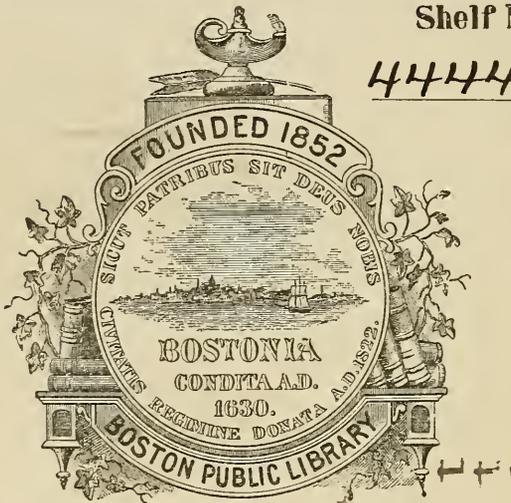


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THE GOOD MERCHANT.

A.

DISCOURSE

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SECOND EDITION.

BOSTON:

CHARLES C. LITTLE AND JAMES BROWN.

1845.

in 4405.61

This Discourse was first printed in 1837, immediately after it was delivered. Portions of it were copied, without acknowledgment, into HUNT'S MERCHANTS' MAGAZINE, No. III., for September, 1839, Vol. I. page 200. This fact is mentioned lest any one, reading that article, should suppose that the author of the Discourse borrowed from the Magazine, whereas the case was directly the reverse.

Lindsay Swift
July 24, 1896

BOSTON:
PRINTED BY FREEMAN AND BOLLES,
WASHINGTON STREET.

DISCOURSE.

ISAIAH, XXIII. 8.

THE CROWNING CITY, WHOSE MERCHANTS ARE PRINCES, WHOSE TRAFFICKERS ARE THE HONORABLE OF THE EARTH.

THE subject of my discourse is *The Character of the Good Merchant*. It is my lot, it is my privilege, to address a congregation composed chiefly of persons actively engaged in the various branches of trade and commerce. My position, therefore, may serve to justify, if it do not seem to demand of me, the discussion of a topic which necessarily involves a consideration of the *duties* of this large and important class of the community. Let me first give some account of the rise and progress of this department of industry, and detail some of the advantages and benefits which it has conferred upon the world.

The occupation of the merchant, though not the earliest, was yet among the earliest in which mankind were employed. We trace it back to a very remote antiquity, nay almost to the cradle of the human race. It is coeval, at least, with the first germs of civilization. We look into the Scriptures

of the Old Testament, the oldest chronicle extant, and among the earliest events there recorded, we read of “a company of Ishmaelites, that came from Gilead with their camels bearing spicery and balm and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt;” and it was to these “merchantmen” that the patriarch Joseph was sold as a slave;—so early commenced that accursed traffic in human flesh.

Commerce, at first, among the nations of the East, was altogether inland, and was carried on between countries separated by arid wastes, by means of the camel, emphatically called by the Arabs “the ship of the desert.” And even this overland commerce was a hardy and adventurous vocation. The merchant of those early times, it will be recollected, trusted not to factors or agents to manage his business for him, but accompanied his merchandise through inhospitable climes and over scorching sands. The passage of the desert was hardly less perilous than the navigation of the open sea; and probably quite as many, if not more, perished from the hardships and dangers of the former as of the latter. For the green spots in the desert, where water could be procured, were few and far between; and the wells were always marked, not only by the verdure around their margin, but by the bleached bones of many an exhausted traveller, whose strength held out only just long enough to enable him to reach the desired spot, and quench his burning thirst, and

lie down and die. Then too, there were the pirates of the desert, those roving and marauding tribes, the descendants of him "whose hand was against every man, and every man's hand against him." The merchant was obliged to go armed against those wild robbers, as much as ever the peaceful trading-vessel against the freebooters that infest the ocean.

