

MEMOIR

OF THE

REV. CHARLES NISBET, D.D.

LATE PRESIDENT OF

DICKINSON COLLEGE, CARLISLE.

BY SAMUEL MILLER, D.D.

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PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY.

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of Marischal College, Aberdeen. On this occasion, Dr. Beattie composed and transmitted a beautiful Poem, which he styled EPITHALAMIUM MONTROSIANUM. Pains have been taken to recover this elegant testimonial of friendship from so popular and honoured a pen, but without success.

Not long after Mr. Nisbet became an assistant Minister at Montrose, another event occurred which showed the high esteem and confidence in which he was held by those who were most competent to judge of his character and attainments. In the month of November, 1766, on the death of the Rev. Dr. Finley, President of the College of New Jersey, the Rev. Dr. Witherspoon, then Pastor of the Church of Paisley, in the west of Scotland, was unanimously chosen to succeed him in the Presidentship of that Institution. His first answer to this call was in the negative. He felt himself so bound to the land and the Church of his nativity, that he could not consent to sever himself from them, and go to a land of strangers. While in this state of mind, feeling it impossible that he himself should accept the office, he addressed the following letter to Mr. Nisbet.

“ Paisley, May 25, 1767.”

“ Dear Sir,”

“ I received a letter from you, some time ago, upon the subject of the call from New-Jersey, which I did not answer immediately, as that affair was under deliberation. It has indeed given me the greatest uneasiness that ever any thing of the kind did, for I felt a very strong inclination in myself to comply; but met with so many difficulties from my

family and connexions, particularly my wife's insuperable aversion, that I have been at last obliged to give it up. I find the gentlemen here are still desirous of having one from Scotland, and particularly a young gentleman, Mr. Rush, from that country, a Student of Medicine at Edinburgh, a most agreeable young man, and who has the warmest attachment to the interest of that Seminary, was with me the end of last week on that subject. I then named *you* to him as the person of all my acquaintance the fittest for that office, and said that your being so much younger than me was, in my opinion, an advantage, instead of a loss. He told me you had been mentioned by his friends at Edinburgh; and that he was sure that any person recommended by me to them would be chosen by the Trustees. I, therefore, undertook to write to you on the subject, which I now beg you may take into your immediate serious consideration. I dare say you will consider this as a mark of my undissembled esteem, and assure you that you have not a sincerer friend; and that I believe it to be a station in which you may be eminently useful, as well as a station of much honour and profit. I know there is one difficulty: a prudent man may be backward to give his consent, when there is only a possibility, not a certainty, of his being elected; but when you consider the necessity of the case, and the disappointment they have already incurred, you will be sensible that we cannot write to them to make an election of another in Britain, unless they have reason to think it will be successful; and therefore hope you will overcome this difficulty; and that you may not run the least risque, I

have taken Mr. Rush, and engaged that no person shall know of this application to you but your friends at Edinburgh, Mr. Erskine and Mr. Wallace. Let me have your answer as soon as you possibly can on such a subject."

"I rejoice to hear of Mrs. Nisbet's welfare and fruitfulness; and do heartily wish you much pleasure and comfort in your family. Present my compliments to her in the most affectionate manner.

"I am, dear sir,

"Your affectionate brother,"

"JOHN WITHERSPOON."

When we consider that Mr. Nisbet was now only thirty-one years of age; that the gentleman who spoke thus of him was Doctor Witherspoon, undoubtedly one of the most sagacious and wise men of his day; and that such a judge, who had long and intimately known him, pronounced him "the fittest man of all his acquaintance" to be the head of a College; we are presented with a testimonial of Mr. Nisbet's reputation in Scotland, at this time, for talents and learning, of the most remarkable kind.

Whether, in consequence of this recommendation by Doctor Witherspoon, any movement was ever made in the Board of Trustees of Princeton College towards the election of Mr. Nisbet, is not now known. There is no record to that amount in the minutes of that Body. But the fact is, that in a very short time after this letter announcing his own refusal of the call to America, and recommending Mr. Nisbet, was written, Dr. Witherspoon reconsidered the subject; and intimated to the Trustees of the College that, if