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THE LIFE OF 'THE
RIGHT REV. DR. WATSON, F. R. S.

*Late Lord Bishop of Llandaff, Regius
Professor of Divinity in the Uni-
versity of Cambridge, Archdeacon
of Ely, and Rector of Knaptoft, in
Leicestershire.*

(Extracted from the Annual Biography and
Obituary, for the year 1817.)

RICHARD WATSON, a native of Westmoreland, was born at Eversham, about five miles from Kendal, both situated in that county, in the year 1737. His father, a clergyman, who possessed but a very trifling preferment, enjoyed for many years the Mastership of the free Grammar School in Kendal, where the son was brought up. That his education was carefully attended to, and that he was not only early, but thoroughly initiated in the elements of human learning, appears probable; his knowledge, indeed, seems to have been all that he carried with him to Cambridge, except a very scanty stock of money, the most persevering economy, and a habit of application, that defied imitation, and almost belief. He was admitted of Trinity College about the year 1755, and his *true blue worsted stockings and coarse mottled coat*, both of which doubtless evinced themselves of home-spun manufacture; together with a northern, or provincial accent, are still commemorated by tradition in the annals of that celebrated institution. Nor ought such trifles to be overlooked in this place: for when it is recollected, that his unimpeachable morals, rapid progress, and uniform good conduct, either served to overcome or to obliterate the prejudices arising from these petty obstacles, the very mention of them

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conveys an appropriate lesson to the raw, young, and uninformed *Tyro*.

Mr. Watson was twenty-two years old when he took his first degree, having obtained that of B. A. in 1759; he proceeded A. M. 1762; when he stood high among the *Wranglers*; and finally crowned his academical promotions as D. D. in 1791. The Doctor appears at an early period to have obtained the respect of his own college, which could not be long unconscious of his worth; and to this was added the esteem of the whole university, in consequence of an incident which might have proved prejudicial to a person less discreet. The late Duke of Grafton, who was then their Chancellor, having made an improper recommendation of a candidate for a vacant office, he gave a spirited opposition to the appointment; but took care, at the same time, to mingle his objections with so much suavity of manner, as actually to obtain the friendship of the nobleman in question. Indeed, at an early period, he appears to have imbibed a due knowledge of the world and its affairs: for although he never excelled in *mathematics*, a study, then, as now deemed so essential at Trinity College; yet he soon obtained precedency of those who were deeply versed in all its most abstruse branches. Thus Postlethwayte, one of his ablest opponents as a *Wrangler*, could demonstrate himself fit only for a small rectory in the country, while Watson was soon enabled to become his Diocesan!

A fellowship obtained sometime before, afforded something like present independence, while a college tutorship led to future honours and emoluments. The present Lord Carysfort

was one of his early pupils; and to another, the late Mr. Luther, afterwards M. P. for the county of Essex, he was indebted for a large portion of that affluence which accompanied the latter period of his life; while, by means of a third—the late Duke of Rutland, he was at length enabled to attain a mitre.

At the period alluded to, modern chemistry, then in its infant state in Great-Britain, appears to have been unknown, or at least unattended to in the university of Cambridge. This may be fairly deduced from the circumstance, that a gentleman elected Public Professor of this science, was notoriously ignorant of the first principles of the art. Luckily, however, the office fell to the lot of Mr. Watson, in 1764, who determined that it should not be a *sinecure*. Immediately after his nomination, he associated Hoffinan, *supposed* to be a good practical chemist, in his labours, and by his means learned the rudiments of the art in which he was to instruct others. It is well known in the university, that their first attempts were rude, awkward, and unsuccessful. During the course of their joint experiments, both they and their workshop are said to have “been blown into the air!” but luckily escaping with only a few bruises and contusions, they proceeded in their doubtful and dangerous labours, until considerable progress had been effected. Immediately on this, the subject of the present memoir having commenced his public lectures, adopted the *nomenclature* then in use, but since become obsolete; and exhibited his apparatus and his experiments to a crowded and admiring audience. The discourses of the new Professor were of a popular nature; he did not pretend to enter into the depths of science, but contented himself with explaining the more obvious principles; and, above all, demonstrating the intimate connexion between chemistry and manufactures.