The merchant of ancient times, by thus accompanying his merchandise everywhere, was led to visit various countries, and became acquainted with different races of men; and it was by this commercial intercourse that the knowledge of other lands and nations was first obtained, and the arts of civilization gradually diffused. The merchant was the principal, if not the only, traveller in those days, and of course was generally, as he often is now, the best informed man of his times. He could describe, for he had seen, the wonders of Egypt. He could tell of its mysterious rites, its hieroglyphic characters, its recondite science, its colossal architecture. He led the way, where the historian and the philosopher afterwards followed. Herodotus, Pythagoras, and Plato, only trod in the footsteps of the adventurous merchant. He was the pioneer of civilization, and the mediator between strange and hostile countries. The caravan was the great channel of intercommunication. It was a peaceful army, moving forward on an errand of mercy, carrying with it the products and the fabrics of various climes, and scattering the

accumulated treasures of nature and art over the whole surface of the then known world.

We come down a little later in the history of our race, and we see the beginnings of that maritime enterprise, which has since made the whole world one family, "clasped the islands to the continent, and one country to another." Even the Jews, who by their peculiar polity and the character of their institutions, as well as by their anti-social and exclusive spirit, were the least addicted to commerce, even they, in the time of Solomon, had their ships not only upon the Mediterranean Sea, but upon the Arabian Gulf. The timber and the stone used in the construction of the Temple, were brought by water from the forests and the quarries of Lebanon. Solomon had a navy at Eziongeber, on the Red Sea, which traded to Ophir,—situated either on the eastern shore of Africa, or on the Malabar coast,—and brought thence gold, precious stones, and the odoriferous sandal-wood. He had also "a navy of Tarshish, which came once in three years, bringing gold and silver and ivory,"—probably from the western coast of Africa. The precious lading of these two fleets, flowing directly into his dominions, added to the spice trade of the Arabian peninsula, and the linen yarn which Egypt supplied, from the flax which grew so abundantly in the well-watered valley of the Nile, rendered his territory the emporium for the commerce of the world. It was to facilitate the in-

land trade, and to secure the benefits of this important branch of commerce, that Solomon built cities in various places, as stations for the innumerable caravans that were continually passing between the Mediterranean and the Euphrates; and among others, Tadmor in the wilderness, the celebrated Palmyra, the lovely city of palms. The extent, wealth and splendor of these inland cities can be judged of, in some measure, by the ruins of their architecture that still remain, the most beautiful monuments in the world. Through these various channels, the precious metals and other valuable commodities poured into his kingdom in such a full and uninterrupted stream, that, in the language of the sacred historian, “the king made silver to be in Jerusalem as stones, and cedars made he to be as the sycamore trees that are in the vale, for abundance.” The merchants of Tyre, who were his factors, were “princes, and her traffickers the honorable of the earth.”

But the occupation of the merchant is not only one of the most ancient, it is also one of the most useful of human employments. It devolves on him to collect the surplus products and fabrics of his native land, and exchange them for such foreign articles of comfort or luxury as she may require. In this way he gives substantial encouragement to agriculture and manufactures, which but for the markets which he supplies, might languish and de-

cline. It devolves upon him, too, in times of public scarcity, resulting from unfavorable seasons and a failure of the home crops, to bring from abroad the means of subsistence and the necessaries of life for a whole people. Commerce, likewise, gives a spring to all arts and trades. Whilst enriching himself, the merchant furnishes employment to a vast number of artisans and laborers, and thus helps to knit society together, and to promote among its members a feeling of mutual interest and good fellowship.

Just consider, for one moment, how many hands are constantly employed merely in that navigation which bears the merchant's orders to the ends of the earth. These orders are usually more punctually executed than the edicts of the most absolute despot. In the remotest lands, thousands stand ready to do his bidding and gratify his wishes. The ocean groans beneath the weight of his argosies, which from the farthest climes bring riches and abundance, and lay them at his feet. The counting-room of the merchant may be likened to the cabinet of a powerful monarch, that sets the whole world in motion. He establishes the only practicable and beneficial community of goods. He renders the productions, the fabrics, the discoveries of every nation accessible to all the rest. He brings the widely scattered inhabitants of our globe into contact, establishes relations and facilitates intercourse

among them, and enables each country to enjoy, reciprocally, the peculiar blessings and advantages of every other. “He provides such facilities of intellectual communication between the remotest regions, that not a bright idea can spring up in the brain of a foreign scholar, than it darts like lightning across the Atlantic; not an improvement obtains in the condition of one society, but it is instantly propagated to every other. By this perpetual interchange of thought, and this active diffusion of intellect, the most favorable opportunities are afforded for the dissemination of useful knowledge, and especially for the extension of that most precious of gifts, the Gospel of Jesus.” What could our missionaries do without our ships?

