the operation of which they witnessed in his life. Every one knows that this work has circulated beyond almost any other religious publication of so recent date in the English language. I once had the honour of receiving a copy of it from his own hand; and as he gave it to me, he remarked that he had much cause for gratitude for the good that it had accomplished; and that, when first published, he sent a copy of it to Pitt, who expressed his high approbation of it; but he added, “Poor fellow, I fear he never gave much attention to the subject of which it treats.” It is an interesting fact that Burke was occupied in reading this book during the last two days of his life, and declared that “it was a source of much comfort to him, and that, if he lived, he should

thank Mr. Wilberforce for having sent such a work into the world.”

In 1797, when he was at the age of thirty-six, he was married to a Miss Spooner of Bath,—a lady of great excellence and high accomplishments, who was every way fitted for the responsible station to which her marriage introduced her. She proved herself worthy of his affection and his choice; and lived to witness the usefulness and splendour of his whole subsequent course, and, for aught I know, still lives to witness the grateful offerings with which his memory is perfumed.

In 1803 he was actively engaged in the formation of the British and Foreign Bible Society,—an institution towards which his heart was ever afterwards attracted as one of the brightest glories of the age; and on the preceding year he had been no less active in the establishment of the well known periodical called the *Christian Observer*,—a work which always had his cordial support, and was not unfrequently enriched with his eloquent and able contributions. In 1808 his mind was much occupied in promoting the cause of East Indian missions,—especially in defeating an effort that was made in the court of directors of the East India Company, to prevent

the diffusion of Christian knowledge through the empire. He found on this occasion many noble spirits coming to his aid, and the result was a most gratifying triumph of Christian benevolence.

In 1811 and 1812 he was greatly concerned on account of the prospect of a rupture between Great Britain and the United States, and exerted himself to the utmost to prevent it. He deprecated it not only on the general ground of his abhorrence of war under any circumstances, but especially on the ground that this would be a war between nations in whose veins flowed the same blood, and who constituted the two great bulwarks of Protestant Christendom. When, however, he found that the evil could not be averted, and that the two nations were actually involved in the horrors of war, he comforted himself by the reflection that he had done what he could to prevent it, and composed his mind to a cheerful confidence in Him who "rides in the whirlwind and directs the storm." Thirty years before,—immediately after his first appearance in Parliament, he pronounced the struggle which issued in our independence "a mad and calamitous war" on the part of Britain, and spoke earnestly in favour of the

treaty of peace; and though he did not regard his own government as alike censurable in the war of 1776 and of 1812, yet it was on every account an occasion of the deepest regret to him that the amicable relations between the two countries, to the establishment of which he had lent his early influence, should be even temporarily interrupted.

In 1812 his health had suffered so much from long continued and incessant occupation with the duties of public life, that he became satisfied that some diminution of his labours was demanded; and accordingly, after much deliberation and consultation with his friends, he formed and announced the purpose of resigning his place as member for Yorkshire. But no sooner had he done this, than he was returned member for the borough of Bramber; and this he readily accepted on the ground that, while it would devolve upon him much less of care and responsibility than his former place, it would still secure to him the privilege of doing something to guide the counsels and guard the interests of the nation. He soon found, however, that the change in his political relations had done little to lessen the weight of his public cares; for whether he was member for Yorkshire or for Bramber, no

question of moment could arise, but that his active influence was put in requisition. He continued in public life till 1825, when he retired, after having been a member of Parliament forty-five years. It may safely be said that no man ever retired from public service with a brighter name.

The last years of this venerable man, though they were spent in comparative retirement, were yet as full of benevolent occupation as his enfeebled health would permit. While he carefully noted the various aspects of Providence in respect to his own country and the world, and yielded a cordial support to every object of benevolence that came within his reach, and was alive to all the interests of humanity, in whatever form they might be presented to him, he was especially occupied in the culture of his own religious affections, thus getting ready to put off his earthly tabernacle. In addition to this, his acquaintance was sought by every body,—from the Emperor Alexander to the humblest American that crossed the Atlantic; and such were his affability and condescension that no one stood in danger of a refusal. During the greater part of his life, he was blessed,—for to him it was indeed a blessing,—with a princely

fortune; but, though he had always lived with economy, yet so extensive had been his charities that in some of his last years his pecuniary resources were considerably reduced; and within a year or two of his death, in consequence of some unfortunate speculations of one of his sons, his means became so limited that he was obliged to give up his establishment at High Wood Hill, and go to reside with his children. To this reverse in his worldly circumstances he submitted with the most exemplary cheerfulness; and his chief regret in respect to the loss of his property seemed to be, that he was not able as formerly to administer to the wants of his fellow creatures.

