



DOCTOR THACHER'S  
S E R M O N  
ON THE DEATH,

A N D

DOCTOR WELSH'S  
E U L O G Y  
TO THE MEMOIR,

O F T H E

Honourable Nathaniel Gorham, Esq.

MDCCXCVI.





A  
S E R M O N,

PREACHED AT  
CHARLESTOWN,

JUNE 19, 1796,

AND

OCCASIONED BY THE SUDDEN DEATH  
OF

THE HONOURABLE  
NATHANIEL GORHAM, Esquire,  
Æt. 59.

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BY PETER THACHER, D. D.  
MINISTER of a CHURCH in BOSTON.

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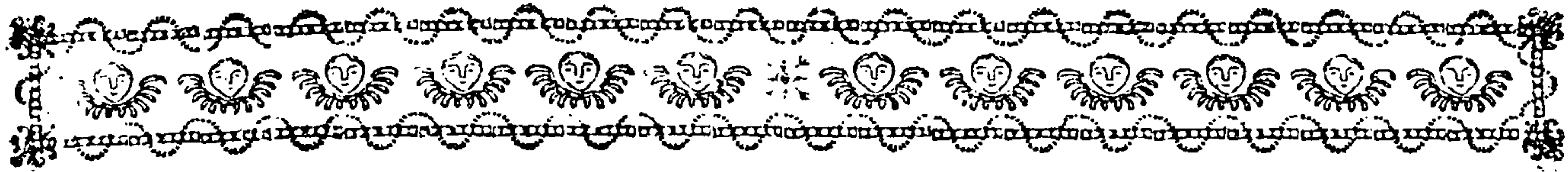


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MDCCXCVI.







## 1 SAMUEL, XX. 3.

BUT TRULY AS THE LORD LIVETH, AND  
AS THY SOUL LIVETH, THERE IS BUT  
A STEP BETWEEN ME AND DEATH.

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**T**HE friendship which subsisted between Jonathan and David, as recorded in the scriptures, was so warm and sincere as to have become proverbial. This friendship was founded on mutual esteem, and was cemented by many acts of kindness and affection. The interests of these persons were dear to each other, and no evil could befall the one without sensibly wounding and grieving the other.

IN such a friendship there must be an unreserved confidence; for where a man conceals any thing from his friend, which it is necessary and fit for him to know, he violates his engagements, and trespasses against the laws of friendship. David did not offend in this manner, but opened his heart freely and fully to Jonathan. Envy at his fame, and jealousy of his increasing influence, after his conquest of Goliath, had  
filled



filled Saul with the utmost virulence against David. His passions rose to such a pitch as led him to attempt, in various different ways, to dispatch this innocent young man, whom he viewed as the rival of his fame, and the future usurper of his throne and kingdom. So bitter was Saul's rancour, and so plainly had David perceived his attempts to murder him, as that he could not think it proper to continue any longer in the court where he was liable constantly to feel the effects of Saul's enmity. He fled from Naioth in Ramah, and came to Jonathan, the friend of his soul. There appears to be a degree of warmth in his first application to Jonathan ; a warmth which arose from the consciousness of his innocence, and an impatience of unmerited persecution. "What have I done," says he, "what is mine iniquity ? and what is my sin before thy father, that he seeketh my life ?" Jonathan could not suppose his parent to be guilty of so much cruelty and ingratitude as to seek the death of a man, who had preserved his crown when it was just falling from his head, and saved the kingdom of Israel from imminent destruction ; he could not suppose him to be so unjust as to attempt injuring an innocent and upright man, as he knew David to be ; and his duty, as well as inclination, led him, so far as was possible, to think well of his father, and justify his conduct. He, therefore, attempts to calm the mind of his friend, not only by these considerations, but by  
affuring



