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Mr. Streng's Sermon,

AT THE FUNERAL OF

Governor HUNTINGTON.

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A
S E R M O N,

DELIVERED AT THE FUNERAL OF

HIS EXCELLENCY

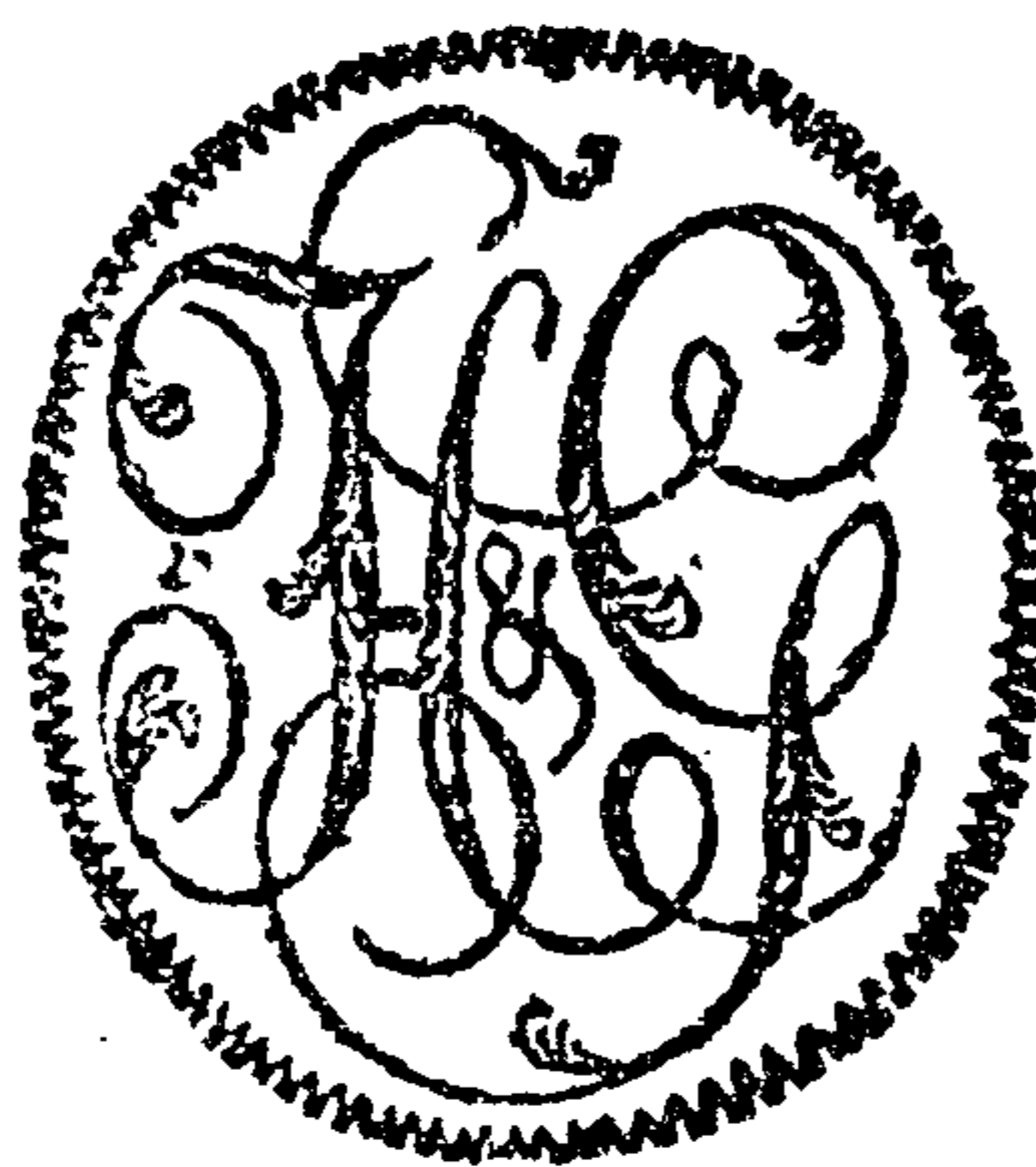
Samuel Huntington,

GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF *CONNECTICUT*;

WHO DIED JANUARY 5th, 1796.