Of the connection that has, from the earliest ages, subsisted between commerce and intellectual improvement, the records of the human race bear ample and constant evidence. The perfection and happiness of our nature arise, in a great degree, from the exercise of our relative and social feelings; and the wider these are extended, the more excellent and accomplished will be the character that is formed. The first step to commercial intercourse is rude and selfish, and consists of little more than an interchange or barter of articles necessary to the accommodation of the parties. But as this intercourse is extended, mutual confidence takes place; habits of acquaintance, and even of esteem and

friendship, are formed ; till it may, perhaps, without exaggeration, be asserted, that of all the bonds by which society is at this day united, those of mercantile connection are the most numerous and the most extensive. The direct consequence of this is not only an increase of wealth to those countries where commerce is carried on to its proper extent, but an improvement in the intellectual character, and a superior degree of civilization, in those by whom its operations are conducted. Accordingly, we find that in every nation, where commerce has been cultivated upon great and enlightened principles, a considerable proficiency has been made in liberal studies and pursuits. Without recurring to the splendid examples of antiquity, to Tyre, and Sidon, and Corinth, and Carthage, it may be sufficient to advert to the effect produced by the Free States in Italy, and the Hanse Towns in Germany, in improving the character of the age. Under the influence of commerce, the barren islands of Venice, and the unhealthy swamps of Holland, became not only the seats of opulence and splendor, but the abodes of literature, science, and the arts ; and vied with each other, not less in the number and celebrity of their eminent men and distinguished scholars, than in the extent of their mercantile concerns.¹

Such are the services and benefits of that ancient

¹ See Mr. Roscoe's Discourse on the opening of the Liverpool Institution.

and honorable vocation, which gothic prejudices have attempted to brand with opprobrium, even in the bosom of nations that owe their wealth and splendor chiefly to commerce. In the old world generally, and even in England, till very recently, the peaceful merchant was regarded with contempt by the stupid soldier, who had not sense enough to perceive, that without the aid of the merchant, he could neither clothe nor subsist his army. It was her commerce and manufactures that enabled that country to bear up against the tremendous power of "the man of destiny," and to form those powerful coalitions, and support those vast armies, which she mustered from all parts of continental Europe, to take the field and fight the great battles, in which her very existence was involved. It was this "nation of shopkeepers" that humbled his pride, and crushed his power. Is not this useful calling quite as honorable as the inglorious ease in which so many of the nobility and gentry of the old world wear out their unprofitable lives? Is not the merchant as respectable a member of the community as the luxurious planter, the time-serving politician, or the cringing office-seeker? How long will the foolish vanity of men lead them to look down upon those from whom they receive the most important benefits? Shall honor be always awarded exclusively to the destroyers and corrupters of our race? Ought it not to be conferred on those who are employed in supplying the

wants and promoting the comfort and welfare of mankind?

This unworthy and foolish prejudice against trade dates back to those times of barbarism and ferocity, when the rising communities of men were as yet unacquainted with the benefits which commerce confers. We are told that in the republics of Greece merchants were ineligible to public office, and were excluded from the cares of state. From similar ignorance the ancient Romans, who were solely occupied with agriculture and war, regarded the occupation of the merchant as disreputable and degrading. But time and necessity gradually disabused their minds of these ridiculous prejudices; till at last the most distinguished persons in the state were not ashamed of exercising a calling which they found so gainful to themselves and so advantageous to their country.

