

THE
DISINTERESTED AND DEVOTED CHRISTIAN.

A SERMON, PREACHED AT NASSAU-HALL, PRINCETON, MAY 28, 1761. OCCA-
SIONED BY THE DEATH OF THE REV. SAMUEL DAVIES, A. M. LATE PRESI-
DENT OF THE COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY.

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ROMANS xiv. 7, 8.

*For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we
live, we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord: wheth-
er we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.*

As the very dear and reverend man, whose premature and unexpected death, we, amongst thousands, this day lament, expressed his desire, that, upon this mournful event, a sermon should be preached from these words, he plainly intimated his expectation, that the audience should be entertained, not with an ornamented funeral oration, but with such an instructive discourse as the text itself naturally suggests. The subject being his own choice, I cannot doubt but this friendly audience will the more closely and seriously attend, as conceiving him, though dead, yet speaking to them the solemn truths it contains. For having been admitted into the full knowledge of his religious principles, I may presume on speaking many of the sentiments he intended from this text, though not in his more sublime and oratorical manner.

When I reflect on the truly Christian, generous, yet strict Catholicism that distinguishes this whole chapter, and how deeply it was imprinted on Mr. Davies' own spirit, and influenced the course of his life, I am ready to conclude, that perhaps no text could be more aptly chosen on the occasion. It expresses the very temper that should be predominant in all, and which actually is so in every pious breast.

That we may apprehend the scope and genuine sense of the words, it is necessary to observe, that warm debates at that time arose between the Jewish and Gentile converts, about the difference of meats and days established by the Mosaic law; and, so sharp was the contention, that they were mutually disposed to exclude each other from Christian communion. The Gentile being under no bias from the powerful prejudices of education and custom, was sooner and easier convinced of his freedom from that yoke of bondage, and despised the Jew as weak to admiration, and scrupulous to a fault. The Jew, on the other hand, persuaded that these ancient divine institutions were still obligatory, censured and condemned the Gentile as unconscientious, and profanely regardless of God's awful authority.

The Apostle, in order to quell the growing strife, maturely determines that, though the Gentile held the right side of the question, yet both parties were wrong as to their temper of mind, and the manner in which they managed the

controversy; and that they laid an undue stress on the matters of difference, and carried their censures higher than the merits of the cause would at all justify. He therefore recommends moderation to both, and sets before them sufficient reasons why they should judge of each other more charitably, since they agreed in all those principal points that would justly denominate them “the servants of the Lord.” For if they would reckon it a bold intrusion to call before their tribunal, condemn, and punish another man’s servant, over whom they had no legal authority; how much more arrogant and presumptuous must it be so to treat a servant of the Lord; ver. 4.

Again, let them be so candid as to persuade themselves, that, unless the contrary be evident, they who differ from them, mistaken or not, are influenced by a conscientious regard to the divine glory, ver. 6. This admitted, their personal censures will necessarily be milder, even though their judgment of the points in debate continue unaltered; and this must be admitted, if they can charitably judge, that their respective opponents are real Christians: for in all such the governing principle is, “not to live to themselves, but to the Lord. For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s.” Now, if no pious person lives merely to please himself, we ought not to judge that his aversion from, or attachment to certain meats and days, arises only from a selfish humour: but, on the contrary, since his whole life is governed by an honest regard to the will of God, it is altogether credible that, in his different conduct respecting meats and days, he acts from the same principle; for whatever is true of the general, is also true of all the particulars contained under it. Suppose a man to be a real Christian, you then suppose him to be of an upright heart, of a tender conscience, and one who dares not to neglect, nor live in contradiction to known duty. He makes it his main business to please God, and shall we be implacably disgusted because he does not rather endeavour to please us? God forbid.

Thus, while our text affords a convincing argument for moderation in judging of other Christians, who differ from us in circumstantials, it teaches us what should be the principle and end of our life, and that both negatively and positively. We may not live nor die to ourselves, but to the Lord.