BY JOSEPH STRONG,

PASTOR OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN NORWICH.



HARTFORD:

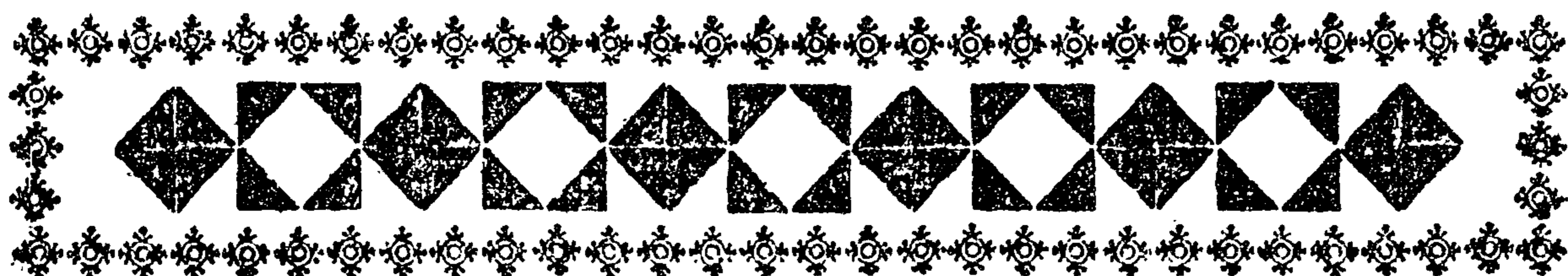
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A Funeral Sermon.

A C T S xiii. 36.

*For David, after he had served his own generation
by the will of God, fell on sleep.*

THESE words, are part of St. Paul's address to the inhabitants, of Antioch in Pisidia.—After a course of historical remarks, he at length introduces his favourite subject, “that according to promise, God had raised unto Israel a Saviour Jesus.” Pertinent as the discussion of such a subject would have been on other occasions; it was now particularly recommended from the circumstance, that he was in a Jewish synagogue, speaking to those who were avowed infidels to the Messiahship of Christ. Under the influence of strong delusion, that another Saviour should in future be raised up, they were unwearied to distort the whole

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system of scripture prophecy, in support of so false and hazardous an opinion—Professed believers in the old testament writings, they were still blind to their surprising fulfilment with reference to Christ, in a large number of respects. That he might meet the prejudices of his hearers to the greater advantage, and be more likely remove them; the apostle therefore directs their attention to the resurrection, in the light of certain prophecies, which were allowed by them to be of unquestionable authority—“And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second Psalm, thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee—and as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David—wherefore he saith also in another Psalm, thou shalt not suffer thine holy one to see corruption—for *David after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep.*” But it is not my design, to pursue the argument of the text any further—Content with the remarks already made, as to its original intention; I shall now attempt to accommodate it to the present mournful occasion, in the light of *a detached passage—an historical sketch*, which commemorates the virtues and laments the death of an eminently great and good man.

THREE enquiries, will comprise the substance of what is thus proposed;—when a person may be said, to serve his generation—the sense in which he is to be considered, as doing it by the will of God—and the nature of that sleep into which he afterwards falls.

WITH reference to the *first* of these enquiries ; a person may be said to have “ served his generation,” when he has done the whole of that good to mankind for which the forming hand of his creator appears to have designed him. Great abilities and an elevated sphere of action, are by no means essential to the character. The honest servant—the laborious husbandman—those who pursue the learned professions—and the civilian ; may all have it truly said of them, that they serve their generation. No circumstance can be more self-evident, than that the present state of things was never designed for personal independence. Mutual wants, render mutual assistance constantly necessary ; thus insensibly strengthening the bands of the social state, and furnishing a practical argument in favour of that benevolence, which is the perfection of the universe. Indeed, was it not for the dependance of man upon man, a link would be missing from that inconceivably long chain, which suspends from Jehovah’s hand creation at large ; down to those more obscure articles, many of which it is difficult to conceive why they were ever made.