When the swarms of barbarous nations from the northern hive had overrun the Roman Empire, and parcelled it out among themselves, the prejudice against trade revived. Europe was for ages plunged in gross darkness and in perpetual warfare. The profession of arms was the only one that was accounted respectable and manly. The people, hemmed in and kept down by an insolent soldiery, could have no communication with one another. Commerce, which can never flourish without liberty, was carried on solely by Jews and usurers, who were a con-

tinual prey to the exactions of a thousand petty tyrants. Being thus engrossed by men devoid of character and principle, it fell into disrepute. None but such wretches, allured by the expectation of vast profits, would undertake to pursue a calling environed with so many difficulties and dangers. Such, undoubtedly, was the origin of that aversion and contempt with which trade was for a long time regarded by what were called the higher orders in the old monarchies of Europe.

In the mean time, some republics, taking advantage of their liberty, engaged successfully in commerce, and by this means attained a degree of wealth and power that excited the admiration and envy of other nations. Venice, Genoa, Pisa, Holland, showed the rest of Europe the wonderful effects that commerce can produce. Princes then began to encourage it; the Cape of Good Hope was doubled; a New World was discovered; and the unexplored wealth of two hemispheres, the untold treasures of both the Indies, aroused the cupidity of the nations. They all rushed into this new source of aggrandizement, and the indifference with which they had hitherto regarded commercial adventure was changed into a universal enthusiasm, and they were soon found struggling with one another to secure the monopoly of the most lucrative branches of trade. From that time commerce has firmly established itself as one of the most honorable of employments, and one of the principal sources of national opulence and power.

But this ancient, useful, and honorable vocation has its temptations and dangers, its responsibilities and duties, peculiar to itself. I know of no better way of exhibiting them, than by simply portraying the character and detailing the conduct of *The Good Merchant*. In doing this, I shall describe, first, the manner in which he acquires, and, secondly, the manner in which he dispenses his wealth.

1. In the first place, then, the good merchant is scrupulously just and upright in all his transactions. Integrity, good faith, exactness in fulfilling his engagements, are prominent and distinctive features in his character. He is a high-minded and honorable man, who would feel a stain upon his good name like a wound, and regards with utter abhorrence everything that wears the appearance of meanness or duplicity. Knowing that credit is the soul of business, he is anxious to sustain the integrity of the mercantile character. Accordingly, his word is as good as his bond. He stands to his bargain, and is faithful to his contract. He is like the good man described by the Psalmist,

“ Who to his plighted vows and trust
Hath ever firmly stood ;
And though he promise to his loss,
He makes his promise good.”

He would rather at any time relinquish something of his lawful rights, than engage in an irritating dispute. He would rather be the object than the agent

in a dishonorable or fraudulent transaction. When one told old Bishop Latimer that the cutler had cozened him in making him pay two pence for a knife not worth a penny, "No," said Latimer, "he cozened not me, but his own conscience."

2. Again. The good merchant is not in haste to be rich, observing that they who are so, are apt to "fall into temptation and a snare," and often make shipwreck of their honor and virtue. He pursues commerce as his chosen calling, his regular employment. He expects to continue in it long, perhaps all his days, and is therefore content to make small profits and accumulate slowly. When he first entered into business, he was determined not to be a drudge, nor be chained to the desk like a galley-slave, nor make his counting-room his home. He recollects that he is not merely a merchant, but a man; and that he has a mind to improve, a heart to cultivate, and a character to form. He is therefore resolved to have time to develope and store his intellect, to exercise his social affections, and to enjoy in moderation the innocent and rational pleasures of life. He accordingly sets apart and consecrates a portion of his time, his evenings at least, to be spent at home, in the bosom of his family. He will not, on any account, deny himself this relaxation; he will not, for any consideration, rob himself of this source of improvement and happiness. He is willing, if need be, to labor more years in order to obtain the de-

sired amount of wealth, provided he can improve himself in the mean time, and enjoy life as he goes along.