In the spring of 1833, he was seized with a violent influenza, which proved the immediate cause of his death. He made a journey to Bath, in the hope that the waters might affect him favourably, as they had done on some other occasions; but returned without much perceptible amendment. He reached London on the 19th of July; and his friends anxiously flocked around him, alas, with the vain hope of finding his health improved. But he was now just passing into the twilight of life. The silver cord was about to be loosed, and the wheel broken

at the cistern. He lingered till the 27th, in the exercise of the most humble, grateful, cheerful spirit, and then passed into a brighter world, after having been an inhabitant of this for nearly seventy-four years. In compliance with a request from the lord chancellor and a large number of peers, he was buried in Westminster Abbey; and there his remains now repose, among the most honoured in that great assembly of illustrious dead.

The brief narrative which I have now laid before you, comprising only a few of the leading incidents of his life, is enough to establish the claim of Wilberforce as a great and good man, to the gratitude and veneration of posterity. I will now attempt a more distinct portraiture of his character, by holding up before you some of the leading qualities of which it was composed, and exhibiting him in some of the more important of his relations.

Notwithstanding there is great truth in the proverb that "education makes the man," it is no less true that there is great original diversity among mankind in respect to their physical, intellectual and moral constitution. In regard to the first, Wilberforce was, by no means, among the more highly favoured; for, notwithstanding,

he lived a life of great activity and survived to old age, yet his frame was always feeble; and he used to speak of it as an occasion for gratitude that he was not born in a less civilized age, as he should not probably, with less care, have survived the period of infancy. In stature he was considerably below mediocrity; and towards the close of life,—I know not how it was before,—his body was so much bent and his head so much inclined towards one shoulder, as to give him the appearance of slight deformity. His eyes were constitutionally weak,—an infirmity which attended him through life. There was nothing of beauty in his features, whether taken separately or together; but his countenance had a most radiant expression,—a beaming forth of all that is graceful and lovely; so that he held your eye as by a magical attraction. His voice was perfect melody; susceptible of every inflection and intonation necessary to the highest perfection both in music and oratory.

The vigour of his intellect presented a striking contrast to the feebleness of his frame. His perceptions were uncommonly quick, his judgment sound, his imagination brilliant and excursive, his taste the perfection of delicacy. As might be expected from such a combina-

tion of intellectual qualities, he abounded in wit; though his good sense always kept it under suitable control. He was also naturally a keen mimic; and would sometimes take off old Lord North so admirably as to convulse a large company. He seems, however, to have been early cured of this propensity by the remark of some nobleman, that it was "at best a vulgar accomplishment."

In his moral dispositions he was not less distinguished than in his intellectual powers. In his childhood he exhibited a deep conscientiousness, which had doubtless much to do in preserving him from early vicious habits, and in predisposing him to yield to the influences of religion. But that moral quality which chiefly distinguished him was benevolence. His heart glowed with kindly and generous feelings, so that human misery could not come in his way, but that he was intent upon finding a remedy for it. He was also preëminently social: he delighted greatly in the company of his friends, and was the life of every circle.

Such was Wilberforce in his original constitution. The time does not permit me to trace out all the influences by which his character was moulded into the noble form which it final-

ly assumed; but there was one influence far more important than the rest, which I cannot omit to notice. I mean the influence of Christianity. Seldom does Christianity find such a subject for her operations, or accomplish in this world so complete and glorious a work.

And what was the change that Christianity produced in him? She found him not a man devoted to vicious indulgences, not a contemner of the obligations of religion, but a mere lover of gaiety; and she rendered him thoughtful, humble and devout. She found him in eager pursuit of worldly honour, and drew forth his aspirations towards that higher honour that cometh from God only. She taught him to judge himself by a new rule, to conform to a new and spiritual standard, to live with referēce to his eternal well-being. In short, she infused herself into his whole soul, and became the living, moving principle of all his actions.