I. “We may not live to ourselves.”

This proposition supposes, what is a demonstrable truth, that we are not the absolute proprietors, and therefore have not the rightful disposal of our lives. For since we could exert no kind of efficiency in bringing ourselves from nothing into existence, we could not possibly design ourselves for any end or purpose of our own. Hence it is evident, that, whose property soever we are, we belong not to ourselves; consequently, it is the highest indecency to behave as though we were accountable to none other. As rationally may we claim self-existence and independence. It will, therefore, be an eternal solecism in action to aim chiefly at our own glory, seek only our own things, or pursue most eagerly our own pleasures. Right reason itself peremptorily denies that the dictates of our own minds are our supreme rule of conduct, or that our own will is our law; much less may we subject ourselves to the government of blind passions, or indulge irregular appetites.

We are not at liberty, nor have we any authority, to employ either the members of our bodies, or powers of our souls, at pleasure, as if we had originally designed their use. Hence it will appear criminal, on the one hand, to waste

our time, or expend our strength in useless exercises; and, on the other, to allow an idle negligence in necessary business. Our tongues themselves, those unruly members, must be patient of restraint; for it is the language only of haughty rebels to say, "Our lips are our own, who is lord over us?" Psalm xii. 4. Our very thoughts are to be confined within prescribed limits, and all our rational powers stately exercised, not in merely curious and amusing researches, but in matters the most useful and important.

It also follows, that the product of our activity, whatever is acquired by the exertion of these powers, ought not to terminate in ourselves. Are we in pursuit of learning, that ornament of human minds, it should not be with a view only to shine more conspicuous, but that we may serve our generation to better advantage. Has God blessed "the hand of the diligent" with abundant riches? We are not to consider them as the means of gratifying vanity, or "fulfilling the desires of the flesh, and of the mind;" for we must "honour the Lord with our substance." Prov. iii. 9. Has God clothed any of us with power? This is not a discharge from his service, nor a freedom from subjection to his laws, but a stronger obligation to duty, as it gives us an opportunity of more extensive usefulness.

Finally, since we were not the authors of our lives, we can have no right to take them away. We have no power to determine, either the time or kind of death, any more than we can ward off, or suspend its blow when commissioned to destroy. Therefore, amidst all the miseries that can make life itself an insupportable burden, and all the glorious prospects that can make us impatiently pant for dissolution, it must be our determinate purpose, that "all the days of our appointed time, we will wait till our change come." Job xiv. 14.

As these particulars, examined by the strictest reason, will all appear to be immediate consequences from self-evident principles, and must all be confessed by him, who acknowledges that "he is not his own lord and master;" it will follow as an evident truth, that the evangelical duty of self-denial is founded on the everlasting reason of things.

Reflecting farther on the preceding observations, they force upon us the disagreeable conviction, that our whole race has revolted from God, and risen up in rebellion against him. "The world evidently lies in wickedness;" for the allowed practice of men supposes principles, which, they themselves being judges, must confess to be palpably false and absurd. They act as if they believed they were made for themselves, and had no other business in life but the gratification of their respective humours. One exerts all his powers, and spends all his time in nothing else but endeavouring to amass heaps of worldly treasure: another, by riotous living, disperses what had been collected with anxious care and assiduous labour. Some live in malice and envy, whose favourite employ is calumny and wrathful contentions, as if they had been created for no other end but to be the pests of society: others blaspheme the name of God, despise his authority, mock at religion, and ridicule serious persons and things. One has no other purpose in life but sport and merriment: another eats to gluttony, and drinks to besottedness. Yet all these, and nameless ranks of other daring offenders, would be ashamed in a Christian country to profess it as their serious belief, that they were made by a most wise, holy, and righteous God, preserved, blessed, and loaded with benefits every day, on purpose that they "might work all these abominations," or, in order to live just as they do.