BUT proper and needful as it is, for these and other reasons, to serve *ones own generation*, there is nothing to discountenance the most earnest solicitude and strenuous endeavors, to subserve the interests of generations yet unborn. It is the character of a narrow mind, to be altogether wrapped up in pursuit of personal advantages ; it is that of one, comparatively so, to look no further than the benefit of neighbours—acquaintance—or other contemporaries. The enlarged prosperity of an individual at the distance of centuries, is an object not merely to be wished, but actively laboured for, so long as substantial increase is made to the

quantity of human happiness, it matters less, whether it be within the limits of our own æra or of one more remote. Nor is the thought I am now upon visionary or impracticable—It is true, the personal, more direct services of mankind to each other, always stand confined to a small number of years; though not to prevent their usefulness, many times, proving of a much more lasting nature. Was every generation to live for itself alone, how exceedingly limited would improvement be of every kind? The arts—science, and morals, would be placed upon much more unfavorable ground than at present; virtuous example lose its be-friending effect upon the world, and long established order, by ceasing to operate, leave each successive period the prey of anarchy, with its whole train of unwelcome consequences. The remark is no doubt just, that a person cannot fail to sub-serve the interests of posterity, provided he serves his own generation as he both may and ought. Those parts of conduct which operate at the present time in a beneficial form, are certain to support the same character, in a way of more distant consequence.

THE object of our *second* proposed enquiry, is the sense in which he who serves his generation, may be considered as doing it *by the will of God*. What words could make more express recognition, that a divine agency is employed in forming for the purpose and directing to a particular province of action. Passing by that small number whose mental capacity is such, as scarcely to give them rank among moral agents, there are none but what are capable of being useful, in some or other way.—That diversity of constitutional make, which dis-qualifies for universal sameness of calling, and leads to widely varied pursuits in life, argues su-

perior design, and is of inexpressible advantage to the combined interests of the world. No department of action is thus left vacant—the social body, like the natural, maintaining that connection and subserviency of parts, so essential to the convenience and most extended usefulness of the whole. Wide indeed, are such from serving their generation by the will of God, who from motives of ambition or imaginary interest, crowd themselves forward into some particular department of life, for which they possess no natural turn, nor have been previously educated. Plants of another climate, they shew themselves mere dwindled exotics thro' life; occupying a place in the vineyard, without any increase to the quantity of its fruits. Numerous are the examples, of persons thus completely lost, both to themselves and others. In order to avoid the contemplated great unhappiness, the mind must be left to pursue its own native bent—the language of attending circumstances, carefully heeded; united with frequent supplication to *him* for guidance, without whom, it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.

BUT thus careful to fall upon that course of life, which providence appears to have designed; serving our generation *by the will of God* requires further, that we industriously employ our whole ability and time for the purpose. Formed to be usefully active, and never thus happy as when we are so, the hours of indolence must be cautiously avoided, and the whole extent of resources, whether natural or acquired, called into vigorous operation. Blessed with only a single talent, that must not be buried in the earth. No adventitious circumstance, can excuse from a strict observance of this, the great law both of nature and revelation. In the place of a demand for industry, barely from

those who have no other resource for their daily support ; it is by no means beneath those in the most easy circumstances, or whose honors hang the thickest upon them. The mind hesitates not a moment in whose favour it shall decide ; whether the great man who is proud and above business, or the one who acts with humility, and does not feel himself degraded, by occasional attention to agricultural or other innocent employments.

BUT to compleat the idea of serving ones own generation *by the will of God*, we must not forget to mention, a spirit of constant dependance upon him, united with views to the promotion of his glory—Indeed the former of these in its full proper extent, ever implies the latter. The acknowledgment of the heart, “ *that in God we live, move and have our being*, involves the disposition to think, speak, and act unvaryingly for his glory. You will remark, I use the word *disposition*, for nothing can be more absurd in itself, or contradictory to actual experience in the case of the very best, than that the divine glory should be constantly thought of, amidst the numerous, varied, and oftentimes exceedingly perplexing avocations and employments of life ; this would be to expect more from imperfect human nature, than is possible for it to perform. He who knoweth our frame and remembereth that we are but dust, extends his expectations nothing so far ; but approves the heart habitually inclined to rest upon and do honour to him. But words are needless, upon so plain a subject—the ideas of every person, must be sufficiently extended and accurate, what serving ones generation by the will of God imports. Did practice in such an instance keep pace with information, real desert of character and social obligation, would without question, be far greater than at present.