assuring him, that his father never took a single step, of any kind whatever, without communicating it to him. David had felt too much to be soothed in this way, or persuaded to disbelieve that of which he was so fully convinced. He obviates Jonathan's objection by remarking, that Saul knew well the friendship which subsisted between them, and was loth to communicate to his son a resolution which he knew must grieve him. He adds immediately, as an evidence of his full conviction and absolute certainty of the truth of what he had said, the words of the text, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death !" A method was then concerted between the two friends, by which the fact might be ascertained, and Jonathan be convinced of the real intentions of his father. Too soon this good young man found the suspicions of David to be just, and that his father was really the cruel and unjust tyrant which he had been represented. Fatal indeed are the effects of ambition and envy on the human heart ! They destroy its amiable sensibilities ; they diminish, and in the end exterminate, our sense of justice, of gratitude, and even natural affection, and often hurry men into crimes which astonish the world, and bring indelible disgrace upon the human character !

DAVID could not have more strongly expressed the full conviction which he felt, that he was in imminent  
danger



danger of death, than by the declaration, the solemn declaration, of the text. It is confirmed by two oaths ; and though we praise him not for using such language, yet it expressed strongly the perturbation of his own mind, and served to impress the mind of Jonathan with a sense of his extreme hazard. “ As the Lord liveth,” so surely as there is a God in heaven : “ As thy soul liveth,” so truly as you have an existence, “ I am in the most imminent danger of death. A day, an hour, or a moment may subject me to the effects of thy father’s cruelty, and carry me out of the world. There is but a single step between me and death.”

It was upon a particular occasion that these words were spoken, and the man who uttered them was exposed to be murdered by stratagem, by the prostituted forms of justice, or by immediate and direct violence. He was in the hands of a prince whose absolute power enabled him, at any time, to execute his bloody purposes, and therefore he felt his danger to be extreme. But the declaration cannot be confined only to such a man, and to such circumstances. On the contrary, with the utmost truth and propriety may the words of David be applied to us all. “ As the Lord liveth, my Brethren, and as your souls live, there is but a step between you and death !”

THERE is no need of entering into a formal proof of this point. Every man knows it. He sees it.

And



And with respect to every man but himself, he feels it. We can look around upon our fellow men and see their infirmities. We can perceive them to be hastening with rapid steps to the grave, and may expect every hour to find them seized by the king of terrors. "All men think all men mortal but themselves." We find no difficulty in considering the various circumstances which may attend the deaths of others. We can realize how they will appear when their bodies are shrouded for the grave. We can anticipate our own feelings, and the feelings of their friends, when the passing bell shall announce their approach to the "house appointed for all living." We can see them lowered into the dark, cold grave, and can hear the earth founding on their coffins. We can think how we shall feel when we come away, and leave them "covered with the clods of the valley;" how their houses will appear, and what situation their friends will be in, when "the places that now know them, shall know them no more." We can paint all these things strongly upon our imaginations as to others; but our hearts shrink when we come to apply them to ourselves. A secret shuddering seizes the mind, and we turn away from a prospect which terrifies us. What!—to bid an eternal farewell to the world; to have no more to do with its concerns; to leave the persons, the places, with which we have, from the beginning of



our existence, been conversant ; to lay aside the body, which has been our close companion, and the principal object of our cares, for many years, to go down into the grave ; to be shut up in darkness and gloom, and to have “no share in any thing that is done under the sun !” To realize these things, is a very great attainment, and very few there are who arrive at it, who possess firmness and coolness enough to keep their eyes steadily fixed upon objects so terrifying, and upon scenes so awful. If, by alarming providences of God, we are for a moment awakened, we soon return to our slumbers, and dream on, without being disturbed or awakened.

BUT, we must every one of us be convinced that there is but a step between us and death. If we listen only to the voice of reason, of discretion, of common sense, we shall hear a voice loudly proclaiming, that “in the midst of life we are in death.” What is the voice of the frequent infirmities, the pains, the languor, the indisposition which we daily feel ? Is it not that we “dwell in houses of clay,” that we have the seeds of death germinating within us ; and that the smallest defect in one of the vessels of the body, may stop forever the operations of the machine, and reduce it to an inanimated trunk ? When the partners of our lives, the parents who gave us being, the companions of our cheerful hours, the neighbours with whom we were daily conversant ;