There is much, my friends, that passes in the world for religion, that but ill deserves the name. There is a miserable sentimentalism that has its being in airy dreams and exquisite fancies. There is a reckless fanaticism that acts as a consuming fire upon truth and charity, and even decency. There is a chilling formality that en-

trenches itself behind articles of faith, or forms of worship, or modes of discipline,—no matter how good or how bad they may be; and wraps itself in the mantle of its own complacency, as if it had made its calling and election sure. But such was not the religion of Wilberforce. *His* religion began with the intellect, in a full conviction of the divine authority of Christianity and of the truth of all its revelations. It extended to the heart,—regulating and pacifying the conscience, and reducing all the passions and affections to its pure and spiritual dominion. It controlled the life,—diffusing its influence over every relation, and dictating an uninterrupted course of justice and charity. In short, his Christian character was eminently consistent. To his own eye, turned inward as it constantly was, upon the operations of his heart, it seemed indeed exceedingly defective; and his journal abounds with expressions of deepest humiliation; but to those who only saw what was external, it appeared with almost unclouded glory.

It deserves here to be remarked as one secret of Wilberforce's exalted Christian attainments, that he was thrown into circumstances which demanded great watchfulness, and subjected

him to continual conflict. He was not only exposed to the ordinary vexations and temptations incident to public life, but he was the only man of note in the British Parliament whose religious character was so marked as to attract attention; and there were not wanting those who, both in public and in private, made his piety the subject of derision. But he held on his course against all these untoward influences; and the effort that was necessary to this constituted that deep inward discipline, without which eminence in the graces and virtues of Christianity is never attained.

I wish I had time to linger here a little amidst the scenes of his domestic and social life. I would conduct you to his family, and show him to you there, the model of a husband and a father; now directing and aiding the sports of his children, now instructing them in the great principles of duty and leading them to the throne of the heavenly grace, and always diffusing around him a charm which the most casual visitor could not but feel. I would ask you to follow him around into the various circles in which he mingled, and observe how considerate and graceful and benevolent were all his movements; how he was at home alike in

the king's palace and by the bed side of a dying peasant; how his heart glowed with affection for his friends and with joy at seeing them happy; how easily he could condescend to those who were below him, and keep them from all painful comparisons of the dignity of his rank with the humility of their own; in short, how well he befitted and adorned all the more private stations which he held in society. But this would lead me into too wide a range. I must, therefore, hasten to present him before you in the more public characters of a statesman and a philanthropist; the two characters,—if indeed, in his case, they are to be considered as separate,—in which he is chiefly to live in the gratitude and admiration of posterity.

If I mistake not, the character of Wilberforce as a statesman has suffered in one respect from being always contemplated in connexion with his character as a philanthropist; as if the latter from its superior glory had cast the former into the shade. While his works of faith and labours of love are extolled as worthy of all imitation and beyond all praise, it seems often to be tacitly conceded that his mere intellectual efforts scarcely rose above a respectable mediocrity. But this is a capital mistake. No one, even with

the heart of an angel, could have accomplished what he did in the British Parliament, unless his intellectual endowments also had been of a superior order. Besides, the greatest minds of which England can boast rendered their testimony to his exalted powers; and to no other man were the eyes of his illustrious contemporaries, in common with the nation at large, directed more frequently than to him, in seasons of public danger and calamity. What then are some of the more prominent qualities by which his character, as a statesman, was distinguished?

He was distinguished for his *wisdom*. His mind was not only quick and clear in its perceptions, but far-reaching also; comprehending, as if by intuition, the remoter relations of things, and anticipating distant results, which minds endued with only an ordinary degree of prescience would never reach. The great objects at which he aimed as a statesman, were worthy of the highest patriotism and philanthropy; and the means which he used for their accomplishment, while they were dictated by the most considerate regard for truth and right, were admirably adapted to their proposed ends. His intimate knowledge of human nature, supplied partly by his habit of self-communion, and partly

by observation of the conduct of others, was of the greatest importance to him; now inspiring him with confidence when others were doubtful, and now holding him back when others would rush forward at their peril. Notwithstanding the natural quickness of his spirit, he had disciplined himself to the most deliberate caution in all matters of moment; and when a great question was presented to him, he would sometimes hold his mind for a long time in suspense, watching the light from every quarter, and especially seeking the wisdom that cometh from above; and when his judgment was finally made up, he rarely had occasion to alter it. If any one doubts his wisdom, the answer is that he projected and carried forward and finally accomplished one of the most arduous enterprises that ever *was* accomplished independently of a miraculous agency; and we have the alternative of supposing either that he was a pre-eminently wise man, or the most fortunate blunderer of whom history has given us any account.