His fortune was now assured. In 1771 he was created Doctor of Divinity by royal mandate; and in the course of the same year was unani-

mously elected Regius Professor of Divinity to the university of Cambridge; to which office, the rectory of Somersham, in Huntingdonshire, is annexed. On this he married a lady of respectable connexions, with whom he had been long acquainted, and soon began to have a family around him, for which he was now enabled to provide.

By this time his reputation had extended throughout the whole kingdom, and the Royal Society, anxious to incorporate a man of such talents among its members, immediately proceeded to his election. Many of his papers, soon after, were published in the Philosophical Transactions; and those connected with chemistry were at length selected, and engrafted into his Essays.

Meanwhile, his friends and admirers were not inattentive to his clerical interests: for in 1774, he was presented to a prebendal stall in the church of Ely; and in 1780, succeeded Dr. Plumtre, as archdeacon of that diocess. In the course of the same year he obtained the rectory of Northwold, in Norfolk; while his patron and former pupil, the Duke of Rutland, now presented him to the valuable rectory of Knaptoft, in the county of Leicester, as an earnest of his future intentions.

It may be here fairly and truly stated, without intending any insult to Oxford, that anterior to the French Revolution, the university of Cambridge was uniformly distinguished by Whig principles, and all those liberal notions both in respect to politics and religion, which were introduced with, or rather confirmed by William III. It was not until the year 1776, that Dr. Watson had an opportunity of publicly maintaining his own opinions on those interesting subjects. Being then nominated to preach before his own university, on the anniversary of the Restoration, he delivered a discourse, which was soon after printed, under the title of “The Principles of the Revolution vindicated,” which attracted a considerable share of notice and popularity. Another of the same nature, and

professing the same tenets, on the anniversary of his present Majesty's accession to the throne, produced a controversy; but like all similar contentions, the disputants were soon lost in their own smoke; and we now only recollect "An Heroic Epistle to Dr. Watson;" the author of which, supposed to be the same with that "to Sir William Chambers," remains still unknown.

Having thus vindicated the principles of general liberty, and justified the revolution of 1688, Dr. Watson next proceeded to justify Christianity itself, from the attacks of sophistry, scepticism, and infidelity. The late Mr. Gibbon, fond of ease, luxury, and enjoyment, had relinquished his political opinions for a place; but in his religious tenets, he appears to have remained firm and sincere until the very last. In two of the chapters of his celebrated work on "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," he had attacked the religion of Christ; and he was now answered by means of a work, entitled, "An Apology for Christianity, in a Series of Letters, addressed to Edward Gibbon, Esq." This immediately became a popular production; for, instead of calling in the assistance of the secular power, or commencing his attack with the violence of bigotted zeal, Dr. Watson displayed all the mildness of a true Christian, and all the good manners of a well-bred gentleman.

In 1780, he published another sermon, preached before his own university, in the beginning of the same year (Feb. 4th), on the day appointed for the general fast; and in 1781, he produced his first volume of "Chemical Essays." This was soon after followed by four additional ones.

At length, by the influence of the Duke of Rutland, to whom this work was inscribed, he obtained the mitre; and thus owed to a lucky incident, what his own merit had fully entitled him to. From that moment he seems to have abandoned his once favourite pursuit, as will be seen from the following quotation from the preface to his fifth and last volume:

"When I was elected Professor of

Divinity in 1771, I determined to abandon, for ever, the study of chemistry, and I did abandon it for several years; but the *veteris vestigia flammæ* still continued to delight me, and at length seduced me from my purpose.