Tant; when these are suddenly, and, as it were, in a moment snatched from us, what is the language of divine providence? What instruction, what lesson is addressed to the heart? Is it not the important lesson taught by the Prince of life and glory, "Be ye also ready; for at an hour that ye think not, the Son of Man shall come"? When we see our friends one hour conversing with ease and cheerfulness, in the enjoyment of full health and vivacity, and the next stretched upon the bed of death, what should we learn from the sight, but a lesson of our own mortality? For, we are made of the same perishing materials; we are liable to the same accidents, and know as certainly that *we* must *die*, as we know that *they* are *dead*. Brethren, we are hurrying rapidly down the hill of life. Every step brings us nearer to the close of our journey. Our next step may be the last. "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye," we may fall into the dark, the fathomless abyss, which has swallowed up the myriads of mankind who have existed since the creation, and which terminates, unavoidably, the career of human life. One step more may end our journey. We may fall, never to rise again, and the gulf of eternity may swallow us up forever! What plainer proof can I give to this congregation, of the truth of these observations, than the sudden and surprising death which has occasioned the present discourse! This is a louder lesson



lesson of mortality than any which I can read to you. This is a preacher who must be heard, whose veracity cannot be doubted, and who addresses himself deeply to the heart and the feelings ! It is death, sudden, alarming, melancholy death, who now addresses you. His voice is deep and solemn, but loud and commanding. He calls you to awake from the slumbers of insensibility, and to “consider your latter end” ! Let him not address you in vain. Let not his voice be silenced by the follies or flatteries of life, lest he should come and lay his icy hand upon you, and carry you the way whence you shall not return.

BUT what benefit will result from these considerations ? Is it merely to make us feel grave and melancholy for a time, and take away our relish for the amusements and pleasures of life ?—No—the most salutary effects will result from such a realizing sense of our mortality ; effects which will not deprive us of the pleasures of life, but which will give us a true and proper enjoyment of them ; effects, which will increase the real dignity of our characters, and prepare us for exquisite and endless happiness.

A FULL conviction that we are liable, every moment, to death, will lead us, in the first place, to fix a proper value upon the world.

It will prevent us from being fondly attached to it, and will make us feel as “pilgrims and strangers here



here upon earth.” If, when we rise in the morning, we know not that we shall live till night : If, when we leave our houses, we know not that we shall ever return to them : If, when engaged in parties of lawful and cheerful amusement one hour, we know not but that in the next we shall be gone away forever : If we bring home these things to our hearts, we cannot surely be immoderately attached to the world and its enjoyments. We shall not place our happiness in our friends, pleasant or agreeable as they may be to us, because we know that we and they are equally exposed to the assaults of the grand enemy. We shall not place our happiness in honor, because all honor is humbled by the dust ; nor shall we fix our hearts upon riches, because they cannot “ redeem the soul in the day of death ;” and when we are gone, we “ know not who shall gather them.” Alas ! what are the pleasures of life, exquisite as they may be, to a man who feels himself dying, and who “ knows not what a day may bring forth ?” They are as nothing ; and the glory of the world, its value, its importance, its excellency, all vanish away on the approach of death, “ like the baseless fabric of a vision, and leave not a wreck behind.”

THIS sense of death will lead us to think soberly of the world, to be thankful for its good things, and to improve them as the traveller gratefully improves the accommodations of an inn ; to embrace every opportunity



tunity of being useful to the world, as “knowing that our labor will not be in vain in the Lord.” It will learn us to be moderate and temperate in prosperity ; to be patient and humble in adversity, never to murmur at the divine disposals, but “in whatever state we are, therewith to be content.” “But this, I say, Brethren, the time is short ; it remaineth that both they that have wives, be as though they had none ; and they that weep, as though they wept not ; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not ; and they that buy, as though they possessed not ; and they that use this world as not abusing it, for the fashion of this world passeth away.”

A SENSE of our liability to instant death, will lead us, secondly, to conduct properly towards our friends and connexions in every station and relation of life.