Wilberforce, as I am about to show you, had other noble qualities of a statesman besides wisdom; but so essential was this element in his character that without it he had been an

entirely different man. And without it, let me say, no man is fit to be charged with the interests of his state or nation. It is not the quality, I well know, which glares most imposingly upon the world,—not the quality that is most likely to be enshrined in a glorious newspaper paragraph, or to accumulate upon one the plaudits of the multitude; but it is preëminently the quality that stands as a security for the public weal, and without which, legislation is less likely to be a blessing than a curse. The demagogue not unfrequently makes himself heard to the extremities of the nation, and by multitudes is applauded as a stirring patriot, while yet his influence is evil, and only evil, and that continually: the truly wise statesman, on the other hand, may scarcely ever be heard at all; and may perhaps scarcely be known beyond a very contracted circle; and yet the influence of his counsels may be felt through all the departments of public life, and may vibrate even to the minutest and most distant fibre of the body politic. It is always bad policy to choose eccentric men for rulers; for men of great eccentricity rarely have much wisdom. If wisdom in the high sense and to the same extent in which it was possessed by Wilberforce, is an uncommon

endowment, and therefore not often to be looked for in rulers, yet surely common sense is not so rare that any community need despair of finding it; and common sense in a statesman is greater than all eloquence and all learning without it.

Wilberforce was an upright statesman: there is not an instance in the whole history of his public life, in which can be detected the least departure from an incorruptible integrity. The first question that he had to settle in regard to any matter that claimed his attention, was, "What is right?" In deciding upon this, he was always upon his guard against the influence of prejudice and passion, and weighed with the utmost impartiality all the attending circumstances of the case; but when his mind was once made up, his conduct was always in accordance with his convictions. There were several instances in which he found himself constrained to differ from Pitt his bosom friend; and though it cost him a severe struggle to pursue his own course at the expense of opposing his friend, yet he never hesitated for a moment when Pitt was on one side, and his own conscience on the other. There were times also when an adherence to his convictions subjected him to a temporary loss of the favour of the royal family: the prince re-

gent repeatedly frowned upon him; and in one instance the king refused to recognise him at a levee; but neither the prince nor the king had majesty enough to make him swerve a single step from what he believed to be the path of duty. He forgot not that he was a subject of the King of Heaven; and that *his* will was paramount to the will of any earthly monarch; and while he would gladly yield obedience to both, yet, when there were conflicting claims, he never hesitated to obey God rather than man. How opposite to this is that spirit of political dissimulation and intrigue, which so often disgraces the councils of nations, and I fear none more than our own! How many are there who legislate, not for their country's welfare, but for their own personal aggrandizement, or at best for the triumph of a party! How many who never think of taking counsel of conscience or of God, when they are approaching questions in which their nation's weal or wo is most deeply involved! Oh that the spirit of Wilberforce might rest upon all our senators and counsellors; and that each one, in imitation of that illustrious man, might take for his motto, "Let mine integrity and uprightness preserve me!"

Wilberforce was also an eloquent statesman.

The uncommon sweetness and flexibility and power of his voice, the gracefulness of his air and gesture, and his remarkable command of the most appropriate and glowing thoughts and expressions, gave him an advantage as an orator that few men have ever possessed. The effect of some of his speeches on the abolition of the slave trade, approaches near to the very highest effect of parliamentary eloquence. By a single speech he is known to have gained over to his cause forty of the members of the House of Commons; and whatever might be the prospect of any question in debate, all felt that the fate of it was not decided while Wilberforce was yet to speak. But he never spoke unless there was manifest occasion; and when he did speak, it was not as one who was entranced by the melody of his own voice, or the perfection of his own oratory, but as one who had an end to accomplish far above personal display,—nothing less than to move the minds of his hearers in favour of the interests of his country or his race. Would that many of our *little* statesmen would sit at his feet and learn of him; and that, when they are getting ready for a long speech and a glorious display, at the nation's expense, but without any thought of the nation's benefit,

they would think of Wilberforce, and be contented to—hold their tongues.

