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from E. S. Wain*

A

TRIBUTE OF RESPECT

TO THE

CHARACTER AND MEMORY

OF

MR. ENSIGN LINCOLN.

WHO DIED DECEMBER 2, 1832.

BY DANIEL SHARP,
PASTOR OF THE CHARLES-STREET BAPTIST CHURCH, BOSTON.

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TRIBUTE OF RESPECT.

AN EXCELLENT SPIRIT WAS IN HIM.

Daniel vi. 3.

SEVERAL years have elapsed since I delivered a funeral discourse. This has been owing, not to a want of respect for the memory of deceased members of this church, but to a conviction of the peculiar delicacy of the task. To speak of all our departed Christian friends in the same terms of approbation, would be to defeat the legitimate object of funeral eulogy, and yet to discriminate, might be considered invidious and unkind. I have therefore thought it better to be silent in relation to some individuals, whose conduct was truly exemplary, than to feel compelled by custom to praise others, whose lives had not entitled them to any public commendation. We ought never to praise the dead at the expense of truth, nor to censure them at the expense of charity. These considerations induced me long ago, to relinquish the practice of preaching funeral sermons.

There are, however, instances when it is due both to the living and the dead, that the characters of those who have gone the way of all the earth should be portrayed. Not to do so, would indicate great insensibility to real worth. It would deprive us of the pleasure of grateful, although mournful recollections, and of the benefit of examples which ought to be imitated. Such an instance has just occurred. The man whose life

and death, I would notice on this occasion, was eminently pious, amiable, and useful. We should be unjust, both to him and to ourselves, as well as ungrateful to God, who gave him to us, were we to allow him to pass to the land of silence and death, without offering a publick tribute of regard to his memory.

What is said of Daniel, could be applied to no one with more truth and propriety, than to our deceased friend. "An excellent spirit was in him." It was this spirit, pervading his private intercourse, accompanying him in all the difficult and perplexing transactions of business, and manifesting its mild lustre in his various publick ministrations, that so greatly endeared him to us. Perhaps I cannot give a more just and complete sketch of his character, than by tracing out its resemblance to that of the prophet.

1. There was in the young Hebrew a spirit of ardent and habitual piety.

He might have been just and kind, and have felt a patriotic concern for his suffering countrymen who were captives in a strange land ; but estimable as these traits of character are, it could not have been said, "an excellent spirit was in him," had he forgotten the claims of his Maker on his regards. But he did not. He not only acknowledged the assistance of God, and his relation to him as a dependent creature, and a subject of his moral government, but cherished the affections suitable to the admission of these facts. Love and reverence, gratitude and penitence, pervaded his bosom ; and he gave utterance to these feelings in the language of praise and prayer. He was a man of habitual piety. "He kneeled upon his knees three times a-day, and prayed, and gave thanks to God." He was indeed, so conscientious in observing his stated seasons

of devotion, that although he knew, according to the decree which had been issued, that he could not do so but at the hazard of his life; yet, as was his custom, "he went into his house, and made supplication before his God." No one can read the book of Daniel without feeling convinced that he was eminently pious.

So was our departed friend. This excellent spirit was in him. No one who knew him, ever doubted his piety. And those who knew him best, had the best evidence of it. It was not in him a transient and fitful feeling. It was not a flame, merely kindled by the devotional ardour of others, and as suddenly extinguished. It burned purely, mildly and steadily, without apparent intermission. He held habitual communion with the skies. Although he was extremely pleasant as a friend, and would converse cheerfully and freely, on the affairs of business, and the events of the day, as one who felt a rational interest in them, yet he could pass from these topics, without any apparent abruptness, to those higher and nobler themes in which he most delighted.

But it was at home, in his own beloved family circle, where his piety shone with peculiar brightness. Those who had the happiness of an occasional residence with him, can bear testimony, how pleasant and acceptable he made his morning and evening devotions. His kind and pertinent remarks on the portion of scripture that was read, his unaffected simplicity, and his earnestness of manner, convinced every one that he was an Israelite indeed, in whom there was no guile.

2. Daniel was eminent for a spirit of wisdom.

This was manifested in all the difficult and important transactions of his life. When he was in the king's palace, at Babylon, "he purposed in his heart,

not to defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank." He therefore requested the prince of the Eunuchs that he might not defile himself. But although the Prince favoured Daniel, and treated him with great kindness, yet he feared to comply with his request; because he knew that his own life would thereby be endangered. In this dilemma, Daniel displayed his great wisdom. Instead of reproaching the Prince for his pusillanimity, or of discussing abstract questions with him, and insisting on his right to refuse the King's portion, he said, "Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink; then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenances of the children that eat of the portion of the King's meat; and as thou seest, deal with thy servants." His history affords many other illustrations of his profound knowledge of the human heart. He united a respectful demeanour with unshrinking fidelity; and a spirit of kindness with a spirit of firmness. He knew how, and when, to yield to others without surrendering his own principles. He knew also, how to induce others to yield to him, without assuming an improper tone of authority over them.

