

The Gift of Sol. Freeman Esq. to his  
Humble Servant. Philander Sh.



DR. THACHER'S

S E R M O N,

ON THE DEATH OF

General Washington.





A  
S E R M O N,

OCCASIONED BY THE DEATH OF

General George Washington,

AND PREACHED FEB. 22, 1800, BY THEIR DIRECTION,

Before His Honor MOSES GILL, Esq. Commander in  
Chief, the Honorable COUNCIL, the Honorable  
SENATE and HOUSE of REPRESENTATIVES

OF THE

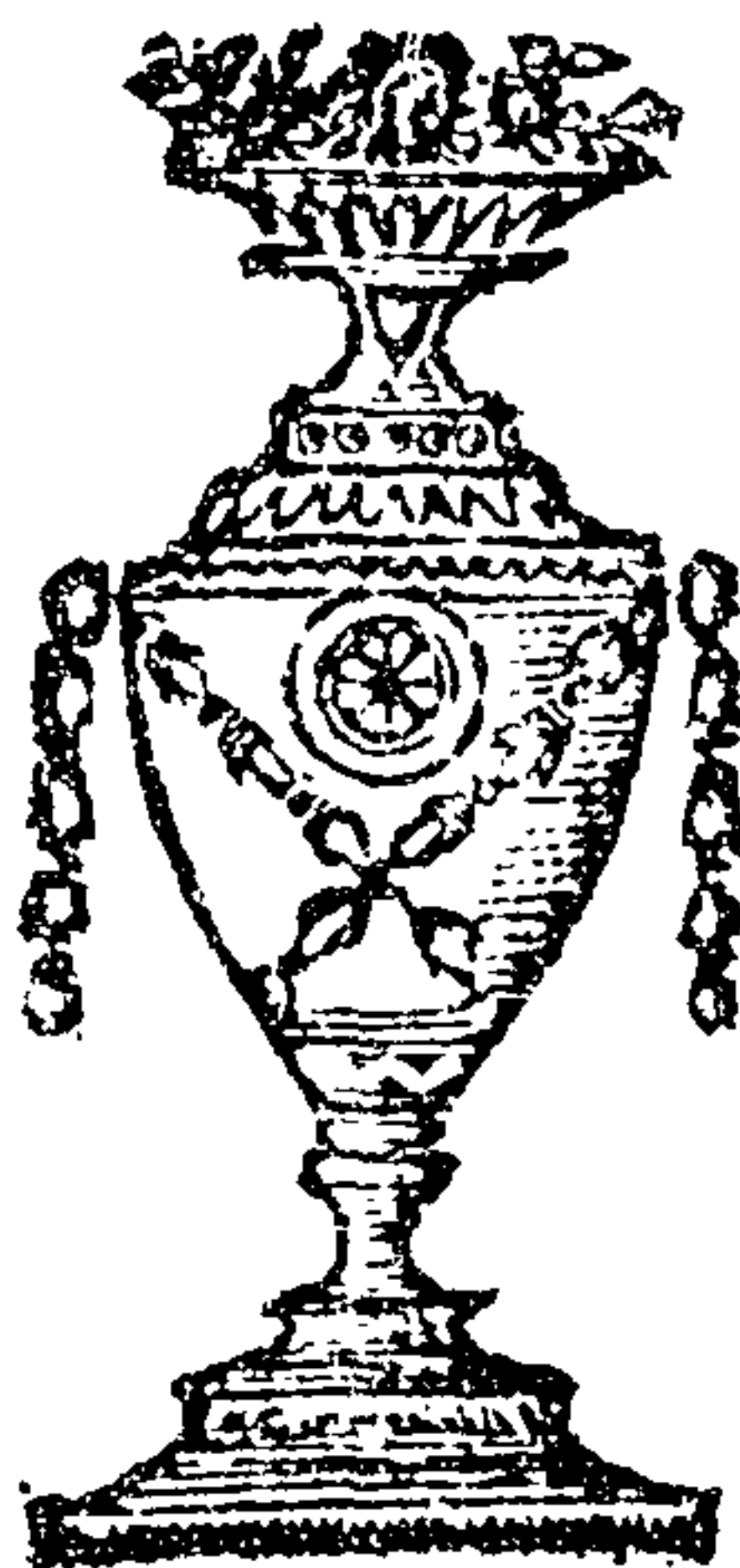
*Commonwealth of Massachusetts.*

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BY PETER THACHER, D. D.