Wilberforce's career as a statesman was distinguished by activity and diligence. It too often happens that men in high places of civil trust, if they do not use for purposes of evil the influence thus secured to them, seem to imagine that they have little else to do than indolently repose amidst the honours of an exalted station. Particularly if they are members of a great legislative body, that shares in common the responsibility of what is done and what is left undone, they fancy that they can play the drone without much chance of detection, or at least of public exposure; and hence they not only do nothing themselves, but scarcely preserve sufficient wakefulness of mind to notice what others are doing around them. Aye, and it were well if this were all; but there are men too whose names are read as often as the roll of the nation's representatives is called, whose chief employment is the indulgence of their own vicious appetites and the corruption of their fellow men. What a glorious contrast to both these classes was Wilberforce! In accepting a place in Parliament, he felt that he became responsible, in a degree, for the nation's prosperity; and that he

was bound to his country and bound to his God, to fulfil the trust committed to him to the extent of his ability. Accordingly we always find him in his place,—always find him in the attitude of vigilance and ready for action. Nothing favourable, nothing adverse, escaped his observant eye. He was alike at home in the committee room and in the senate house; and as ready to task his faculties for the benefit of his country in private as in public. Though his health in its best state was precarious, and his hold on life for many years was extremely feeble, his intervals of relaxation were few and brief; and even when he was absolutely forced away from his labours by serious illness, the great objects for which he was labouring still kept their place in his thoughts and his prayers; and the first signs of returning strength he hailed as the harbingers of return to his accustomed field. No, no, he was not the man to find any attractions in a life of indolence and self-indulgence: on the contrary, he was never satisfied unless he was straining every nerve, exerting every faculty, in the discharge of the duties which his station devolved upon him.

Such was Wilberforce as a statesman: let us now view him as a philanthropist. The two

characters, as I have already intimated, were so blended in him, that it is not easy to separate them in our reflections; for it was chiefly in the character of a statesman that he put forth his philanthropic efforts.

I say then, his philanthropy was eminently a philanthropy of principle. There is a sort of beneficence not uncommon in the world, that consists in obedience to the impulses of a generous and sometimes of an erratic spirit, without regard to the dictates of conscience or the authority of God. Such a spirit, to say nothing of its inherent defectiveness, will not always operate for good; for it will be capricious in the choice of its subjects, and will be as likely to pour its benefactions upon vice as upon virtue. Wilberforce was indeed originally blessed with a warm and sympathizing heart: there never was a time from his earliest childhood when he could listen with indifference to the tale of distress, let it come from whomsoever and in whatever form it might. But his philanthropy ultimately was far enough from being a mere matter of feeling; it was founded in a deep conviction of right; it was the homage of a virtuous mind to the will of the Creator. The great law which God has given for the regulation of our

social conduct, of doing to others as we would that they should do to us, was engraven upon his memory and his heart as with the point of a diamond; and his whole life was a strict conformity to that law. No matter whether he was labouring for the abolition of the slave trade, or establishing schools for the instruction of the destitute, or dealing out bread to the beggar at his door, he was not merely acting in accordance with the sympathies of his nature, but was swayed by the dictates of Christian principle. His religion taught him to regard the objects of suffering all over the world as his brethren,—taught him to consider whatever constituted his ability to relieve them as a trust from the great Lord and Master of all; and he heard and heeded her infallible teachings.

It was an interesting feature in his philanthropy, that though it was directed chiefly to one great object, yet it was by no means exclusive in its operations. It is well for any individual who would labour to the best purpose in the cause of human improvement, to have some one commanding object before him towards which his efforts shall be chiefly directed; for the long continued and steady contemplation of an important object, not only secures a better

acquaintance with its bearings and a deeper impression of its importance, but also reveals new facilities for the prosecution of it. Had not the energy of Wilberforce been concentrated chiefly on the slave trade, he never would have stood forth the honoured instrument of its abolition; but the more he held it to his mind, the more its horror grew upon him: the more familiar he became with its difficulties, the more strength he felt to encounter them: the farther he advanced, the greater was the amount of influence which he brought to his aid: and in the review, he was himself amazed at what Providence had wrought by his instrumentality. But while this was the object to which his life was chiefly given, he was far enough from overlooking the claims of other objects which were constantly offering themselves to his regard. He was the founder of various schools in different parts of the country for the education, especially the religious education, of the poor. He had more to do than almost any other man in establishing and sustaining several of the earliest and most important of the British institutions of benevolence. When any question was agitated in Parliament, involving the rights or the interests of his fellow men,—no matter