If, then, it is confessedly impious and unreasonable to live to ourselves, it necessarily follows that we are the property of another, for it will ever be “lawful for one to do what he will with his own.” And whose can we be but his who gave us existence? Or, if ties of gratitude can more powerfully influence ingenuous minds than even those of nature, who can so justly claim us as he, who, as we hope, “loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood?” Rev. i. 5. This leads me to observe,

II. That we should “live and die to the Lord.” This can admit of no debate; for if our Maker and Redeemer be our rightful owner, then whatever we are, or have, or can do, must be for him. Being his servants, we must “shew all good fidelity” in his business. The talents with which he has entrusted us, more or fewer, or of whatever kind, may not be returned without improvement; for, as is fit and proper, he “receives his own with usury.” Matt. xxv. 27. He is our King, whose prerogative it is to direct our course of action, and propose the end at which we are to aim; to “mete out the bounds of our habitation,” and carve our portion; and it becomes us to give the most ready and cheerful obedience to his commands, and submit to all his disposals.

Our living thus to the Lord plainly supposes our being sensible of our entire dependence on him, and that we devote ourselves to his service. We must “present our bodies a living sacrifice,” Rom. xii. 1, without reserve or hesitation; and “avouch the Lord to be our God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and to hearken to his voice.” Deut. xxvi. 17. We bind ourselves to him in a firm covenant, not for a limited term of months and years, but for ever and ever, and acquiesce in Him as our chief good.

The solemnity of such an infinitely important transaction between the glorious majesty of heaven, and such mean creatures as we, who are “but dust and ashes,” cannot but strike us with reverential awe. And what will make it yet more humbling is the consideration of our guilt. We not only as creatures take upon us to speak unto the Lord our Maker, but as criminals approach to the seat of our offended and most righteous Judge. Dare we then trifle, and not rather be most serious and deliberate? Reflecting that we are in the presence of the heart-searching God will naturally make us watchful over every thought and motion of our spirits, and engage us to the greatest sincerity in surrendering to him our all. We will give him our hearts themselves; keep nothing back; nor except against any terms he shall please to propose, but yield at discretion.

On this occasion a consciousness of our having revolted from him, neglected his service, purloined his goods, and, in every respect, behaved most ungratefully and undutifully, will affect us with the most genuine sorrow. Therefore, when repentant we return to him, we shall, covered with shame, approach with the Prodigal’s self-abasing confession, “Father! I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.” Luke xv. 18, 19. He will “surely bear us bemoaning ourselves, like Ephraim,” that we have too long wrought the will of the flesh, and suffered other usurping lords to have dominion over us; but now we humbly beg forgiveness, his gracious acceptance of our persons, and admission into his family, should it be only on trial, “as hired servants.”

But though our sins have made us vile, and the view of their odious nature makes us “loathe ourselves in our own sight,” yet a conviction of the free grace and mercy of God in Christ will comfort and encourage our dejected and

diffident hearts. The cords of love will draw us nearer and nearer, until we shall assume an humble “boldness, to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.” Heb. x. 19. Sacred love, and a grateful sense of the unmerited favours of our God will now dispose us to, and animate us in, the performance of every duty. Religion will be our chosen course, and the commandments of God will be so far from being burdensome to us, that we shall rejoice in them, and delight in doing the things that please him. Our whole time will be consecrated to his service: no part of it can be spared for fleshly indulgences, or sinful pleasures, but will be employed either in some positive duty, or in preparation for it in the proper season.

This religious bent of mind will manifest itself in all our conduct, and give even common actions a different direction. If we attend our ordinary callings, we shall be active and diligent, not in order to gratify an earthly temper, but from an obediential regard to supreme authority. When our spirits flag through intense application to business, and recreation becomes necessary, our very diversions will be considered as our duty, and so as a branch of our religion: and as they will always be innocent in their nature, so they will be no otherwise regarded than as means to fit us for the repetition of our work. If our friends or country demand our service, we shall not give way to selfishness and indolence, but, as lovers of God and men, generously exert ourselves for the common good. Thus will our whole life be religion, upon such a sincere, entire, and affectionate dedication of ourselves to the Lord. And such as is our course so will be its end. When the date of time is concluded we shall also “die to the Lord.” This in general imports our living under the rational, affecting impression of our dissolution, and appearing before God, and our constant endeavours after actual preparation to enjoy him for ever. Then, upon the approach of death, we shall confidently “commit our spirits into his hands,” recommend his ways to survivors, and glorify him with our dying breath.