CHAPLAIN TO THE GENERAL COURT.

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~~Massachusetts~~

Supra

**COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS.**



IN SENATE, FEB. 24th, 1800.

**O**RDERED, That JONA. MASON, Esq. with such as the Hon. House may join, be a Committee to wait on the Rev. Doct. THACHER, and present him the thanks of the Legislature for the Discourse he delivered on the 22d instant, before His Honor the Lieutenant Governor, the Hon. Council, and the two branches of the General Court, and request a copy for the Press.

**EDWARD M'LEAN, Clerk of Senate.**





## S E R M O N.

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II. CHRONICLES, XXXV. 25.

*AND THEY SPAKE OF JOSIAH IN THEIR LAMENTATIONS TO THIS DAY, AND MADE THEM AN ORDINANCE IN ISRAEL.*

**W**E cannot wonder that the people of Israel were thus deeply affected by the death of a good prince who was their warm friend and their great benefactor. JOSIAH was the common centre around which every good citizen of Judah revolved; and on him they relied, under God, to defend their country if invaded from abroad, and to crush, with the weight of his name and virtues, faction and rebellion at home.

How melancholy is the reflection that in the universal dominion of death over the human race, men of the most sublime virtues and most illustrious talents, are not only subjected to it, but frequently become the more early victims of his power; while some others who cumber the ground, and infest society, still live to disturb and distress all around them! We cannot comprehend the designs of Providence! It becomes us only to submit and to adore, to bow before  
before



before the throne of the highest, encircled as it may be with the thickest clouds, and to know that “the Judge of all the earth will do right.”

ALAS! that the empire of death is so universal; that the wise and the prudent, the brave and the virtuous, must submit to its power, as well as “the fool and the brutish person.” It is indeed “appointed unto all men once to die, and there is no discharge in that war.”

WHEN the power of the king of terrors is exercised over those who, like JOSIAH, were highly esteemed and fondly beloved; when it levels, with its fatal wand, the men who stood high above their fellow mortals, and removes to their long home those whose services and sufferings had purchased the freedom and happiness of a nation, we cannot be surprised that uncommon grief should possess the heart, and uncommon tokens of mourning should be displayed!

THE people of Judah, not content with simply committing their hero to the tomb, and bedewing his hearse with the tears which a recent loss occasions, resolved to manifest their grief by long and uncommon mourning. All Judah and Jerusalem, we are told, mourned for JOSIAH. They attended his remains to the sepulchre of his fathers, with deep and solemn grief. But they did not cease the expressions of it, when the clods of the valley covered him, and the grave concealed him from their view. But, “led by JEREMIAH, the prophet of the LORD, they lamented for JOSIAH.” Determined to perpetuate their gratitude, “the singing men and women



men (the poets and historians of that age) spake of JOSIAH in their lamentations to the very day” in which the chronicles were written. This was many years after the death of JOSIAH; probably after the return of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity, when the sacred canon was completed, under the auspices of heaven, by EZRA the high priest of the LORD.

WHEN we lose those who are peculiarly dear to us, and those whom we highly honor, we cannot endure the idea of their being forgotten. We determine that they shall live in our remembrance, and that their names shall be transmitted with honor and respect to the “generations which are yet to be born.” It is a sentiment similar to these which led our civil fathers to institute the religious solemnities in which we are now engaged. Some weeks have elapsed since we were deprived of the great and good man who was so long the pride and the father of his country. Every thing which gratitude could dictate, affection inspire and eloquence express has already been said and done on this occasion. The service before me is therefore a difficult one.

BUT, this solemnity is of a religious nature. The humble worship of the Deity is our object, and a moral improvement of a death so affecting, our design in the exercise before us. My duty is not that of the eulogists, whose classic elegance and glowing description have drawn the character of the illustrious dead, and richly emblazoned his fame. No; it belongs to the present discourse to lead our thoughts  
from



from earth to heaven ; to adore the divine sovereignty ; to acknowledge his gracious hand in all that the departed was himself and did for us ; and to point out the lessons of wisdom, civil and religious, which we may learn from the affecting event !