whether Catholics or Protestants,—no matter whether inhabitants of England or Ireland or India,—his voice was always heard in defence of the claims of humanity. Almost every form of private distress, from time to time, passed under his eye, or at least found favour at his hands; and he has even been known, when visiting a nobleman, to wander off to a miserable hovel in the neighbourhood, and pray and administer Christian counsel and consolation at the bed-side of one of its dying inmates. Indeed he would have well established his claim to the character of a philanthropist, if that which gives him his chief glory,—the abolition of the slave trade, had never been attempted; for wherever he moved, his path was rendered fragrant by his offerings for the relief of human wo. How unlike this is the character of some of our modern philanthropists! They have no heart, nor hand, nor tongue, but for a single object; and *that* possibly of an equivocal character. They live and move and have their being within the limits of a nut shell. They judge of your philanthropy, even of your Christianity, by your readiness to coöperate with them; and whatever you may be in other respects,—if you fail at this point, they set you down as little

better than a universal hater of men. If I may say what I think of this class of philanthropists, I must say that I greatly fear that they know not what manner of spirit they are of. I must say that the fact that they have no bowels of compassion except for one object, leads me to suspect that even in regard to that one they may be deceived; and that if they could look on the naked principle that animates them, they would marvel to find how little it differs from selfishness or vain glory.

I scarcely need add, after what I have said already, that the philanthropy of Wilberforce was characterized by the utmost perseverance. It is not easy for us adequately to comprehend the full amount of opposition which he had to encounter in the prosecution of his great enterprise. There was the accumulated prejudice of several successive generations. There was selfishness in the form of the most rapacious avarice, operating in favour of the traffic. There was a low state of moral feeling in the nation at large. There was, even on the part of those who acknowledged and deprecated the evil, a dread of giving offence to the great and rich men who favoured it; as well as a conviction that the monster had so much power that it was well-

nigh hopeless to think of destroying him. Burke's attention had been directed to this subject as early as 1780; and he had even gone so far as to sketch some plan of reform; but upon farther reflection, he gave it up as an impracticable project. But Wilberforce not only projected his plan, but carried it out. What was at first conceived in the secrecy of his own great soul, was gradually matured by reflection and counsel, till it ripened into a determined purpose, and was proclaimed in the ear of the whole nation. And that purpose for twenty years held him in a course of earnest and constant effort. The opposition assumed the form, now of malignant scandal, and now of personal violence; and it was exhibited every where, from the bar room up to the Parliament House and the Palace. More than once there was an attempt made upon his life; but God, by his providence, kept him out of the murderer's hands. Such was his confidence in the rectitude of his cause, and such his conviction that he was called to enlist in it, that he feared no opposition; he shrunk from no danger; he moved forward to the accomplishment of his object as steadily and serenely as the sun moves through the Heavens. The experience of multitudes teaches us that it

is easier to project great things, to attempt great things, than to accomplish them. Many of us form plans of usefulness, to the execution of which we are abundantly adequate; but alas, the record of them remains, if it remains at all, only as a testimony to the weakness of our resolution and the sluggishness and inconstancy of our efforts. What a rebuke to this spirit is furnished by the example of this illustrious man! What labourer in the cause of humanity is there, but may be edified and strengthened by his unyielding perseverance.

But notwithstanding the high degree in which he possessed this quality, he was mild and conciliatory in all his movements. He did not, like many pretended reformers at this day, claim the privilege of abusing every man who did not see with his eyes: not only his opponents in Parliament, but even the traffickers themselves, he always treated with the utmost courtesy. With the traffic indeed he kept no terms; he declared openly and every where his conviction that it was an offence against the dignity of man's nature; against every social obligation; against the recorded will of the Infinite Majesty; but the men who were concerned in it, he treated as men having a common nature with himself; and he even

made every apology that his benevolence could invent for their adherence to the traffic and their opposition to his efforts. He had no idea of serving one class at the expense of vilifying and injuring another; no idea of the doctrine which some in our day seem to have embraced,—that one cannot speak plainly without speaking reproachfully; that one cannot labour efficiently in any good cause without borrowing his armour from the world below,—I had almost said, without being baptized into the spirit of the father of lies. Let our advocates of truth and righteousness and humanity, be as earnest and as honest as they will; but let the successful issue of Wilberforce's enterprise teach them, that even earnestness and honesty lose none of their virtue by being tempered with gentleness and condescension.