That the number of those who extensively serve their generation by the will of God, is so small, must not be ascribed to a deficiency of motive—barely the one, that the present season, so rapid in its progress and of such short duration, is alone allowed for the purpose, is sufficient were there no other. As cannot be forgot such is a motive which the text particularly notes. Might Christ, by his instructions, example, death, and intercession, subserve the interests of each successive generation to the end of time; David's opportunity for doing the same, stood confined to far more narrow limits—"For David when he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep."

WE are now naturally brought to the *third* and last enquiry upon the present subject—the nature of that sleep into which those who serve their generation by the will of God, afterwards fall. The import of sleep, as thus spoken of, is by no means difficult to be discovered—without question it denotes death, which is the lot of all, whether high or low, virtuous or vicious—useful in life or the reverse. The scripture examples of death's being alluded to by such a form of expression, are numerous. We are presented with them both in the old and new testament; as by the prophet Daniel, "and many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth, shall awake; some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt—and they that be wise shall shine as the firmament: and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars forever and ever." And also with reference to the deceased Lazarus, "these things said he, and after that he saith unto them our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go that I may awake him out of sleep." These and other similar bible declarations, are obviously predicated of the body, and not of that deathless principle the soul. As for the latter,

but few points command a greater weight of scripture evidence, that it continues to maintain a conscious existence, and immediately passes to a state of reward, or punishment, conformably to past character. Perhaps none have ever called in question such a fact unless secretly tinged with infidelity. And confining sleep, as descriptive of death to the body, how just and forcible are the ideas it conveys? Does a want of consciousness mark the state of a person asleep; how strikingly is such fact in reference to the one deceased? A varied, busy world lives no longer for him in any sense or degree.—Hence that pointed address by Solomon, “whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor knowledge, nor device, nor wisdom in the grave whether thou goest.” And again to much the same amount, where we find Job thus fervently expostulating with God,—“Are not my days few? cease then, and let me alone, that I may take comfort a little, before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness, and the shadow of death; a land of darkness as darkness itself; and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where light is as darkness. It may be also noted, as a circumstance of strong resemblance between sleep and death, that they are respectively states of recess, from every thing which can disturb, and give uneasiness. Does the labouring man, after the fatigues of the day, retire to rest and his sleep is sweet to him; the same is true of the good man when descended to the grave. Arrived in the place of which inspiration observes “for there the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest,” the storms of life are forever past; no care disturbs—no pain is felt—no tear is shed, but the whole is a state of uninterrupted repose. In addition to these circumstances of likeness betwixt sleep and death,

I shall only note this equally striking one—that neither of them is perpetual, but only preparatory to soon waking up, refreshed and in possession of increased vigour. What a widely different conception is this of death, from what the heathen and a large proportion of modern infidels, profess to entertain? In their opinion the close of existence; the believer in revelation contemplates it in the very different light, of life's commencement. He ventures down securely into the grave, with strong assurance, that in as much “as Jesus died and rose again; even so them also who sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him.”

AND, in view of death being only such a pleasing short sleep, how is it in a great measure deprived of its naturally terrifying influence upon the mind. Instead of shrinking back with dismay, how ought the good man, who feels conscious that he has “served his generation by the will of God,” to congratulate himself, upon its nearer approach—Not only is he thus taken away from the evil to come, but put into possession of the whole heavenly blessedness.

BUT, constrained to view death in the light of a privilege to the one, who is called to be its subject; it assumes a widely different aspect, with reference to those who survive. The loss, thus incurred to them, often much exceeds their most extended calculation—A pillar, in that building of which they are a part, being fallen, both its beauty and durability, are in proportionable degrees diminished. At such a season of breaking down, there certainly is the greatest propriety that none should fail to join the lamenting prophet, in his memorable exclamation, “Help Lord for the godly man ceaseth, and the faithful fail, from among the children of men.”

AND having enlarged upon the doctrinal parts of our subject, to the extent which is likely to be useful, I must not delay to invite your more particular attention to the mournful and truly calamitous providence, which is the occasion of our present assembling.