THE sovereignty of GOD, like the thunders and lightnings and thick cloud which surrounded him on Mount Sinai, veils from our eyes many of the motives which influence the divine conduct, and operate in the government of the world. Without controul or restraint he does his pleasure in heaven above and on earth beneath. GOD is absolute and unlimited in his will and purposes. Himself the first cause, the source, the fountain of all existence and energy, he has communicated to his creatures whatever they possess, and the highest archangel in heaven is as entirely subjected to the divine sovereignty as the meanest reptile on earth. "GOD is a rock, and his work is perfect." The plan of his government is fixed beyond alteration, and all creatures are in his hands as the "clay is in the hands of the potter."

THE divine sovereignty would be a doctrine of terror and distress to us, did we not know that it resided in a being perfectly wise and essentially good. It is not the exercise of power, prompted by caprice, actuated by resentment, or dictated by folly. It is the result of infinite wisdom which beholds the past, the present and the future at one view, which knows the nature and the consequences of all events, and will bring them to pass in the time and by the means which are most honorary to him, and most beneficial



cial to his creatures. Viewed in this light, the sovereignty of God should calm our hearts, engage our trust, command our obedience, and elevate our affections. With the inhabitants of heaven we should in humble devotion and grateful rapture, exclaim, “Alleluia, the LORD GOD omnipotent reigneth !”

IN all the circumstances which relate to the world and to man, from the revolution of a kingdom to the lighting of a sparrow, we view and should acknowledge this sovereign providence of the most HIGH. “In him we live and move and have our being.” We are supported by his bounty, defended by his power, pardoned by his grace, and sanctified by his spirit. Surrounded by his immensity, we are always before his eyes. He upholds us in life. His “visitation preserves our spirits,” and he has determined the bounds of our habitations which we cannot pass.”

DEATH is an interesting period to us all, and for wise purposes we are made to dread its approaches. When its icy hand is laid upon us, or when its fatal vortex swallows up those who are dear to us as ourselves, then we should realise the sovereignty of God. “Behold, he taketh away, who can hinder him? there is no man who hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit in the day of death.” When the decree goes forth from the eternal throne, when the “time, the set time” is come, then the grim tyrant performs his fatal office. The prayers and tears of an assembled nation; the fondest affection of immediate friends; the most brilliant virtues; the most illustrious character; the esteem and honor and



veneration of a world cannot for a moment arrest the progress or prevent the approach of death ! The great and the small ; the high and the low, the rich and the poor, bow their heads and die !

BUT under the exercise of this act of sovereignty, at a day of lamentation like the present, let us contemplate the wisdom and goodness and righteousness of God. "He is in heaven and we are upon earth, and therefore it becomes us that our words should be few." Our understandings, darkened by sin and clogged with mortality, are sometimes perplexed with the ways of God. But submission to his will becomes us who "are of yesterday, and know nothing." We are as certain as he exists that God cannot do wrong. When therefore we mourn a loss like that which now covers America with sadness, we are to submit without a murmur to those dispensations which we cannot comprehend, and keep "our hearts fixed, trusting in the LORD."

BUT when, in our lamentations, we speak of the friends, the patrons whom we have lost, we cannot fail to recollect their amiable characters and their excellent virtues.

LET us constantly remember that God is the source of all virtue and of all excellency ; that mortals are good in themselves and useful to us as he makes them to be so. We may meditate with pleasure on their virtues. We may remember them with the warmest esteem and tenderest affection ; but we should never be unmindful, that every talent of nature, of reason and of art, descends from him who is "the father of our spirits, the former of our bodies, and the author of all our mercies."

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WE mourn this day “a prince and a great man fallen in our Israel ;” a man more truly elevated in the esteem of the world than any monarch who wields a sceptre, or any hero who commands an army ! The people of America have borne witness to his numerous virtues ; and now, we will summon his illustrious shade to aid us in support of the religion which he honored, and to make those men virtuous and good whom he was instrumental of making free and happy.