But, on the other hand, if our lives are not thus consecrated to our God, we cannot be supposed to perform any duty in an acceptable manner, as the requisite principle and end are wanting. He, to whom the secret springs of action are all obvious, will not, cannot accept pretended services; nor be pleased with the “blind and the lame for sacrifice,” when the best are esteemed too good for him. To compliment him with our lips, when we refuse to give him our hearts, will be judged similar to the conduct of those, who “bowed the knee in derision,” and in derision said, “Hail! King of the Jews!” He, “with whom we have to do,” cannot be deceived, nor will be mocked. He requires “Truth in the inward parts,” which cannot subsist without an honest and upright design to serve him all the days of our lives.

Now to live wholly to the Lord, will appear to be our reasonable service, if we consider,

1. That “such a life is most worthy of rational and immortal creatures.” From the powers and faculties given us it may naturally be concluded that we are created for some very important purpose; but what can be so important, or bear so just a correspondence to our capacities, as to live to the glory of our great Creator? This being our ultimate end, to which we refer all our actions, and perform each of them in such a manner as may best answer it, will influence our hearts, and frame our whole conversation agreeable to the divine approving will. And what can so ennoble the soul as conformity to the pattern of perfection? But to neglect this, and chiefly regard our temporal affairs, would

be infinitely unworthy of beings capable of the highest pursuits, and formed for immortality. Why should we have been “wiser than the beasts of the field, or the fowls of heaven,” if we are to have no sublimer aims than they? In a word, we could never vindicate the wisdom of God in our formation, if he intended us for meaner things than those for which we are qualified. Therefore,

2. Such a life is most worthy of God our Maker. Nothing can appear more decent and proper, than that he who is the beginning, should also be the end; that as all are of him, all should be to him. And if his glory be the most excellent thing, and he the most perfect being, it will necessarily follow, that he cannot ultimately design what is less excellent. Therefore the Scripture speaks agreeable to everlasting truth, when it asserts, that, “he made all things;” and, that “for his pleasure they are, and were created.” Rev. iv. 11. And can it be rationally supposed, that he allows us, whom he made for his own glory, to act for a different or opposite end? It cannot. We must therefore peremptorily affirm, that he cannot, in consistency with his perfections, require less, than that “whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, we should do all to his glory.” 1 Cor. x. 31. And this he does require, not because he needs our service, or can be happier, or more glorious in himself by our praises, but because it is fit and right, and results as our duty from the eternal reason of things.

3. Such a life is our own happiness: for, acting as prescribed, we move in our proper sphere, and tend to our native centre. We live as near the fountain of blessedness as our present state can admit, and nothing can be so animating as the glorious and blissful prospects our course affords. Our hearts, being fixed on the chief good, are at rest, and no more tortured with anxious hesitation, and uneasy suspense, as to what we shall choose for our portion, nor do our desires wander in quest of a more suitable object. We can wish for no more but the full enjoyment of God, whom we “serve with our spirits;” whose “peace, that passeth all understanding, rules in our hearts;” and for whose glory we hope, secure from confounding disappointment in the day of our Lord.

Now methinks every attentive hearer prevents my improvement of the subject, being ready, of his own accord to make such reflections as these. How serene and placid is the life, and how triumphant must be the death, of a true Christian! How reasonable a service do we perform, when we consecrate ourselves to the Lord, and receive him, freely offering himself to be our portion, our father, and our friend! None can plausibly urge, that some things unfit, or detrimental, are required. None can pretend a conscientious scruple about complying with the proposal, nor dare any, however secretly reluctant, openly avow their dissent. Every mouth is stopped, and all acknowledge their obligation to this plain duty. What then should hinder the unanimous agreement, of this whole assembly, to so advantageous an overture? Why may we not join ourselves, this day, to the Lord in an everlasting covenant? Would it not seem uncharitable to suppose, that any one in this Christian audience rejects a proposal so infinitely just and kind? How pleasing is the very imagination of an universal concurrence! Not only would each of our hearts who are here present exult, but unnumbered hosts of angels, and all “the spirits of just men made perfect” would rejoice.