WE are met to pay the last offices of respect to the *chief Magistrate* of this State. But a few weeks past, active as usual and able to perform the various weighty duties of office; we now behold him a striking example of the Psalmists words, "I have said ye are gods, and all of you children of the most high; but ye shall die like men and fall like one of the princes." Probably there are few, who so richly deserve the character, which has been the burden of our past reflections, as what he did—"For when David had served his own generation by the will of God; he fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers and saw corruption."—Like the ancient David, our modern one, "was taken from the sheepfold, to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance." The son of an affluent farmer, his juvenile occupations were chiefly of the agricultural kind. Without the assistance of a collegiate education, his naturally discerning inquisitive mind, enabled him to acquire a good stock of scientific information, upon various subjects—among other studies, that of law engaged his particular attention, and was what he afterwards made his professional employment for a course of years. It was in this department, that he laid the foundation of his after very extended celebrity and usefulness. Aided by that candid deliberate manner, which seemed in a sort constitutional, but few have practised at our bar more extensively or with greater applause. During the period, that law was his governing object, he oc-

casionally represented this town in the General Assembly; and was soon advanced to a seat at the Council Board. It was while acting there, that he was delegated to the national Congress, of which he was twice appointed President, and after spending the whole term in that department, which the law would permit, he returned to his native state; where he has since sustained in succession, the offices of Chief Justice—Lieutenant-Governor and Governor, with unusually great approbation. But barely thus to sketch the civil career of our departed father and friend, would by no means do justice to his memory. Of a naturally amiable disposition, the whole tenor of his conversation was ingratiating and exemplary. For many years, a professor of religion, he appeared to delight both in the doctrines and ordinances of the gospel—a constant attendant upon public worship; he was occasionally the people's mouth to God, when destitute of preaching. After the commencement of his last sickness, previous to that singular debility both of body and mind under which he laboured a few days before death, his religious confidence continued unshaken. Amid repeated and very feeling declarations of his own personal unworthiness, he avowed unwavering trust in God through his Son; in full belief that he would keep what he had committed to him, against that day.* But I

* As some would probably be pleased with a more circumstantial account of Governor HUNTINGTON, the following extract is here inserted:

“Governor HUNTINGTON was descended from an ancient and respectable family in this state; he was son of *Nathaniel Huntington*, Esq. of Windham; his childhood and youth were distinguished by indications of an excellent understanding, and a taste for mental improvement. Without the advantage of collegiate education, or that assistance in professional studies which modern times have wisely encouraged, he acquired a competent knowledge of law, and was early admitted to the bar; soon after which, he settled in this town, and in a few years, became eminent in his profession. In the year 1764, he was a representative in the general assembly, and the following year appointed king's

perceive myself upon ground, which I should always wish to approach, with the greatest caution. The delineation of a good character, if deserved, is most commonly needless ; and if the reverse, is no better than disguised satire. The eulogy of words can never embalm the memory, which is not previously embalmed, in the progress of an exemplary, holy life. The preacher's business is not with the dead, but with the living—May he be instrumental to heal the wounds of affliction and direct the heart to improvement, his every rational wish is answered.

attorney, which office he filled with reputation to himself, and usefulness to the public, till other and more important services induced him to relinquish it. In the year 1774, he was made an assistant Judge in the superior court. In 1775, he was chosen into the Council, and in the same year elected a delegate to congress. In 1779, he was made president of that honorable body, and in 1780, re-chosen. The time of his continuance at Congress expiring with that year, he returned home, and resumed his seat in council, and on the bench which had been continued vacant for his return. In 1783, he was again a member of congress. In 1784, he was chosen Lieutenant-Governor, and appointed Chief Justice of the state. In 1786, he was elected Governor, and was annually re-elected by the freemen, with singular unanimity, till his death.

The public need not be informed of the usefulness of Governor HUNTINGTON, or the manner in which he discharged the duties of his various and important offices, especially the last ; the prosperity of the state during his administration, and the present flourishing condition of its civil and military interests, are unequivocal testimonies of the wisdom and fidelity with which he presided. Though not blessed with children, he was uncommonly happy in the conjugal relation with his excellent lady, who merited and possessed his most entire affection till her death.

As a professor of christianity, and an attendant on its institutions, he was exemplary and devout ; he manifested an unvarying faith in its doctrines, and joyful hope in its promises, amid the distresses of declining life, till debility of mind and body produced by his last sickness, rendered him incapable of social intercourse.