Too often the public virtues of a great character are clouded by private views. Sometimes those who are most useful to the world, and whose solid services and brilliant talents, compel our respect and admiration, prove themselves in the more retired walks of life to be “weak like other men.” It is happy for America, now she mourns her darling son, that not even the envenomed tongue of malice, battenning on the faults of its neighbours, nor the rageful voice of party, more cruel than the grave itself, can assail the fair fame of the man whom she laments ! In the domestic relations ; in his private dealings ; in his daily department, you always beheld him discreet, amiable, dignified ! He shone, not with the lustre which dazzles courts and armies, but with the purer, the more honorable rays of private virtue.

WAS it not a sense of religion which led our late excellent friend to acknowledge, when at the head of our armies, and more lately when he presided in the nation, our absolute dependence upon the God of providence, ascribing the honor of his victories and our deliverance to him who “setteth up one  
and



and putteth down another !” In his public instruments ; in his last precious legacy to his country, and in his private conversation he expressed the deepest reverence for the infinite and eternal being who is “ in all and over all, and by whom all things consist.” His constant attendance on the christian church, his reverend observation of the LORD’S Day, as well as his whole behaviour, demonstrated his belief in the religion of the Cross.

“ HE that is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.” Never does a man appear so truly great as when he subdues those passions which infuriate others, and hurry them to the most fatal excesses. And here our beloved chief discovered true greatness, and placed before our eyes an illustrious example. His mildness, his patience, his impartial benignity enabled him to controul the passions of others, and reconcile contending interests. His self command enabled him to rule those who did not possess their own minds. A reserve, partly the gift of nature and partly the effect of prudent habit, prevented him from betraying his own purposes, or expressing sudden and unsuitable feelings. His patient endurance of wrong from the envious and the mistaken, made him their superior, and converted his enemies into friends. The enemies of his country I mean ; personal enemies he had none.

“ HE that walketh uprightly, walketh surely.” The blessing of GOD, the favor of men, and the testimony of a good conscience are the consequences of an honest and faithful discharge of our duty. These  
consequences



consequences of his integrity did our late excellent President enjoy. Neither wealth nor flattery nor clamour nor violence could corrupt his heart, or detach him from his duty. Honestly did he exert his whole power and influence to serve his country, nor can an instance be produced of his having neglected its concerns, or betrayed its interests.

It is recorded of NAAMAN that “by him GOD gave deliverance to Syria.” And him whom we mention in our lamentations this day, GOD made the principal agent in giving freedom and deliverance to America. A soldier in early life, when he was highly useful to his native province, he possessed a cool judgment and a determined courage. Without the ardent impetuosity, the furious valour which sometimes give success to folly and prosperity to injustice, he was intrepidly brave. His love of liberty, his well known military talents, led the venerable band of patriots, who, at the commencement of the revolution, conducted our councils, to consign to him the chief command of the American forces. Many of us remember this period, when at the hazard of his life and fortune, he first headed our feeble armies.—“Gallant mortal”—how did our souls love and honor him when first we beheld him on yonder plains flying to the relief of the oppressed, and defending the freedom of his country! How anxiously did we watch his footsteps through the dangers of our revolution, and how did our hearts warm with gratitude to heaven and to him, when we found that the soldier had not destroyed the citizen; that the lust of power which led so many generals, the CÆ-



SARS of old and the CROMWELLS of later days, to destroy their country and advance themselves, had no existence in his noble bosom ; but that he could cheerfully resign his brilliant and flattering command, and seek the shades of private life !—Thither did he modestly retire from the applauses of his country and the world, and shook from his venerable brow the laurels which oppressed him !

To such a man it was self denial to leave the happiness and the security of private life, and again to enter on the fatigues and hazards of elevated station.—But the call of his country General WASHINGTON never declined. The unanimous suffrages of his fellow citizens ( an election without a parallel in the history of the world ) selected him to administer the free and excellent constitution of government which he had assisted in forming. In the cabinet he shone equally as in the field. The interests of the Union and of the several States he guarded with the tenderest care. Our foreign relations he conducted with a temperate firmness which defeated the designs of faction, crushed the efforts of rebellion, and prevented us from being fatally affected with the convulsions which have shaken Europe to its centre, and agitated the whole world !