"When I was made a Bishop, in 1782, I again determined to quit my favourite pursuit: the volume which I now offer to the public is a sad proof of the imbecility of my resolution.

I have on this day, however, offered a sacrifice to other people's notions, I confess, rather than to my own opinion of *episcopal decorum*—I have destroyed all my chemical manuscripts.—A prospect of returning health might have persuaded me to pursue this delightful science; but I have now certainly done with it for ever; at least, I have taken the most effectual step I could, to wean myself from an attachment to it; for, with the holy zeal of the idolaters of old, who had been addicted to curious arts—I have burned my books."

Soon after his consecration, the new Bishop attracted the notice of both the clerical profession and the public at large, by "A Letter addressed to the Archbishop of Canterbury," on the equilization of the Church Revenues. The late Mr. Cumberland, however, was the only person who attempted to answer it; and his reply lost much of its effect from the appearance of haste and violence in which it was composed.

The Bishop of Llandaff was now considered as a very able and popular prelate; and on being chosen to preach before the Lords on January 30, 1783, the Abbey was crowded on the occasion. But those who expected any violent declarations, or extraordinary political sentiments, returned home disappointed; on the other hand, such as were fond of a discourse admirable in its composition, and cautious as well as temperate, in respect to its sentiments, were delighted upon this occasion.

In 1786, appeared "A Collection of Theological Tracts," in six vols. 8vo. of which his Lordship was the

avowed editor. This was published at Cambridge, and designed entirely for the use of students in divinity : it may be considered as an official publication, as *Regius Professor* ; and the series, of itself, forms an inestimable library to every candidate for holy orders. It could add nothing to his Lordship's fame, as it required selection alone ; it was therefore considered merely in the light of a duty.

As the Bishop of Llandaff had now become a legislator, the eyes of the public were steadily fixed upon his political conduct. During the discussion of the commercial treaty with France, his Lordship supported Ministers in that measure, which must be allowed to have proved highly beneficial to this country. During his Majesty's first illness he joined the opposition, and was one of those who considered the Prince of Wales as possessing an unqualified right by birth alone, to the assumption of the Regency. But Mr. Pitt, on this occasion, deemed it more constitutional, that the two remaining states should supply the temporary vacancy of the throne. The sudden and unexpected recovery of the Sovereign put an end to all the changes then meditated ; and among other incidental speculations of that day, the vacant Bishopric of St. Asaph was assigned to Dr. Watson.

Meanwhile, a great and singular event occurred in Europe, which, from the very beginning, seemed portentous ; and in a short time appeared pregnant with the most serious and important results. Different opinions prevailed as to the manner in which the French Revolution ought to be viewed by the English people ; and ministry and opposition were, as usual, divided, both as to the nature and the treatment of this national convulsion. The Bishop of Llandaff, as a friend to peace, appears to have deprecated all intervention on our part ; and it was not until long after the commencement of hostilities, that he gave his avowed sanction to the war. In 1791, he delivered a charge to the clergy of his diocese, in which this, and a number of other points were touched up-

on ; particularly respecting the present condition of the Church, and the pretensions of those who dissented from the established faith. To avoid the possibility of misrepresentation, he soon after deemed it necessary to publish this address.

His attention seems now to have been divided between his attendance in the House of Lords, where he spoke frequently, and always in the spirit of conciliation, and his prelatial duties, when called on as a preacher, to promote the great charitable institutions of our metropolis. Accordingly, he twice preached sermons for the benefit of the Humane Society, both of which were admirable of their kind, although neither of them has ever been printed. He also delivered a discourse in behalf of the Westminster Dispensary, which has been praised by an author, by no means favourable to his political sentiments :—

“ I am not in the habit of perusing many of the various single sermons which are published ; but I cannot resist the opportunity of recommending three, which I think are at this time important, and written with ability and spirit. One by the Rev. Dr. Vincent, head Master of Westminster School (a gentleman of very considerable erudition, diligence, ability, and most exemplary conduct), preached for the Westminster Dispensary ; another by Doctor Watson, Bishop of Llandaff, preached for the Westminster Dispensary also ; with an Appendix, containing Reflexions on the present State of England and France. The Appendix is of peculiar merit ; and a third ‘ On Gaming ;’ written with great energy, patriotism, and eloquence, by the Reverend Thomas Rennel, D. D. Prebendary of Winchester.”