Wisdom is the correct and useful application of knowledge. There are men of great learning and splendid talents who have no wisdom. They have no spirit of discernment which enables them to decide what is proper to be said or done. Hence, with the best intentions they frequently do more harm than good. You never can calculate with certainty, whether you are to be gratified or mortified by their remarks; or whether they will promote a spirit of peace, or blow up the flames of strife.

This was not the character of our lamented friend. In him was the spirit of wisdom. Such of you as were connected with him under all the circumstances of this religious society from its formation until his dismissal to the church in Federal-street, including a period of twenty years, know well, how wise he was in counsel, and how prudent in action. There were occurrences in the early history of this society which would probably have ended in its disorganization, had it not been for the great discretion of the deceased, and a few others who were imbued with a kindred spirit. The blessing of the peace-maker was always his. When any unhappy collision ever occurred in the church, he never was the individual to increase it. No unkind remarks escaped his lips. He was a mediator between brethren. He loved to unite those who had been alienated from each other. And knowing that a soft answer turneth away wrath, he would not unfrequently use the language of entreaty, when in truth stern rebuke was deserved. He was extremely cautious of wounding the feelings of others; and when his own was injured, would say, "I might express my displeasure; but I have concluded that when I come to die, I shall feel better that I past it over." By silence, forbearance, and conciliatory words and conduct, he contributed in an uncommon degree to the peace and union of the numerous societies with which he was connected.

3. The excellent spirit of Daniel was seen in his unaffected modesty.

Although he was endowed with "a superior understanding, and the power of interpreting dreams, and of explaining hard sentences, and of resolving doubts" beyond all the wise men of Babylon; yet he manifested no improper elation of spirit. Nor did he attempt to

prejudice the King against his soothsayers and astrologers for the sake of obtaining favour for himself. Instead of this, he voluntarily became their apologist, and assured the king that it was beyond the capacity of the wisest man to interpret his dreams. He candidly acknowledged his own utter incompetency for the task; only said he, "there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets. But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any one living, but for their sakes that shall make known the interpretation to the king, and that thou mightest know the thoughts of thy heart." Had he been so disposed, he might easily have imposed on the monarch, and have gratified his vanity by producing the impression that he was superior to all the wise men around him. But no, he could not resort to such means. He was unwilling that any one should praise him for wisdom or goodness that he did not possess. He was not more distinguished either for natural or supernatural endowments, than he was for modesty.

This was a prominent trait in the character of our late beloved friend. He would have been the last man to speak of his own talents or services. He never evinced by his conduct, that he had a high opinion of himself. Instances of his unassuming deportment are so numerous that my only difficulty is in making a suitable selection. He was a member of a church several years before he participated in any of its deliberations, from a feeling that it was indecorous to obtrude his opinions on those who were more aged, and had more wisdom and experience than himself. And it was not till a friend spake of him to his venerable pastor,* as

* Rev. Dr. BALDWIN.

a young man of talents and great promise, that he was drawn from the shade, in which he had voluntarily remained. The same modesty would have prevented him from entering the ministry at the period he did, but for an overruling Providence. Your present Pastor had engaged to supply your pulpit on the first Sabbath in September, 1811. But unavoidable circumstances prevented. And as the church had agreed from its organization, always to assemble for worship whether they were favoured with a minister or not, Mr. Lincoln was requested on that occasion, to direct the services. He complied with the request; and more perhaps to the surprise of himself than to others, preached two very acceptable and interesting sermons.

It was not without regret that I heard of this circumstance. For it had been my misfortune to have known several licensed preachers, who by their unreasonable jealousies and evil surmisings, had weakened the arms of their ministers, and added greatly to their discomfort. But I repeat now, with feelings of pleasure, what I frequently said while my friend was living, that not one of my fears in relation to him was ever realized. A more modest, simple-purposed man never lived. His single aim was to be useful. If this were accomplished, it never seemed a matter of concern to him, whether he occupied a conspicuous or an obscure station. He was willing to take any position, assigned to him, if it only afforded the prospect of turning men from the paths of disobedience to the wisdom of the just. He knew, what many preachers have yet to learn—the extent of his talents. And he never stretched himself beyond his own measure. He never attempted to be brilliant. He never soared to a height which he was unable to sustain. Hence, he seldom, if ever, raised hopes

which were disappointed. His hearers never expected any thing from his lips but what was characterized by piety, modesty, affection and good sense ; and these expectations were sure to be realized. He admired Cowper's description of a preacher, and answered well to the requirement in which he says :

"I seek divine simplicity in him
Who handles things divine."