3. The good merchant, though an enterprising man, and willing to run some risks, knowing this to be essential to success in commercial adventure, yet is not willing to risk everything, nor put all on the hazard of a single throw. He feels that he has no right to do this — that it is morally wrong thus to put in jeopardy his own peace and the comfort and prospects of his family. Of course he engages in no wild and visionary schemes, the results of which are altogether uncertain, being based upon unreasonable expectations and improbable suppositions. He is particularly careful to embark in no speculation out of his regular line of business, and with the details of which he is not familiar. He is aware, that although he knows all about the cost of a ship, and can determine the quality and estimate the value of a bale of cotton, he is not a good judge of the worth of wild lands, having had no experience therein. Accordingly, he will have nothing to do with any bargains of this sort, however promising they may appear. He will not take a leap in the dark, nor purchase upon the representations of others, who may be interested in the sale ; — fearing lest what is described to him as a well-timbered township may turn out to be a barren waste, and what appears, on paper, a level and well-watered district, may be found, on

inspection, a steep and stony mountain, of no value whatever. He therefore deems it safest for him to keep clear of these grand speculations, and to attend, quietly and regularly, to his own business. Above all, he makes it a matter of conscience not to risk in hazardous enterprises the property of others intrusted to his keeping.

The good merchant, having thus acquired a competency, and perhaps amassed a fortune, is liberal in dispensing his wealth.

1. At the outset, he is careful to indulge in no extravagance, and to live within his means, the neglect of which precaution he finds involves so many in failure and ruin. Simple in his manners, and unostentatious in his habits of life, he abstains from all frivolous and foolish expenditures. At the same time, he is not niggardly nor mean. On the contrary, he is liberal in the whole arrangement of his household, where everything is for use and comfort, and nothing for ostentation and display. Whatever will contribute to the improvement and welfare of his family, or whatever will gratify their innocent tastes, be it books, or engravings, or pictures, he obtains, if within his means, though it cost much; knowing that at the same time he may foster the genius and reward the labors of our native authors and artists, an estimable class of men, whose works reflect honor upon their country, and who consequently merit the patronage of the community. But whatever is intend-

ed for mere parade and vain show, he will have none of, though it cost nothing. He thinks it wise and good economy to spend a great deal of money, if he can afford it, to render home attractive, and to make his children wise, virtuous and happy. Above all, he never grudges what is paid to the faithful school-master for their intellectual and moral training; for a good education he deems above all price.

2. Having thus liberally provided for all the wants of his household, the good merchant remembers and cares for all who are related to him, and who may in any way stand in need of his aid. And this aid is administered in the most kind and delicate manner. He does not wait to be solicited; he will not stop to be thanked. He anticipates their wishes, and by a secret and silent bounty removes the painful sense of dependence and obligation. He feels it a pleasure as well as a duty, to help them; he claims it as his privilege to do good unto his brethren. He would feel ashamed to have his needy relatives relieved by public charity or private alms.

3. But our good merchant feels that he has duties, not only to his immediate relatives and friends, but to a larger family, the community in which he lives. He is deeply interested in its virtue and happiness, and feels bound to contribute his full share to the establishment and support of all good institutions, particularly the institutions of learning, humanity, and religion. He is led to this by the expansive and lib-

eralizing spirit of his calling. It is, unfortunately, the tendency of some occupations to narrow the mind and contract the heart. The mere division of labor, incident to, and inseparable from, many mechanical and manufacturing pursuits, though important and beneficial in other respects, yet serves to cramp and dwarf the intellect. The man who spends all his days in making the heads of pins, thinks of nothing else, and is fit for nothing else. Commercial pursuits, on the other hand, being so various, extensive, and complicate, tend to enlarge the mind, and banish narrow and selfish feelings. The merchant looks abroad over the world, puts a girdle round the earth, has communications with all climes and all nations, and is thus led to take large and liberal views of all things. The wealth which he has acquired easily and rapidly, he is consequently disposed to spend freely and munificently. It has been beautifully said of Roscoe, the distinguished Liverpool merchant, "Wherever you go, you perceive traces of his footsteps in all that is elegant and liberal. He found the tide of wealth flowing merely in the channels of traffic ; he has diverted from it invigorating rills to refresh the gardens of literature. The noble institutions for literary and scientific purposes, which reflect such credit on that city, have mostly been originated, and have all been effectually promoted, by him." In like manner, our good merchant encourages learning, and patronizes learned

men. He is particularly liberal in endowing the higher seats of education, whence flow the streams that make glad the cities and churches of our God.