LIKE JOSHUA, the brave leader of Israel to independence and Canaan ; like DAVID, the intrepid defender of his country ; our late illustrious chief when, with manly dignity and patriotic affection he retired from the chair of government, left a legacy the most valuable and important to his country. While we are governed by the moral and religious principles



principles, and preserve the policy with respect to our internal and external affairs which he recommends, we shall be free and happy. When we leave them to adopt other principles and maxims, we shall deserve any consequences which may take place.

No man's character is fully ascertained till his death. And happy is he who dies as he has lived in the exercise of firmness of spirit and benevolence of heart. So died our beloved friend! Without the sickness and long debility which sometimes precede death; in the full exercise of reason, of humanity and patriotism, he suddenly encountered the universal conqueror. He submitted, for resistance was vain!—But nobly, and like a hero he submitted!—Great in his last moments, with his own hands he closed his own eyes, and gave up the Ghost!!—Happy man! Useful and beloved in life, calm and composed in death, embalmed with the tears of thy friends and thy country, God *did* bless thee above other mortals!

AND now, let us make a solemn pause in our lamentations, and amidst our grief acknowledge the goodness of God in raising up this great man, in qualifying him so essentially for the service of his country, and continuing him to us for so many years. On this day, when we used to celebrate his birth with warm and grateful pleasure, we feel his loss most deeply. But, how much more deeply should we have felt it, had he been taken from us at any period of our revolutionary war; or when the whole weight of his influence and character



ter was necessary to preserve us from being involved in the confusions of the European world, or when insurrection reared its hydra head, and threatened the most fatal consequences ?

BUT that GOD who has always been kind to America in raising up from among her own sons those who “naturally care for her state” and watchfully guard her interests, continued his life till a period when our excellent constitution is firmly established, and the prospects of disuniting and destroying us are greatly weakened. While we mention WASHINGTON in our lamentations this day, let us be thankful that so many great and good men in our Federal and State Governments are still spared to us ; men whom GOD has qualified for eminent service, and called to fill the most important stations. Let us be thankful for the inestimable life, the uncorrupted integrity, the superior wisdom, and the pure patriotism of ADAMS, the wise and the good, who now presides over these states ! May the Almighty continue him for many years, to be the father of his country, and the friend of mankind !

LET us be deeply humbled before GOD, this day, under the frowns of his providence in taking away men so great, so good, so useful as those whom we have lately been called to deplore.

WHEN GOD removed from his ancient Israel “the stay and the staff, the mighty man and the man of war, the prudent and the ancient, the honorable man and the counsellor,” it was considered as a token of the divine displeasure, and called not only for grief but humiliation. Great and good men

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are instruments in the hands of GOD to effect his purposes. They accomplish his will, and by them he does good to us. When they are taken away therefore, we ought to humble ourselves in his sight. When those by whom GOD has been used to do good to us are removed by death, have we not reason to fear that he means to deprive us of the good itself?

GOD is, we trust and hope, the guardian and friend of America, and his gracious favor is the palladium of our country. Its existence and prosperity do not depend upon any one man, or any number of men, let them be ever so wise or good. "The LORD is our defence, and the holy one of Israel is our King." It is true that when we sustain the loss of such men as a WASHINGTON and a SUMNER, we are constrained to say, "Help LORD, for the godly man ceaseth, the faithful fail from among the children of men." When those who "seemed to be pillars" are removed, we feel the goodly fabric of our government shaken. But, "the residue of the spirit is with GOD." He gave us these excellent men. He continued them to us as long as he saw to be best. And now that he has taken them away, we will submit to the will of Heaven, and rely on him who has never forsaken us nor our fathers.

BUT surely when we mention the virtuous and the good in our lamentations, we should be stimulated to emulate their virtues, and be studious to follow their advices, founded on experience, wisdom and love of their country.