How careful should we be of grieving or offending them ; of doing that which would wound or injure their feelings, if we viewed them as on the borders of the grave, and knew that they would not be spared to us another day. How easy would it be in this case, to bear with their little failings ; and how careful would it render us to do every thing which we knew to be necessary to their comfort and happiness ! *Could* we grieve, offend, or injure a friend, whom we viewed as on the verge of eternity, and of whom we knew that a few hours would deprive us forever ?

IF



IF we felt *ourselves* in this situation, how careful should we be of injuring, either in person, in good name, or estate, any one with whom we were connected ! How strict and punctual and conscientious in all our dealings ! How careful not to do the least wrong ! How solicitous that we should be, and appear to be, upright ; and not only so, but kind and benevolent ! How charitable would it make us in our opinions of others ! How thoroughly would passion and envy and pride be eradicated from our bosoms, and how ready should we be to pardon and pass by the failings or offences of our neighbors ! If it was in our power to do good to their souls or bodies, how cheerfully should we embrace the opportunity, and exert ourselves for their benefit ! The excuses which we now make for our idleness, and the specious arts by which we attempt to justify or disguise our sinful and wrong actions, would then lose all their force, and we should “ follow that which is altogether just,” kind and good ! Nothing will so effectually cure us of turbulent or unruly passions, of dishonest or improper practices, as seeing and feeling that “ there is but a step between us and death.” If husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, rulers and subjects, felt this really to be the case, it would make them strictly careful of their conduct to each other.

GREAT care to redeem our time, would be another  
consequence



consequence of our realizing that we are liable to instant death.

MY BRETHREN, if we knew that we were to die to night, how should we improve this holy day ? How should we attend upon the duties of public worship ? How should we spend our time, when we return from the house of God ? Do you think that we should walk out for our amusement, that we should pay a visit to our friends, or seek visits from them ?—Much do I doubt whether this would be the case. It is more natural to suppose, that we should pass our time in serious devotion ; and if we sought any company, it would be the society of those who could guide and assist us in the way to Heaven. On other days, if we felt as David expresses himself in the text, we should not waste our time in idleness or unnecessary amusement ; we should not delay our attention to any business which was properly before us, nor should we neglect to “ set our houses in order.” It is a plain duty for every man who possesses property, and who wishes to dispose of it at his death so as to prevent contention, injustice, and difficulty, to do this immediately. Not for a single day should it be delayed, because hereby the opportunity for doing it may be forever lost. Men who feel themselves to be dying, do not procrastinate their business. They do not waste their time ; but a sense of its value, as well as of the account which they must give of it, makes them careful to redeem it.

A SENSE



A SENSE of our being liable to instant death would, fourthly, make us careful of our thoughts, words and actions.

DYING men do not generally indulge themselves in sinful or improper thoughts or words. Death is a serious hour, and will bring a solemnity over the spirit. It will make us careful of what we say and do, and will induce us to conduct properly and suitably, so as that we may not be afraid to account to God. Did we bring death near to us ; vain, idle, impure imaginations would be banished from our minds, and we should “ keep our hearts with all diligence.” Our conversation would “ tend to the use of edifying.” Every thing improper would be avoided, and “ our speech would be with grace, seasoned with salt.” Finally, how careful would the prospect of death make us of doing any thing sinful or wrong ! Temptation would lose its force. The world would be deprived of its charms, and we should feel the necessity of “ walking circumspectly,” of “ avoiding the most distant appearance of evil, and abounding in every good word and work.” If we knew, if we realized, that “ there was but a step between us and death,” we should not dare to offend God, nor wound our own souls.

FIFTHLY. The prospect of immediate death would make us prayerful.

PRAYER is our first refuge in distress of any kind, and it is the first employment to which a dying man



will betake himself. Oh, how earnestly desirous are persons sensible of approaching death to have the throne of grace addressed in their behalf! what “strong cryings and tears” do they pour out, and how fervently do they cry to God to have mercy upon them! This is not the effect of weakness or enthusiasm. It is a principle felt in every country, and under every system of religion; it is a principle deeply engraven on the human heart; and it is a principle calculated to produce every good disposition in us, to make us feel that we depend upon God, that we are accountable to him, and that we must be holy if we wish to enjoy his favor.