Since therefore all things that pertain to our present or future happiness, conspire to urge this point, let us with one accord, in the most affectionate and reverent manner, approach the throne of our august Sovereign, and cheerfully

resign ourselves to him for ever; spend our lives in his service, and expect his compensating approbation at our end.

In some such strain, but more diffusive and sublime, would our reverend and dear deceased friend have addressed us on such a subject. We may imagine how fervent his desire was of “living to the Lord” himself, and persuading others to the same course, when he fixed on this for the subject of his funeral sermon. Now, as it is generally agreed that example has the most powerful influence, perhaps a few sketches of his own life and character may best recommend the preceding discourse, as they will prove the life described to be practicable. And though he on whom this talk is devolved owns himself inferior to it, yet he is encouraged to undertake it, from a persuasion that a simple and unornamented narrative of what he knows, either personally or by certain information, concerning President Davies, will set him in a very agreeable point of light. He is now disinterested in all the praises and censures of mortals, and can neither receive benefit, or suffer detriment by them; but his example may profit the living, as it tends to excite a laudable emulation; and some brief hints of the dispensations of divine providence towards him may not be without very useful instruction.

He was an only son, and, which is more, was a son of prayers and vows; was given in answer to fervent supplications, and, in gratitude, wholly devoted to God from the womb by his eminently pious mother, and named Samuel, on the like occasion as the ancient Prophet.¹ The event proved, that God accepted the consecrated boy, took him under his special care, furnished him for, and employed him in the service of his church, prospered his labours with remarkable success, and not only blessed him, but made him a blessing.

The first twelve years of his life were wasted in the most entire negligence of God and religion, which he often afterwards bitterly lamented, as having too “long wrought the will of the flesh.” But about that time the God to whom he was dedicated by his word and Spirit awakened him to solemn thoughtfulness and anxious concern about his eternal state. He then saw sufficient reason to dread all the direful effects of divine displeasure against sin. And so deeply imprinted was the rational sense of his danger, as to make him habitually uneasy and restless, until he might obtain satisfying scriptural evidence of his interest in the forgiving love of God.

While thus exercised, he clearly saw the absolute necessity and certain reality of the gospel plan of salvation, and what abundant and suitable provision it makes for all the wants of a sinner. No other solid ground of hope, or unfailing source of comfort could he find, besides the merits and righteousness of him, “whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation for sin, through faith in his blood.” Rom. iii. 25. On this righteousness he was enabled confidently to depend; by this blood his conscience was purged from guilt; and “believing, he rejoiced with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.” 1 Pet. i. 8. Yet he was afterwards exercised with many perplexing doubts for a long season, but at length, after years of impartial repeated self-examination, he attained to a settled confidence of his interest in redeeming grace, which he retained to the end.

A diary, which he kept in the first years of his religious life, and continued to keep, as long as his leisure would permit, clearly shows how intensely his mind was set on heavenly things; how observant he was of the temper of his heart; and how watchful over all his thoughts, words and actions. Did any censure his foibles, or juvenile indiscretions? They would have done it compas-

sionately, had they known how severely he censured them himself. The tribunal daily erected in his own bosom was more critical in scrutinizing, and more impartial and severe in passing sentence, than either his friends or enemies could be.

His love to God, and tender concern for perishing sinners, excited his eager desire of being in a situation to serve mankind to the best advantage. With this view he engaged in the pursuit of learning, in which, amidst many obvious inconveniences, he made surprising progress, and, sooner than could have been expected, was found competently qualified for the ministerial office. He passed the usual previous trials with uncommon approbation; having exceeded the raised expectations of his most intimate friends and admirers.