It is not to the parade of mourning, nor to the dictates of affectionate feeling only that we should this day attend. We ought to be made wiser and better by an event so affecting, and services so solemn as we are now performing. Our civil rulers have called us to celebrate the days of mourning for our beloved friend, in order to fix deeply in our minds a reverence for his character, and a respect to the principles which he practised himself, and in his dying legacy recommended to us. You, especially, venerable fathers, who compose the executive and legislative powers of the Commonwealth : You who so lately solemnized the obsequies of our own beloved Chief Magistrate, will suitably meditate on the uncertainty of human life, and the vanity of human greatness. You will feel the importance of faithfully discharging your whole duty, both public and private, so that you may be approved of God, and “accepted of the multitude of your brethren.” Go ye and imitate the self-command, the disinterestedness, the cool wisdom and warm patriotism of the man whom a nation this day laments. Go ye and serve God, and your generation according to his will !” Go ye, continue in your uprightness, and still preserve the usefulness which gives us security and prosperity !—This is an awful and a solemn scene ! Here the supreme executive power, and the high legislative authority of the Commonwealth, assemble in religious worship, to acknowledge and adore the governor of the universe under one of the most distressing events in his providence, and to condole each other on this melancholy dispensation. All the people



ple of the Commonwealth unite this day in the expressions of their grief, and sympathize with their civil rulers on the great and universal bereavement ! May our mourning be useful, and may we be “taught to profit by the things which we suffer.”

ON imbibing the principles recommended by our late illustrious chief, equally distant from tyranny and licentiousness, depends the safety of our country. If we wish to be great among the nations abroad, and to be peaceful and happy at home, we must preserve inviolably our union. We must guard against improper foreign connexions. We must maintain a spirit of mutual forbearance and good will, and must cultivate especially those principles of religion and morality which are the only solid cement of society, and the only firm foundation of liberty. Where GOD is neglected ; where the religion of CHRIST is denied ; where men are governed not by reason or religion, but by party views and furious passions, there may be the *name* of liberty, but the *thing* never can exist. If we are careful to preserve and to foster the universities, the schools we now maintain : If we honor and respect the day and the ordinances of GOD : If we despise and neglect vice, and honor and support virtue : If we embrace the doctrines, and submit to the precepts of the Gospel, we shall be a happy people, and transmit our civil and religious liberties, a fair and a large inheritance, to the latest posterity.

BUT while we sympathize with a nation in their afflictions, let us not forget the private distresses which this solemn event has occasioned. We mourn with  
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the desolate widow, who is deprived of the “ guide of her youth,” the friend of her riper years, and the most valuable of her earthly blessings ! Calmly and with composure may she submit to this afflictive event ; and since her attachments to earth are diminished, may she prepare to join the “ desire of her eyes” in a better world ! May his friends, his relatives, his domestics, while they mourn his loss, imitate his virtues, and may none who bear his illustrious name, tarnish its lustre, or bring disgrace upon it.

AND now, friends and fellow-citizens, let us “ cease from man whose breath is in his nostrils, for where is he to be accounted of !” If those who are the delights of their country, and the veneration of the world : If men of the purest characters : If those for whom prayers are continually ascending, that they may be spared and blessed : If *they* are taken away : If *they* are laid low in the dust, how shall *we* escape this common lot of humanity ! If these cedars of Lebanon, “ the height whereof reacheth up to heaven, and the sight thereof unto the ends of the earth :” If *they* bow and break, what shall become of the “ hyssop which springeth out of the wall !” — Surely we are hastening to the silent tomb, “ the house appointed for all living !” We shall soon follow the friends whom we deplore, the wise and the good, whom we honor, through “ the dark valley of the shadow of death !” — Let it be therefore our most earnest solicitude, to partake of the grace of the Gospel, to do our whole duty, and promote the welfare and happiness of our fellow-men, so that when we fall asleep, we may be  
“ found



“ found of our judge in peace,” and be “ received into everlasting habitations !”

AND now unto him, who is “ prince of the kings of the earth,” “ before whom” all nations are as the drop of the bucket, and the dust of the balance,” to the infinite, perfect, eternal mind, “ the same yesterday, to day, and forever,” be glory and honor, dominion and power, both now and forever,

*AMEN.*