Wilberforce was signally blessed in his friends. During his whole life he was constantly in the society of the good and the great. Men of the highest rank,—the nobles, and even the king himself, welcomed him as an associate. The most commanding spirits of the age, Pitt and Burke and Fox, and that whole galaxy of illustrious minds that marked one of the brightest epochs of British history, were on terms of constant intimacy with him, and some of them

were his bosom friends. He was in frequent communion also with some of the greatest lights in the religious world; with the Thorntons, eminent for piety and benevolence; with Milner and Newton and Richmond and Hall and Chalmers, and many others, both in and out of the established church, whose names will ever be fragrant in the walks of Christian usefulness. I say *out* of the established church; for to his honour be it spoken, his Christian sympathies were always awake to true excellence, independently of all denominational peculiarities; and I remember myself to have heard him speak of Robert Hall in terms of unmeasured praise. Jay, another great light among the dissenters, was one of his particular favourites; and that highest style of a quaker, Joseph John Gurney, was among those who were admitted most into the interior of his heart. But of all his cherished friendships, that perhaps was the most interesting, that existed between himself and Mrs. Hannah More. They became acquainted while they were both young; and they imbibed the utmost admiration for each others' characters, which soon matured into a devoted and enduring friendship. Wilberforce had an ample fortune and a noble soul; but he was so much oc-

occupied with public engagements, that he had little time to search out objects of charity, or to weigh the claims of many that were presented to him. Mrs. More became to a considerable extent his almoner. She visited in person neighbourhoods that were sunk in the lowest degradation, and applied the bounty furnished by her friend to the establishment of schools in those dark places, which she herself superintended with most patient and self-denied effort. Being alike in their benevolent and religious sympathies, they were fellow helpers in most of the great objects that claimed their regard. They rejoiced in each others' joy, and felt the burden of each others' sorrows; and each evidently looked to the other as a counsellor and a comforter. They were friends in the freshness of their youth; they were friends at the noon day of life; and their mutual affection was never stronger than after age had furrowed their cheeks, and, to a great extent, paralyzed their energies. They were separated but for a little season by death. Each had a glorious transition to the next world, where we doubt not they enjoy the communion of saints and the life everlasting.

The character of Wilberforce's friends furnish-

es an index to his own character, while it may account for some degree of his superior wisdom and excellence. It was because he was himself great and good, that the greatest and best men of the age courted an intimacy with him. They were more than willing to have their intellects quickened by contact with his, and their affections improved by communion with his devout spirit. And then it cannot be doubted that they in turn shed upon him an invigorating and ennobling influence; that Pitt and Burke improved his fine powers, and Newton and Hall aided his spirituality; in short, that he was a greater and better man, from having his lot cast in such elevated society. There were indeed peculiar dangers to his Christian character connected with much of his intercourse; but that which might have been for evil, was, by his uncommon vigilance and fidelity, rendered even tributary to his religious improvement.

And what was it that imparted to the character of Wilberforce such glorious attraction? It was not merely that he had naturally an amiable and generous spirit; for multitudes who possess that live and die mere cumberers of the ground. It was not merely that he had a noble intellect; for the world's greatest minds have not unfre-

quently been its greatest scourges. It was, that Christianity had her throne in the innermost sanctuary of his soul. She breathed in all his noble aspirations. She presided over all the great purposes of his life; acting at once as his guardian angel and his gracious guide. Without this Heaven-originated influence, he never could have been what he was in any one of all his relations. It was Christianity that threw the brightest charm over his domestic and social character,—breathing in the grace and loveliness of his manners, and prompting to every act of kindness and good will. Christianity surrounded with additional glory his character as a statesman; she rendered him more wise, especially by keeping him in communion with the fountain of all wisdom. She was the living spring of his integrity; and it was under *her* teachings that he learned to keep a conscience void of offence. She breathed even in his eloquence; for it was from the deep and earnest convictions of duty that she inspired, that his spirit gathered such brightness and loftiness, that he seemed sometimes to be rising on an angel's wing, and glowing with celestial fire. She had much to do also with his exemplary diligence; for she kept whispering in his ear the admonition

that he was a steward, and was bound to improve every talent to the best advantage. And need I add that Christianity was the animating principle of his philanthropy? She kindled in his bosom that irrepressible desire to do good to his fellow creatures that gave character to his whole life. She rendered him fearless of danger, and nerved him for vigorous conflict, and inspired him with unyielding resolution, and put the law of kindness into his heart even toward those with whom he was constrained to contend. In short, the secret of his power, of his success, of his enduring glory, lies chiefly in the fact that his faculties and affections were subject to the habitual control of Christianity.