If we rose in the morning apprehensive that we should die before night, is it probable that we should neglect secret prayer? Should we not cry mightily to God for his pardon and eternal life? Would the business and concerns of life appear so important, as to hinder us from performing the devotions of the family? Would the cares of the world, its amusements or pleasures, so engross our minds, as to prevent us from thinking upon subjects of religion, or attending upon the offices of it?—Let our own consciences reply; and at the same time let them tell us, that as we “know not what a day may bring forth,” it becomes us always to live in this manner.

BUT, finally, if we felt as David appears to have done, by the expression used in the text, we should  
not



not be easy, unless we knew that we were truly religious, and were savingly interested in the divine favor.

MEN permit themselves to remain in uncertainty, as to the nature of religion, and their own concern with it, because they are not sensible of its importance. If they felt themselves on the verge of eternity, and saw that they were just ready to enter on a future state, their first and most earnest inquiry would be, “what shall we do to be saved?”—They would be anxious above measure to know in what true religion consists, and to examine the proofs and evidences by which it is supported. They would not “give sleep to their eyes,” till they knew they were born of God, that they were true believers in Jesus Christ, and had exercised the “repentance which is unto life.” They would be careful to have their tempers, their words and actions conformable to the will of God, as expressed in the gospel of his Son ; and they could not be easy, nor at rest, while they had reason to doubt whether they were real christians, and had truly felt the power of divine grace. To a dying man, religion is the most interesting of all subjects. And I do not hesitate to say, that the religion of the gospel, which holds up a free pardon to the guilty sinner, through the merits and righteousness of Jesus Christ, is alone calculated to give relief and consolation to a dying man. This doctrine of free grace will be balm  
to



to his heart, and can alone heal the wounded spirit. “ Oh that we were wise, that we understood this, that we did but consider our latter end ;” that we did so consider it, as to feel the importance and necessity of our being truly and personally interested in the blessings of the gospel !

To these observations, so plain and practical, nothing need be added by way of application. If they are properly considered, they will lead us to make a good improvement of the sudden and affecting death which occasioned them. And we ought all to be solicitous to make such an improvement. When we see our fellow-men, those who were eminently useful and peculiarly dear to their friends and connexions ; when we see them suddenly snatched away from us, and we are called to commit them to the dark and silent tomb ; we shall be inexcusable if we do not think seriously on the great subject of religion, and are not animated to prepare for our own dissolution. When, as in the instance of our departed friend, we see a person called out of the world immediately upon leaving the house of God ;\* surely we must reflect with ourselves, how would it be with us, were we  
now

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\* MR. GORHAM was taken ill as he was returning from a lecture, where he had heard a discourse from those words of Saint Paul, 2 Tim. i. 12. “ I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day.” His illness deprived him very soon of his speech and senses, which he never recovered.



now to be thus called away ; were we to be deprived of our reason at once, and never to recover it till all was over with us, and we were introduced to our future and final state ! How diligent should we be, under this impression, to “ worship God in the spirit,” and to improve diligently the religious advantages with which we are favored ! If we were now to hear a voice, saying, “ Behold, the Judge standeth at the door,” how earnest should we be for divine mercy, and how solicitous to “ make our calling and election sure” !

It would be easy for me to delineate the strong and lively traits which marked the character of the amiable and worthy man whom we now lament, but this duty is to be performed by a person \* who will do him more justice than it is in my power to do. But you will not charge me with anticipating him, nor departing from my own line, when I say, that, of his tendernefs as a husband, his affectionate solicitude as a parent, and his faithfulness and duty as a son, a brother and a friend, the tears, the exquisite grief of those to whom Mr. GORHAM was thus related, bear the strongest testimony. Happy in the bosom of an amiable family, and in the esteem, the love, and confidence of his friends and immediate connexions,

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\* PREVIOUSLY to the delivery of this discourse, Dr. THOMAS WELSH had been appointed, by the town of Charlestown, to deliver a Eulogy on the character of Mr. GORHAM.



connexions, in easy and affluent circumstances, he had much to attach him to the world, and induce him to wish for the continuance of life. But God has seen fit to order it otherwise. He who cannot err has passed the decree, which no good man will censure, and no mortal can reverse. It is for us silently to resign ourselves to the will of heaven; and though we are sensible that “the ways of God are past finding out,” yet to rejoice that a being perfectly wise and good, the “Lord God omnipotent, reigneth.”