4. The good merchant is, likewise, a munificent benefactor to all institutions which have for their object the alleviation of human wretchedness, and the cure of the thousand ills which flesh is heir to. He lends, too, a substantial support to the institutions of religion. He feels the need of them himself, and he understands their unspeakable importance to the peace, good order, and virtue of society. He thinks that he sleeps sounder, and that his property is more secure, in a community where the sanctions of religion are superadded to the penalties of the law ; where the stated inculcation of religious principles and sentiments diffuses a healthy moral atmosphere, which, though unseen, presses, like the weight of the surrounding air, upon every part of the body politic, and keeps it in its place. Accordingly, he contributes cheerfully and liberally to the support of public worship, and moreover, as Fuller says of the good parishioner, “he is bountiful in contributing to the repair of God’s house, conceiving it fitting that such sacred places should be handsomely and decently maintained.”

It is gratifying to think that this duty of liberally supporting the institutions of learning, humanity, and religion, has been fully recognized and faithfully discharged by the merchants of this city. They

have furnished, I believe, by far the larger part of the funds that have established and endowed the numerous humane and literary institutions that adorn this place and its neighbourhood. Our venerable University,—never to be named without a blessing, for the good which it has done through two hundred years,—the Athenæum, both the Hospitals, the Farm School, the Asylums for Female Orphans and for the Blind, are among the monuments of mercantile munificence. I can never forget the feelings with which, four years ago, when in Paris, I heard of the noble and successful effort that had just been made to establish this last named institution, and of the princely donation of one of our merchants to that object. I felt proud of my country. I rejoiced that I was a native citizen of the place where such a spirit prevailed, and where such generous deeds were done.

Such, I conceive, to be the character of the good merchant. It may, perhaps, be thought by some that the character is a visionary one; and that, amidst the competitions of trade, the temptations to unlawful gain, the eager desire of accumulating, and the natural unwillingness to part with what has been acquired with labor and pains, there can be no place for the high-minded and generous virtues which I have described. My friends, I might have thought so too, if I had never seen them exhibited in actual life. I feel that the portrait which I have

attempted to draw is not a fancy sketch, but a transcript from nature and reality.

Since we last met in this place, the grave has closed over the original of this picture — one who exemplified in practice the qualities which I have ascribed to the good merchant. I find that I have insensibly anticipated this part of my discourse, and have unconsciously described, in general terms, the character of an individual, whom the whole community honored when living, and whose departure from among us, though in a good old age, every one regrets. In the death of this worthy man, the town has lost one of its most excellent citizens, the mercantile community its oldest member, and this religious society one of its best friends and brightest ornaments. A father is fallen in our Israel; a pillar of the church is removed. I trust, that under the peculiar circumstances of the case, I shall be justified in deviating from my usual course, whilst I briefly detail some particulars in the life and character of our venerable fellow-worshipper.

WILLIAM PARSONS was born at Byfield, in this State, on the 6th of August, 1755. He was the son of the reverend Moses Parsons, the highly respectable clergyman of that town, and was one of eight children, three daughters and five sons, among the latter of whom was the late distinguished chief justice of this Commonwealth, himself too for many years one of the pillars and ornaments of this church. After

receiving a good education at Dummer Academy, he became an apprentice to an elder brother who was engaged in trade at Gloucester. Before coming of age, however, he entered upon the hard and perilous life of a sailor, which he pursued for five years, having the command of a vessel, and making many successful voyages. Like many other of our rich merchants, who were the architects of their own fortune, he took his first lesson in industry and enterprise amidst the hardships, privations and dangers of a sea life; than which there is no better school for the development and exercise of intellectual and moral energy.