In 1796, an opportunity occurred, and was happily seized by the Bishop, which enabled him not only to distinguish himself as an advocate for, but also to be of eminent service to the cause of Christianity. It was at that period, that the “ Age of Reason” was encountered by “ An Apology for the Bible, in a series of Letters addressed to the author of that work.” On this

occasion he made use of the same mildness and urbanity that he had before displayed, when encountering the infidel opinions broached by Mr. Gibbon; and it must be allowed, that in both instances, he was deemed not only a very opportune, but a very able champion in behalf of that faith which pervades the whole of civilized Europe. In short, Doctor Watson's well-timed and celebrated tract against Paine, although it did not, like Horsley's contest with Priestley, lead to preferment, yet, for a time, turned the tide of loyalty and religion in his favour, and procured him admirers among a class of writers, who had before been his enemies.*

At the commencement of the year 1799, his Lordship published an "Address to the People of Great-Britain." In this political pamphlet, he prudently waved all discussion of the merits or demerits of the war, in respect to its origin; but took a new

* The author of the "Pursuits of Literature," thus compliments the good Bishop, both in prose and verse, upon the present occasion:—

"Yet all shall read,† when bold in strength divine,

Prelatic virtue guards the Christian shrine,
Pleased from the pomp of science to descend,
And teach the people as their hallow'd friend;
In gentle warnings to the unsettled breast,
In all its wand'rings from the realms of rest,
From impious scoffs and ribaldry to turn,
And Reason's Age, by reason's light discern;
Reflex insulted truth with temper'd zeal,
And feel that joy which Watson best can feel."

† "See the important, convincing, and eloquent Letters addressed to Thomas Paine, author of the 'Age of Reason,' second part, by the Right Rev. Richard Watson, Bishop of Llandaff, styled 'An Apology for the Bible.'

"To write such a book as this, is to do a real service to mankind. A cheap edition of it is printed, and it is hoped will be circulated throughout the kingdom.

"I think that his 'Defence of Revealed Religion,' in two short sermons, is of great merit, and of general utility. Bishop Watson should often write, but with the utmost caution, accuracy, and consideration; because his works will always be read.

"I would also particularly recommend the perusal of the Sixth Letter of the series of letters which the Bishop addressed to Mr. Gibbon. To young men of fashion and of abilities, originally good, but obscured by libertine life and conversation, it will be peculiarly serviceable; as well as those, who are led astray by some modern pretended discoveries in natural philosophy, now a favourite mode of introducing and enforcing scepticism and infidelity."

view of our then situation, after six years conflict with an enemy, which becoming stronger daily, during the contest, now menaced us with retaliation, and even menaced invasion itself. Assuming the proposition, that the nation was reduced to the alternative of absolute submission on one hand, or a vigorous prosecution of the contest on the other; he declared in favour of the latter. His Lordship accordingly maintained that great sacrifices and great exertions had become necessary; and he conjured his countrymen to make these in behalf of their liberty, their property, and all that is dear to man.

This address of course produced a multitude of replies. Some accused him of dereliction of both principles and character; while others animadverted on the laxity of his opinions, and the prudent conformity now evinced to the established order of things. The pamphlet in question, however, produced a great effect on the public mind. The Government too, as if impressed with new zeal, in consequence of this timely co-operation, immediately unsheathed the flaming sword of prosecution against his opponents, two of whom were convicted of seditious libels; while all other writers were appalled from engaging in so dangerous a controversy. But the gratitude of Ministers ended here; for no translation ensued, and it was now found, that the labourer who came in at the twelfth hour, was not to be rewarded like him who appeared at the ninth.