When he was licensed to preach the gospel, he zealously declared the counsel of God, the truth and importance of which he knew by happy experience; and did it in such a manner as excited the earnest desires of every vacant congregation, where he was known, to obtain the happiness of his stated ministrations. But, far from gratifying his natural inclination to the society of his friends, or consulting his ease, moved by conscience of duty, he undertook the self-denying charge of a dissenting congregation in Virginia, separated from all his brethren, and exposed to the censure and resentment of many. But the more he was known in those parts, the more were prejudices removed; contempt was gradually turned into reverence; the number of his enemies daily diminished, and his friends increased.

Nor did he there labour in vain, or “spend his strength for nought.” The “Lord, who counted him faithful, putting him into the ministry,” succeeded his faithful endeavours, so that a great number, both of whites and blacks, were hopefully converted to the living God; for the proof of this, I must refer you to his own narrative, sent to the Rev. Mr. Bellamy, and by him published, and to his letters to some gentlemen of the Society in London, for propagating religion among the poor.

As to his natural genius, it was strong and masculine. His understanding was clear; his memory retentive; his invention quick; his imagination lively and florid; his thoughts sublime; and his language elegant, strong, and expressive.² And I cannot but presume that true and candid critics will readily discern a great degree of true poetic fire, style, and imagery, in his poetical compositions; and will grant that he was capable to have shone in that way, had his leisure permitted the due cultivation of his natural talent.

His appearance in company was manly and graceful; his behaviour genteel, not ceremonious; grave, yet pleasant; and solid, but sprightly too. In a word, he was an open, conversable, and entertaining companion, a polite gentleman, and devout Christian, at once.

In the sacred desk, zeal for God, and love to men, animated his addresses, and made them tender, solemn, pungent, and persuasive; while at the same time they were ingenious, accurate, and oratorical. A certain dignity of sentiment and style, a venerable presence, a commanding voice, and emphatical delivery, concurred both to charm his audience, and overawe them into silence and attention.

Nor was his influence confined to the pulpit. His comprehensive mind could take under view the grand interests of his country and of religion at once; and these interests, as well as those of his friends, he was ever ready zealously to serve. It is known what an active instrument he was in stirring up a patriot

spirit, a spirit of courage and resolution in Virginia, where he resided during the late barbarous French and Indian ravages.

His natural temper was remarkably sweet and dispassionate;³ and his heart was one of the tenderest towards the distressed. His sympathetic soul could say, "Who is weak, and I am not weak?" Accordingly his charitable disposition made him liberal to the poor, and that often beyond his ability. He was eminently obliging to all, and very sensible of favours conferred; which he could receive without servility, and manifest his grateful sense of them with proper dignity.

To his friend he was voluntarily transparent, and fully acted up to the poet's advice:

Thy friend put in thy bosom: wear his eyes
Still in thy heart, that he may see what's there.

And perhaps none better understood the ingenuities and delicacies of friendship, or had a higher relish for it, or was truer or more constant in it, than he. He was not easily disgusted: his knowledge of human nature in its present state, his candid heart, and enlarged soul, both disposing and enabling him to make allowances for indiscretions, which narrower and more selfish minds could not make. He readily and easily forgave offences against himself, whilst none could be more careful to avoid offending others; which, if he at any time inadvertently did, he was forward and desirous to make the most ample satisfaction.

He was amongst the first and brightest examples of filial piety, a very indulgent parent, and humane master. As a husband he was kind, tender, cordial, and respectful, with a fondness that was manly and genuine. In a word, think what might rationally be expected, in the present imperfect state, in a mature man, a Christian in minority, a minister of Jesus of like passions with others, in a gentleman, companion, and cordial friend, and you conceive of President Davies.

It would hardly be expected, that one so rigid with respect to his own faith and practice, could be so generous and catholic in his sentiments to those who differed from him in both, as he was. He was strict, not bigoted; conscientious, not squeamishly scrupulous. His clear and extensive knowledge of religion enabled him to discern where the main stress should be laid, and to proportion his zeal to the importance of things, too generous to be confined to the interests of a party as such. He considered the visible kingdom of Christ as extended beyond the boundaries of this or that particular denomination, and never supposed that His declarative glory was wholly dependent on the religious community which he most approved. Hence he gloried more in being a Christian, than in being a Presbyterian, though he was the latter from principle. His truly catholic address to the established clergy of Virginia is a demonstration of the sincere pleasure it would have given him, to have heard that "Christ was preached," and substantial religion, common Christianity, promoted by those who "walked not with him," and whom he judged in other points to be mistaken. His benevolent heart could not be so soured, nor his enlarged soul so contracted, as to value men from circumstantial distinctions, but according to their personal worth.