And the spirit which was so predominant in his ministry, was with him every where. He was never obtrusive nor overbearing. In his secular concerns, although firm, he was ever conciliatory, and gained the confidence and respect of all who transacted business with him. "He has left behind him," says one, who has paid an honourable tribute to his memory, "many more noisy, ostentatious and presuming, but there are few who combine so many of the useful qualities with so much retiring modesty. There are few who have done so much good in so noiseless a manner."

4. In the person spoken of in our text, there was an excellent spirit of benevolence.

When he heard that the wise men of Babylon were to be destroyed, because they were unable to interpret the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar, his sympathies were awakened, and he interposed in their behalf. "Destroy them not, (said he,) but bring me before the King, and I will show him the interpretation." When admitted to his presence, he endeavoured to convince him that the wise men were blameless, and therefore ought not to be punished. This benevolent attempt to save their lives was in accordance with his whole conduct. He breathed a spirit of kindness for all men, and especially for the unfortunate, whatever might be their character or nation.

So did our common friend. I know not in which he excelled most—In modesty or in untiring benevolence. He was always ready to every good word and work. If a plan of charity was presented to his notice, and he thought it would be beneficial to his fellow-beings, he was prepared to promote it.

It was indeed his honour to aid in the formation of almost all the religious and humane charitable societies that appertained to the appropriate sphere in which he moved. He was active in the organization of the Evangelical Tract Society—the Howard Benevolent Society—the Boston Baptist Foreign Mission Society—the Massachusetts Baptist Education Society, and other institutions of a similar character. To these he not only gave his name, but much of his time, and thoughts, and pen, as well as his property.

His disinterested labours as a minister, are known to you all. He could say in the confidence of commanding the belief of the most sceptical; “I seek not yours, but you.” No one could accuse him of being an hireling, for he laboured without fee or reward. Few men preached more frequently, more acceptably, or more successfully. He was constant in season and out of season: And he did not labour in vain. Few if any of our settled pastors had the satisfaction of being so extensively useful. The churches of our denomination at Lynn—East Cambridge—Cambridge-port—Roxbury—South Boston and Federal Street; were more indebted to him for their formation and early progress than to any other minister. Others gave him their countenance, and were occasionally fellow workers with him, but he was the principal and most efficient instrument. Nor were his labours confined to the vicinity of Boston.

Many churches at a distance will long and affectionately remember his timely and useful services.

I have spoken more particularly of his benevolence in sustaining the religious charities of the age, but it was not confined to these. In his concern for the souls of men, he did not forget their bodies. "He visited the fatherless and the widows in their affliction. He was eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame, and the cause that he knew not, he searched out." There are some here, and many who are not here, who not only heard his kind wishes for their welfare, but participated in his liberality. But I need not enlarge on this part of his character. You all know that he had a kind and generous spirit.

A description of the closing scene of this good man's pilgrimage will probably be expected. I shall, in a few words, endeavour to meet that expectation. He died, as every one who knew him, might have anticipated. His end was peace.

"Night dews fall not more gently on the ground,
Nor weary, worn out winds expire so soft.

Having fought the good fight and finished his course, and kept the faith, he looked for the crown of righteousness laid up for him in heaven.

On the last day of his mortal existence, he said, "I know that my Redeemer liveth. And though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another." It was remarked by a friend; to them that believe he is precious. Yes, said he, and then repeated the verse,

"A guilty, weak, and helpless worm,
On thy kind arms I fall;
Be thou my strength and righteousness,
My Jesus and my all.

To an inquiry whether he enjoyed the presence of Christ, he replied, the Saviour promised to be with me a great while ago; and he will fulfil every word. "When I walk through the fire he will be with me, and the waters shall not overflow me." To another friend who said, I am glad that Jesus is with you, he answered yes; "He is the chief among ten thousand and the altogether lovely." About an hour before his death, he offered the following prayer: "Blessed Saviour into thy hands do I commit my spirit. Make me thine in the bonds of an everlasting covenant. What, lovely, gracious Redeemer, what has been wrong do thou forgive; what has been gracious do thou record." He repeated with much emphasis, that sweet verse of Watts—

"I asked them whence their victory came,
They with united breath
Ascribe their conquest to the Lamb,
Their triumph to his death."