But notwithstanding his Lordship had no fewer than six children, and his bishopric was always accounted a poor one, yet his revenues from the church could not be deemed scanty, nor his fortune contemptible. By the death of Mr. Luther,* in 1786, he had also obtained a legacy of 20,000*l*.

* This gentleman was not only indebted to the Bishop for the care taken of his education and morals, but also for his friendly and spirited intervention on a single occasion. Mr. L. was addicted to play, and having fallen into the hands of sharpers in France, was actually rescued from their fangs by Dr. Watson, who repaired to the Continent on purpose.

Immediately after this, he determined to make an acquisition to that amount in his native county. He accordingly purchased Calgarth Park, in Westmoreland, and erected a house, delightfully situate, in the immediate vicinity of the lakes. Here he considered himself as a country gentleman, and dedicated much of his time to agricultural pursuits. For many years Mr. Curwen, M. P. for Carlisle, was either the associate of his labours, or the occasional companion of his retirement. Under his auspices, and at his own expense, the neighbouring mountains, up to their very summits, were clothed with wood of all descriptions, particularly the larch. Of this favourite tree, he planted many millions, and obtained, on that account, not only the applause of all men interested in the improvements of their native country, but the gold medal of the Society of Arts, Manufactures, &c. His leisure moments were also occupied at intervals, with literary pursuits, and he is said to have been busily employed for many years past in writing a "History of his own Times."

The good Bishop, who had now attained almost a patriarchal age, began, of late years, to stoop, and exhibit symptoms of decay. A fit or two of apoplexy, warned both himself and family of his impending fate; and he at length uttered his last sigh at Calgarth Park, in the county of Cumberland, amidst the woods he had planted, and the hills where he was born, on July 5th, 1816.

Thus died Richard Watson, Bishop of Llandaff, in the 79th year of his age. As a divine, he was a vigorous, able, and zealous supporter of the established church. In his person, he was tall, stout, muscular, and dignified. As a bishop, he was always the patron of unfriended merit, and added dignity to the bench, by his learning, his intelligence, his ability, and his independence. As an orator, his action was graceful, his voice harmonious, and his delivery both chaste and correct. As a writer, he displayed a great knowledge of composition; his style was neat, and even elegant, while his

diction was pure and argumentative. But it is as a controversial writer that he is entitled to great, deserved, and undiminished praise. In all his contests, he made use of the language befitting a scholar and a gentleman; and he both detested, and scorned to imitate, the vituperative attacks of those who, by recurring to scurrility and personality, forget the first duty of a Christian divine.

To the Editor of the Christian Journal.

ROBERT NELSON'S OPINION on the IMPORTANCE of THEOLOGICAL SCHOOLS.

The name of Robert Nelson is familiar to the readers of your very useful paper in general, as one of the brightest examples in modern ages, of all Christian excellence. His work on the Fasts and Festivals of the Church, his Treatise on the Lord's Supper, his little Catechetical Tract on Confirmation, and his Book of Devotions, have aided and encouraged thousands in this country, in the right understanding and performance of religious duty. This most excellent and pious member of the Church of England died in 1714—15, and bequeathed his whole estate, which was very ample, to pious and charitable uses. Familiar with his sentiments on other subjects connected with religion, Episcopalians in this country may not be unwilling to receive the strong and decided testimony of one so wise and good, in justification of the purpose which their Church has recently committed to their liberality, on the subject of education for the ministry. It is extracted from his life of Bishop Bull. B.

"I cannot help wishing, from the hearty affection and good will I bear to the welfare of religion in general, and to the prosperity of the Church of England in particular, that, as we have noble foundations for the encouragement of all sorts of learning, and especially for Divinity, in our two famous universities; so we had, also, some of these foundations entirely set apart for the forming of such as are candidates for holy orders: where