Under the influence of a charitable belief, that he is removed to scenes of greater felicity in the world of light, every good citizen will devoutly wish, that others, not less eminent and useful may succeed ; and that Connecticut may never want a man of equal worth, to preside in her councils, guard her interests, and diffuse prosperity through her towns."

UNDER the impresson of such thoughts, I shall accordingly, now address myself, very briefly, to the adopted children of the deceased.

RESPECTED FRIENDS,

WE presume, that though your present situation, is in some respects varied, from that of bereaved children in common, your feelings are not much different.—Left motherless in early childhood, the deceased and his amiable consort, opened their arms wide to receive you ; and have since to the time of their death, consulted your interests, with all the apparent sollicitude of own parents. Under their general guidance, the first rudiments of your education were attended to, and with what judicious indulgence they watched over your advancing youth, yourselves can best witness. Pleased with the return of filial obedience and respect, domestic happiness, has been in few instances more noticeable. But deprived months since of your adopting mother,† upon whom these scenes of happiness not a little depended, you are this day written fatherless. At a moment so interesting and solemn, we would fervently recommend you to the particular guidance and support, of our common father in heaven. Blessed with his continued patronage, may you carefully bear in mind, and to some good degree imitate the virtues, of your deceased parent. So far as he copied the example of our divine master, see to it that you make his life your own. Amid all the possible vicissitudes which may attend you, never forget the reality and im-

† Mrs. HUNTINGTON died June 4th, 1794, in the 56th year of her age—She was a daughter of the Rev. Ebenezer Devotion, of Windham ; of an amiable disposition and condescending manners, she had many to lament her death—among other excellent parts of christian character, her benefactions to the poor, ought not to be forgotten—The number is not small, of those, who on such grounds, “ rise up and call her blessed.”

portance of religion. Duly wrought upon by such an impression, both the enjoyment and respectability of your future days, will be much added to, and the only possible foundation laid, for looking beyond the grave, with the feelings of confidence and triumph.

THE brethren and other relatives of the deceased, will also permit my most sincere condolance with them, under their very great loss.

OFTEN of late called to mourn, another wide breach is now made upon your family connection. Deprived of that brother and friend, whom you deservedly esteemed and loved—clothed in sackcloth on his account; still in few instances, does grief admit of so many substantial alleviations.—Permitted to enjoy his company till the meridian of life was past, you behold him descending to the grave loaded with honour, and not without ground of hope, that he has already joined “the general assembly and church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven.” To admit such for fact, that entire submission to divine disposal, which ranks so high among the christian graces, becomes a dictate of the warmest friendship. In the place therefore, of a wish for re-union with your friend on earth, let the thought of following him into eternity, take full and lasting possession of all your minds. Weep not for him, but rather weep for yourselves and for your children; poured forth on such grounds, your tears cannot be too plentiful; till finally, may you be admitted to that world, where all tears shall be wiped away from the eyes, forever and ever.

A FEW words, to this very large assembly, shall close my discourse.

BEYOND mere address to the passions, the pre-

sent occasion is marked with the most speaking instruction to us all. Be we those who have been indulged the intimate friendships of the deceased—his brethren at the table of our common Lord, or of the number of those more distant citizens, who have for years been happy under his official administrations; let us not fail to bring his death home to the heart, and improve it as a most instructive lesson. In what more legible characters, could the uncertain fading nature of earth, be written out to view? We are thus shown, that a mind constitutionally formed for enjoyment—easy circumstances—a prospect of prolonged usefulness—and the unreserved esteem of an extensive acquaintance, can none of them defend from the arrest of death. So true is that inspired remark, “there is no man who hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death; and there is no discharge in that war.” Respectively hastening forward, to such so solemn a crisis, may we none of us fail to practise the most industrious preparation, against its arrival. Not a moment is to be lost, in respect to the great work—“Now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation.” Of whatever age or description of persons we are, unless believers in Jesus and sanctified by his spirit, we shall be lost forever. May a gracious God forbid, that such should prove the event, to a single individual present.

In dependence upon his sovereign and rich grace, may we all rather now feel authorized on scripture grounds, to anticipate the very different issue of life, which the voice from heaven long since declared to the apostle John, “*Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth; yea, saith the spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them.*” AMEN.