The adventurous navigator, with his hardy and weather-beaten crew, has always been the object of my unfeigned admiration and respect — there is required of him such watchfulness, such intrepidity, such nerve, such self-possession, and presence of mind. In seasons of alarm and danger he has no time to pause and deliberate. The lives of his crew and passengers often depend upon his deciding correctly upon the instant. A wrong order to the steersman,— and the ship is lost. The delay of a moment, when the storm is gathering,— and the squall rushes on and strikes the ship; and in an instant the canvass is rent from the spars, the cordage snaps like glass, the masts go by the board, and the vessel is left a helpless, unmanageable wreck. It is astonishing with what sagacity and far-sightedness

the sailor discerns the coming of the distant squall. The landsman on board sees nothing. To his eye all is calm and tranquil. But the seaman sees it in the floating clouds and the far-off ripple on the waves. He needs no barometer to tell him. He snuffs it, he breathes it, he feels it in every pore. Ay, and he is prepared for it. Calm, silent, imperturbable, he gives his orders as though he trod the solid land; he scuds before the gale, and safely weathers the storm. It is an arduous and anxious life, but a life of great excitement, calling forth high moral power, great courage, firmness, and self-reliance.

In 1780, at the age of twenty-five, Mr. Parsons quitted the sea, and married the lady who, for forty-seven years, by her congenial spirit and the similarity of her views, by sympathizing in all his benevolent feelings, and coöperating in all his plans and deeds of charity, contributed so much to make his life tranquil and his home happy. In the same year he entered into business, and removed to this place, where he remained till his death, a period of fifty-seven years, actively engaged to the last in commerce and navigation, having now one vessel on the ocean, and dying, at the age of eighty-one, the oldest merchant and ship-owner in the city.

Were I called upon to state, in a few words, the prominent traits in the character of this lamented man, I would mention his unbending integrity, his

uncompromising adherence to truth and right, his conscientious regard for duty, his entire freedom from selfishness, his tender and comprehensive benevolence. These qualities shed a daily beauty on his life, and spread a sacred fragrance over his memory.

In the mercantile community no one stood higher than Mr. Parsons ; — his very name was synonymous with integrity. In all his transactions he was systematic, exact, high-minded, honorable. By a regular yet not slavish attention to business, he amassed a handsome fortune, which might have been much larger, had he made business the sole end of life, or had he not distributed his wealth, as he went along, with such a free and liberal hand. His losses, which at times were great, never disturbed his singular equanimity ; he regretted them only as curtailing his means of doing good. To his honor it should be mentioned, that he never had a dispute with the numerous mechanics and laborers whom he employed. He might sometimes, indeed, think himself wronged, and perhaps say so ; but yet he would pay the bill, and leave the man to settle the matter with his own conscience.

The wealth which he had thus honorably acquired, he spent in the most generous manner. He had an open heart and an open hand. Considering his first duty to be to his own family and relatives, he gathered them under his wing, and

overshadowed them with his love. His house was like a patriarch's tent, or the gathering-place of a tribe. He was a sort of universal providence, remembering the forgotten, and attending to the neglected. The absent were not out of his mind, nor the distant beyond the reach of his care.

But his good feelings and charities were not confined within this circle, large though it was. The destitute, the sick, the afflicted, resorted to him for aid and solace, and never applied in vain.

“ His secret bounty largely flowed,
And brought unask'd relief.”

Many individuals and families, here and elsewhere, have lost in him a friend and benefactor. They will miss his regular and systematic bounty. They will weep at the recollection of his kindness; they will rise up and call him blessed.

Was any new charity contemplated, any humane object set on foot in the city, Mr. Parsons was one of the first to be applied to, to give it the sanction of his approval and the encouragement of his purse. And such applications, frequent though they were, he always attended to most cheerfully, and responded to most liberally, deeming it a favor that the opportunity was afforded him of doing his part in promoting a good object. I see many before me who can bear testimony to what I say.

His house was long the seat of a generous, but

quiet and unostentatious hospitality, where there was nothing for display, but everything for the comfort of his guests. His doors were open for his friends to enter at all times, and they were sure to be received with a cheerful welcome and a placid smile.