THERE can be no plainer proof of the eminent abilities and virtues of our deceased friend, than the esteem and confidence which he enjoyed from a free and enlightened country. There are few men who have filled so many and important offices as he has sustained, and who filled them to such general acceptance. This town early noticed his abilities, and employed him in their service. Then he attracted the attention and confidence of this commonwealth, and at last was raised to the highest office in the United States.\* Of his wisdom or integrity, it is not necessary for me to speak, because these will be important parts in the full description of his character which we are led to expect.

THIS

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\* PRESIDENT of the Congress of the United States, under the Confederation.



THIS town never, perhaps, lost a firmer friend than by this melancholy providence. You knew his strong attachment to it, and his earnest solicitude for its civil and religious interests. Perhaps, there is not a man living who loved you better, or who did more for you in the periods of your public distress, than did this useful and respectable citizen. I pray God to sanctify this breach to you ! Those who “seemed to be pillars” in your community, those who bid fair greatly to promote the best interests and happiness of this people, have been, one after another, taken away from you. Your tears are not yet dried up for one of the firmest of your friends and of the best of men,\* when you are again called into mourning, and suffer a new and an heavy breach. Surely you must learn, my brethren, to “cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils,” and to place your confidence in the God of your fathers, who has been with you in fix troubles, and in seven will not forsake you !

THE bereaved family will accept of my deep sympathy under their loss, and my earnest wishes and prayers that divine supports and consolations may be afforded to them ! May the “Father of the fatherless,” the “God of the widow,” the “Staff of the aged,” and the kind and good Benefactor of us all, bless and comfort them ! May he give to them  
all,

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\* THE Honourable THOMAS RUSSELL, Esq. who died April 8, 1796. Æt. 56.



all, an interest in the “better part, which can never be taken away from them,” a portion which shall never fail them, a life which shall never end !

THE voice of God calls loudly to you all, to “be also ready,” to see that “your hearts are right with God, and that you are savingly interested in the blessings of the gospel. “*Now* is the accepted time,” but this *now* is swiftly passing away, and “like water spilt upon the ground,” it cannot be gathered up.

BRETHREN, it becomes me also to say, “As the Lord liveth, and as your souls live, there is but a step between me and death !” The ministers of religion are no more excused from his arrests than other men, but are constantly liable to give an account of their stewardship ! The frequent visits which they are called to pay to the bed of death, and the house of mourning ; the sad offices which they are daily called to render, in their last moments, to the dearest of their friends, and the kindest of their benefactors, must deeply affect them with a sense of their own mortality, if they are not lost to the feelings of humanity and the dictates of religion ! This will furnish a sufficient reason for the plainness with which I have addressed you on this occasion, and for the earnestness with which I plead, that you would instantly attend to the great subject of religion, and to the care of your souls ! Distressing will it be if you have to make your peace with God, and to prepare for eternity, while



while the agonies of dissolving nature are upon you ! Then you can receive very little assistance from mortals, frail, weak, and sinful, like yourselves ! Give me leave, therefore, to urge you, as you value your souls, as you would not die in distress, and be miserable throughout eternity, instantly to renounce those “ iniquities which separate between God and your souls,” and not to be easy till you know that your peace is made with God, and that you are actually prepared for the happiness of Heaven ! If you are thus prepared, you may welcome death, let him come ever so soon ; and if you should suddenly be taken out of the world, you would be suddenly transported to the paradise of God ! Where may we all finally meet, for Christ’s sake.

Amen.