Having thus exhibited another delightful instance how a Christian can die, he gently fell asleep in Jesus. His spirit has ascended to God, and his flesh rests in hope of a glorious resurrection.

The mourning children need not the assurance of our sympathies. We feel that your loss is incalculable. Early in life you were deprived of a most amiable and pious mother; but a father was spared to guide your youthful steps, and to lead you into the paths of virtue and piety: and having had the delightful satisfaction of seeing his hopes and prayers in a good degree realised, he has been taken from you. May the Father of the fatherless be your guide through life, and your supporter in death. In your sorrows, you have more than the common consolations attending the bereavement of a parent. Your loss is his unquestioned gain. He has left you a rich legacy in his character. You are beloved for the fath-

er's sake. Cultivate, my dear young friends, his spirit and follow his example, and the affection which was so generally felt for him will be transferred to you; and what is infinitely more valuable, your father's God will be your God forever and ever.

In portraying the character of the deceased, I have not, my hearers, been influenced by the consideration that it is customary to speak well of the dead. Nor has it been my aim to gratify the feelings of mourning relatives and friends, although they must be gratified, that so much can be said in sober truth, concerning one, whom they so tenderly loved. But I have had a higher object in view. I have been desirous of so awakening your admiration and love for the character of our departed brother, that you should imitate it. Let the same excellent spirit be in you which was in him. Be ye followers of him, who through faith and patience inherits the promises. Remember him, who has spoken unto you the word of God; whose faith follow considering the end of his conversation.

The character to which he attained, you should labour to attain, by patient continuance in well doing. His piety and self-control; his kind and forgiving spirit, and his irreproachable life, were not the result of accident, but of watchfulness, prayer, reflection, and self-dedication, accompanied with that divine blessing which is vouchsafed to all who like him, thus diligently use the means.

There is no doubt, that a happily adjusted physical constitution, contributed in some degree to that calm and equable flow of feeling for which he was so eminently distinguished. But we should not do justice to him, and we should fail of deriving suitable profit from the contemplation of his example, were we to attribute his discre-

tion, equanimity and amiableness of disposition, solely to physical causes. The action of moral causes contributed in no small degree to the formation of his character. He began in early life to commune with his own heart. He was in the constant habit, for a succession of years, of recording his thoughts, words and actions. And on reviewing the past, he determined to correct what he perceived was wrong, and to confirm what was right. He humbled himself before his Maker in view of his many imperfections, and made solemn vows as in the divine presence to be more circumspect in future. It was by such exercises as these, that he kept his heart with all diligence, and became such a lovely pattern of the Christian virtues. It should never be forgotten, my hearers, that moral excellence, any more than intellectual, is not to be attained but by self-denying and persevering effort. Let me intreat you then, that every one of you do give the same diligence, which he did, to the full assurance of hope unto the end.

Recollect also, that the honour of Christianity is involved in your religious and moral character. When you exhibit an excellent spirit, and are careful to maintain good works, you glorify your Father who is in heaven, and benefit your fellow creatures who are on earth. They may not subscribe to all your religious sentiments, but if you act consistently, they will respect your principles, and speak well of you. A respectable clergyman and author, who has transacted considerable business with the deceased, remarked to me only two days ago, that "in early life he was placed in circumstances which unhappily prejudiced him against our denomination. This, said he, I candidly confess continued, until I became acquainted with Mr. Lincoln. But I found his disposition so amiable, and his conduct as

a man of business, so honorable, that my former prejudices were softened, and the kindness I felt for him, was transferred in some degree to the denomination. In all my acquaintance, said he, I have never known one, who gave a more beautiful exemplification of the spirit of christianity." In this instance, you learn, my friends, that you may subdue prejudice, and awaken kind affections, by exhibiting the spirit and obeying the precepts of the blessed Saviour.

And lastly, permit me to remark, that your own happiness is intimately connected with high attainments in piety and virtue. He who has a meek, affectionate, and pious spirit, cannot fail of being happy.

"His mind has heaven and peace within."

His external condition may change. But this will not essentially affect him, because his principles are unchanged. He may be exposed to the agitation of outward circumstances, but reliance on God will keep him in perfect peace. He may experience unexpected provocations; but possessing his soul in patience, the momentary perturbation he feels, will subside into a settled calm. And although he may suffer in body or in estate, yet the hope of an inheritance beyond the grave, which is incorruptible, undefiled and that fadeth not away, will not only reconcile him to his lot, but enable him to triumph over all the pains and sorrows which flesh is heir to. Thus you see, that eminent faith and holiness, are a source of pure felicity in this life, and in the life to come, they will be crowned with a glorious immortality.