Mr. Parsons was a sincere and conscientious Christian. His heart was animated by religious feelings, his character was formed under religious influences, his conduct was based upon religious principles. His unfeigned humility and unaffected sense of personal unworthiness, deterred him, for many years, from publicly professing that religion which he had always revered and loved, and which, through his long life, had been his guide, his support, his joy. But at last, at the advanced age of seventy, he came forward in this church,—as his eminent brother, the chief justice, had done thirteen years before,—and bore his testimony to the truth and value of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I shall ever regard it as one of the most delightful circumstances in my ministry, that it was my privilege to welcome him to the table of the Lord. Never shall I forget his appearance, when, in the first year of my ministry, twelve years ago, he entered my study, bending with the infirmities of age, and with the humility and meekness characteristic of a true Christian, desired to be received to the communion of our church. He had sat for more

than forty years under the instructions of the eminent and worthy men who preceded me in this place;¹ yet it was reserved for me to enroll his name among the professed followers of Christ, and to dispense to him the symbols of a dying Saviour's love. It was a touching sight, to behold this venerable man, bowed with the weight of seventy years, meekly seeking for this privilege, and reverently taking his place at the table of remembrance. Brethren of the church, can ye ever forget that scene? Brethren of the congregation, is not the example worthy of your serious consideration? Is it not the duty of all good men and sincere Christians to bear their testimony to the truth of our holy religion, and make a profession of what they believe and practise? Especially is it not incumbent on men of education, influence, and high public station, to lend the weight of their character and example to the support of the institutions of Christianity?

Mr. Parsons was, for more than half a century, connected with this parish, and was one of its firmest friends and most steadfast supporters. He felt a deep interest in its welfare, and was always ready to do his part to sustain its character and increase its beneficial influence. Whenever pecuniary aid was needed to promote its interests, he was one of the first to be called upon, and always met the

¹ Everett, Kirkland, Thacher, Greenwood.

call readily and generously. In the year 1813, at a time of great commercial embarrassment, when it was resolved to erect this church, besides lending the parish two thousand dollars without interest, he made them a free gift of five hundred dollars, the only donation that was made.

The ministers of this church have always found in Mr. Parsons a kind and faithful friend. He was the model of a good parishioner, honoring them with his confidence and his sympathy. His house was the minister's second home.

My friends, he is gone to his rest, full of years, full of usefulness, and full of honors. As has been beautifully said of another, "Death, which harmonizes the pictures of human character, found little in his to spiritualize or to soften. Kindness of disposition was the secret but active law of his moral being. He had no sense of injury but as something to be forgiven. The liberal allowance which he extended to all human frailties grew more active when they affected his own interests and interfered with his own hopes; so that however he might reprobate evil at a distance, as soon as it came within his sphere, he desired only to overcome it by good. Envy, hatred, and malice, were to him mere names, — like the figures of speech in a school-boy's theme, or the giants in a fairy tale, — phantoms, which never touched him with a sense of reality. His guileless simplicity of heart was preserved

by the happy constitution of his own nature, which passion could not disturb, and evil had no power to stain. He diffused the serenity of a good conscience and the warmth of unchilled affections through a large circle of relatives and friends who were made happy by his mere presence. Such was he to the last, amidst the infirmities which age had accumulated around him—the gentlest of monitors and the most considerate of sufferers.”

My friends, in the removal of such a man as Mr. Parsons, at such an age, we have the rich consolation of believing that he had accomplished the end of existence, and finished the work that was given him to do. The delicate thread of his life seems to have been drawn out beyond all reasonable expectation, not so much for his own sake, as that his usefulness might be continued. With a feeble frame, and many infirmities, how often has he been recalled from the very brink of the grave! God mercifully prolonged his days for the benefit of that numerous body of relatives who looked up to him, with reverence and affection, as their patriarch, the central pillar of their house. Let us believe that he has now been as mercifully and graciously removed from a world where longer continuance would have been only labor and sorrow.







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