He sought truth for its own sake, and would profess his sentiments with the undisguised openness of an honest Christian, and the inoffensive boldness of a manly spirit: yet, without the least apparent difficulty or hesitation, he would retract an opinion on full conviction of its being a mistake. I have never known one, who appeared to lay himself more fully open to the reception of truth, from whatever quarter it came, than he; for he judged the knowledge of truth only, to be real learning, and that endeavouring to defend an error was but labouring to be more ignorant. But, until fully convinced, he was becomingly tenacious of his opinion.

The unavoidable consciousness of native power made him bold and enterprising. Yet the event proved that his boldness arose not from a partial, groundless self-conceit, but from true self-knowledge. Upon fair and candid trial, faithful and just to himself, he judged what he could do; and what he could, when called to it, he attempted; and what he attempted, he accomplished.

It may here be properly observed, that he was chosen by the Synod of New York, at the instance of the trustees of New Jersey College, as a fit person to accompany the Rev. Gilbert Tennent to Great Britain and Ireland, in order to solicit benefactions for the said college. As this manifested the high opinion which both the Synod and corporation entertained of his popular talents and superior abilities, so his ready compliance to undertake that service, hazardous and difficult in itself, and precarious in its consequences, which required him to overlook his domestic connections, however tender and endearing, manifested his resolution and self-denial. How well he was qualified as a solicitor, is witnessed by the numerous and large benefactions he received. His services, as was meet, were gratefully accepted by his constituents; and to the pious, generous, and public-spirited charity of the friends of religion and learning in Great Britain, received on that occasion, does the College of New Jersey, in a great degree, owe its present flourishing condition.

As his light shone, his ability to fill the president's chair in this college, then vacant, was not doubted by the honourable board of trustees. He was accordingly chosen, and earnestly invited to accept the charge of this society. Yet he once and again excused himself, not being convinced that he was called in duty to leave his then important province. But repeated application at length prevailed to make him apprehend that it was the will of God he should accept the call; yet, lest he should mistake in so important a case, he withheld his express consent, until the Reverend Synod of New York and Philadelphia gave their opinion in favour of the college. This determined his dubious mind. He came, and undertook the weighty charge.

And what were the consequences? Had his incessant labours in travelling and preaching the Gospel, his disadvantageous situation, and want of opportunity for improvement made some of his best friends diffident of his capacity and acquirements for moving with honour in this unaccustomed sphere? He agreeably disappointed their friendly fears, and convinced them that strength of genius, joined to industrious application, had surmounted all other disadvantages. Had any such raised expectations as seemed hard to answer? They were fully satisfied: so that from being highly approved he came to be admired.

His manner of conducting the college did honour to himself, and promoted its interests. Whatever alterations in the plans of education he introduced were

confessedly improvements on those of his predecessors. Had I never had other means of intelligence, save only my knowledge of the man, I should naturally have expected that all his public appearances would have been conducted with spirit, elegance, and decorum; that his government would be mild and gentle, tempered with wisdom and authority, and calculated to command reverence while it attracted love, and that his manner of teaching would be agreeable and striking.

But I propose not these as mere conjectures. The learned tutors of the college, the partners of his counsels and deliberations for its good, and these young gentlemen, once his care and charge, who judged themselves happy under his tuition, all know more than I shall speak.

You know the tenderness and condescension with which he treated you; the paternal care with which he watched over you; the reluctance with which he at any time inflicted the prescribed punishment on a delinquent; and how pleased he was to succeed in reforming any abuse by private and easy methods. You felt yourselves voluntarily confined by the restraints of love, and obliged to subjection, not from slavish fear, but from principle and inclination. You have yet fresh in memory his instructive lectures, and can tell with what ease he communicated his sentiments, and impressed his ideas on your minds, and the entertaining manner in which he would represent even a common thought.