There was a man in France contemporary with Wilberforce during a part of his career, — a man not a little signalized in the history of his country, whose native powers were perhaps greater than those of Wilberforce himself. He had a mind that could never rest upon the surface of any thing. His plans were always laid with most consummate address; and of the power and grace of his oratory his nation will never cease to be proud. But he came into the world on a vocation of unmixed evil. There was no perfidy so deep, no crime so desperate,

but he stood ready to engage in it. He was, for a while, the presiding spirit among the people; but he urged them onward to ruin. His voice was often heard in the senate house; but there was death concealed amidst the charms of his eloquence. When he saw the ill-fated king enter the assembly decked out with diamonds, he could not forbear to exclaim with fiend-like triumph to one of his accomplices, "Behold the victim!" That man's name is as familiar all over the world as a household word; but who wishes to speak it, except to enforce a warning? But Christianity might have made of Mirabeau another Wilberforce. Under her influence, those great powers the exercise of which was an unbroken homage to evil, might have accomplished wonders in improving the condition, not only of a country but a world. If you ask then what made the difference between the two,—wherefore it is that the memory of the one is cursed, and the memory of the other embalmed, the answer is, the one was an Atheist, the other a Christian.

I have already had occasion to remark that some of England's greatest minds were contemporary with Wilberforce; and their names England and the world must always reverence; but

I appeal to you,—is there not something more hallowed, more elevated, in your impressions of Wilberforce than of any of his illustrious associates? Pitt and Burke, I verily believe, had originally more gifted minds than he; but I venture to say that the memory of neither of them is embalmed so deeply as his, in the veneration and gratitude of their countrymen. Here again, the secret of the difference is, that *they* looked at Christianity at a distance, while it was the companion of all *his* hours; that they viewed it chiefly as a sentiment or a theory, *he*, as a deep, eternal reality. *They* were patriots; but *his* patriotism was purer than *theirs*, because it had its seat in a mind that was under the constant and all pervading influence of religious principle.

My friends, what a mighty amount of good may be crowded within the limits of this brief life! How much did this great man, with his feeble constitution and often failing health, accomplish! Why, if you read his life, you will find that there was nothing good that came under his eye, of which he was not the active patron. He not only smiled on every good enterprise, but lived in it; and not unfrequently was identified with its very existence. Ask you

the reason of his accomplishing so much? Here again, it was found in the depth of his religious convictions; in the strength of the ruling passion of his regenerated nature; in the rigid economy of his time and the ceaseless activity of his mind; and especially in his reliance on that higher power which he recognized as the source of all wisdom and strength. In this respect he is a model, as well to the humblest as the loftiest man in society. It concerns every human being to render the utmost service he can to the great cause of human improvement. It would be a glorious thing to die with Wilberforce's character for benevolent activity, though its object were ever so unpromising, or its field ever so obscure.

I will detain you only to say that Wilberforce was the friend of America. Our cause in the revolution, as I have already remarked, found favour with him in his youth; and through life he cherished towards our country an ever growing regard. Some of our most distinguished statesmen were on terms of intimacy with him; and several of our clergymen too were honoured with his friendship and correspondence. There are many who have carried him letters, who will never cease to cherish among their most

grateful recollections, the cordial welcome with which he met them, and the graceful and whole souled hospitality which he proffered to them. Yes, I repeat, Wilberforce was the friend of America; and let America never cease to venerate her friend. Let his character be a model for her statesmen and philanthropists. Let his name be fragrant in all her halls of science. Let her educated young men, especially let those whom I have now the honour to address, study his history, till it shall reveal to them an elevating and transforming power. Let his spirit, grateful as the breath of the morning, be diffused every where. Thou patriot among patriots, thrice honoured be thy grave among the graves of the great; thrice happy be thy spirit among the spirits of the blest!