But his persuasive voice you will hear no more. He is removed far from mortals, has taken his aerial flight, and left us to lament, that “a great man has fallen in Israel!” He lived much in a little time; “he finished his course,” performed sooner than many others his assigned task, and, in that view, might be said to have died mature. He shone like a light set in a high place, that burns out and expires.

He went through every stage of honour and usefulness, compatible with his character as a Dissenting clergyman: and; while we flattered our fond hopes of eminent services from him for many years to come, the fatal blow was struck; our pleasing prospects are all at an end, and he is cut down like a tree that had yielded much fruit, and was loaded with blossoms even in its fall.

This dispensation, how mysterious! how astonishing! nay, how discouraging does it seem! Why was he raised, by divine Providence, in the prime of life, to so important a station, and, amidst useful labours, whilst he was fast increasing in strength adapted to his business, quickly snatched away? This is a perplexing case; and the more so that it so soon succeeded the yet shorter continuance of the venerable Edwards. Were they set in so conspicuous a point of view, only that their imitable excellencies might be more observable? or, was Nassau Hall erected by divine Providence for this, among other important purposes, that it might serve to adorn the latter end of some eminent servants of the living God, itself being adorned by them? In this view, the short presidency of a Dickinson, a Burr, an Edwards, and a Davies, instead of arguing the displeasure of the Almighty, will evidence his peculiar favour to this institution; which I know was planned, and has been carried on with the most pious, benevolent, and generous designs. These designs God’s goodness has hitherto amazingly prospered amidst apparent frowns; and, if we may infer anything from what he has already done, it is an encouraging expectation that he will continue to bless this society, and make it an honour and happiness to this venerable Board to have been engaged in so noble and successful an undertaking.

Now one more shining orb is set on our world. Davies is departed, and with him all that love, zeal, activity, and benevolence, for which he was remarkable. This the church, and this the bereaved College mourns. For this we hang our once cheerful harps and indulge in plaintive strains. Yet we are not to lament as those who are hopeless, but rather with humble confidence to “pray the Lord of the harvest,” with whom is “the residue of the Spirit,” that he would send forth another Davies to assist our labour and forward his work.

Nor should the decease of useful labourers, the extinction of burning and shining lights, only send us to the throne of grace for supplies, but excite us to greater diligence and activity in our business, as we have for the present the more to do. And, instead of being dispirited by the loss of such eminent assistants, we should be animated by their example, and hope for the same divine aids that carried them through all the duties and dangers of life with safety, success, and honour.

Finally, this dispensation should lessen our esteem of this transitory disappointing world, and raise our affections to heaven, that place and state of permanent blessedness. Thither ascends, as to its native home, all the goodness that departs from earth; and the more of our pious friends go to glory, so many more secondary motives have we to excite our desires of “departing and being with Christ; which is far better” than any state under the sun: for there, in addition to superior felicity, we shall “come to the general assembly, and Church of the First-born which are written in heaven,—and to the spirits of just men made perfect.” Heb. xii. 23. Amen.

FOOTNOTES

1 The attachment always existing between Davies and his mother was a remarkably strong and holy one.

When his body was in the coffin, she gazed on it attentively and then exclaimed, "There is the son of my prayers and my hopes, my only son, my only earthly supporter, but there is the will of God, and I am satisfied!"

[EDITOR OF THE BOARD.]

2 But with all his genius, Mr. Davies dreaded to preach without careful preparation. He declared that every discourse of his which he thought worthy of the name of a sermon, cost him four days of hard study in its preparation. When on one occasion urged to preach extemporaneously, he replied, "*It is a dreadful thing to talk nonsense in the name of the Lord.*"

[EDITOR OF THE BOARD.]

3 The Rev. Dr. John Rodgers, one of his most intimate friends, in a letter to me since his death, says, "I never saw him angry during several years of unbounded intimacy, though I have repeatedly known him to have been ungenerously treated."