







A

S E R M O N,

P R E A C H E D

AT BRISTOL, IN RHODE ISLAND,

JULY 9TH, 1808,

AT THE FUNERAL OF THE

Hon. WILLIAM BRADFORD, Esq.

BY ALEXANDER V. GRISWOLD,

Rector of St. Michael's Church in Bristol.

BRISTOL :

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A SERMON, &c.

BEFORE we proceed to the last duty which is to close this mournful scene—before we consign to the mansions of the dead the lifeless remains of our venerable and much respected friend, I am requested to offer a few observations on the interesting occasion. Could the observations be equally interesting as the occasion, and do justice to the subject; could I express in words the solemn truths—the tender feelings—the momentous considerations of temporal and eternal concern which the silent eloquence of mortality is now impressing upon every serious mind, the following remarks would unquestionably merit your profoundest attention. But this you are not to expect. Too soon will you have reason to regret that this painful office was not assigned to one possessing talents and leisure (a) and a gift of utterance more adequate to the magnitude of the duty.

But let us not fail on this and on every occasion to remember, that our trust is not in human wisdom or an arm of flesh. God alone is the true source of comfort and consolation—of aid and support in every sorrow—in every trial of this present life. In his name, and by his authority, give me leave to invite your attention to the counsels of his holy word. Hoping and trusting that, through his blessing,

(a) During the short time he had to prepare the discourse, Mr. G. was engaged in a public school.

it may be the means of some solace and instruction to those who feel interested in the mournful event which has called us together, I shall commend to your serious meditations a passage of the sacred scriptures found in

GENESIS XLIX. 29—31.

And he charged them and said unto them, I am to be gathered unto my people: bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite; in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite for a possession of a burying place. There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebecca his wife, and there I buried Leah.

THESE, you will no doubt recollect, are the dying words of the patriarch Jacob. In discoursing from them I propose,

FIRST, To make a few remarks upon the historical facts with which they are connected. And,

SECONDLY, To speak of that faith which they evince.

I. In the chapter before us we are presented with one of the most affecting—the most interesting scenes which the heart of man is called to experience in this mortal state: a numerous family of children and grand-children assembled around the dying bed of an aged, a venerable, and only surviving parent, receiving his blessing, and taking a last adieu. Jacob was in the line of God's chosen race, "of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever." He was the last central head from whom all the tribes of Israel sprang. It was the express promise of God to Abraham his grandfather, that his posterity should possess the land of Canaan: but first they were to be in bondage four hundred years. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance." His purpose cannot be frustrated. By a severe famine, preceded and accompanied with many wonderful and providential events, Jacob and

his whole family were called down to Egypt, and there settled in peace and prosperity.

But no felicity on earth is perfect, or of long continuance. A mournful event is now to discompose their tranquility, and wound their hearts with sorrow. One parent was yet left to the sons of Jacob. The breast, from which they had drawn the streams of life, had mingled with its native dust. The maternal eye, which had watched over their childhood, was long since closed by the hand of death. One kind—one venerable parent was still left them. Long, to their great comfort and happiness, was his life preserved. But there is a period to every earthly blessing. The dreaded moment now drew near: Jacob was the first to mark his own approaching dissolution. He notified his children that his end approached, and wished them to attend and hear his dying words.

And now behold them, bathed in tears, assembled around the bed of their dying parent, marking, with extreme anxiety, and heart-piercing anguish, his gradual decay. His mental powers however, to their great comfort and instruction, were continued till life expired. Having, by the spirit of prophecy, informed his sons of what should befall their respective posterities in remote generations, “and blessed them every one according to his blessing,” which God had appointed, he charged and directed them respecting his burial, as you have heard in the words read for our text. He enjoined it upon them to bury him with his fathers, in the land of Canaan, where Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, and his own wife Leah slept in their graves. “And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost.”

For some time, no doubt, had the family of Jacob anticipated this mournful event. But how ineffectual are all our anticipations, and fortitude, and resolutions to prepare the heart to behold unmoved a beloved friend expire. There is something in the idea of life, even to the last gasp of expiring nature, which solaces the soul, and bids us hope. When this is gone—when the cold hand of death has seized the heart and chilled its vital streams, new horrors fill the sympathizing soul. Great was the distress of Jacob’s children to see him die. Joseph was overcome with anguish.

That kind parent who had been so long the stay—the hope—the glory of their family; who had been their guardian and protector from earliest childhood; whose kind parental care and prudent counsels they had ever respected, almost to adoration, was now no more than lifeless clay. Those hands, which so oft had administered to their relief, could move no more. Those lips so late—so long the fountain of wisdom, were closed in eternal silence. The eye, that beamed with light and glory, is veiled in total darkness.

But even the lifeless body, pale, emaciated and worn away with age and sickness, is still some melancholy consolation to the mourning survivor. The features, though awfully changed, still retain a resemblance of what they were, and paint to the memory the living friend. Hence the great desire, so long as decency will admit, to delay the interment of the dead. The Egyptians had an art, peculiar to themselves, of preserving dead bodies from putrefaction by drugs and spices, which is called embalming. Even to the present day are found bodies entire which have doubtless been, for thousands of years, consigned to the mansions of death. “Joseph commanded the physicians his servants to embalm his father, and the physicians embalmed Israel.” By this means for many weeks they kept his body in Egypt, and mourned over it no less than three score and ten days.

But of this melancholy indulgence they must now be deprived. They now prepare for the last most solemn duty. All the house of Joseph and his brethren and his father's house (only their little ones “excepted, who were too young to know their loss or feel its sorrows,) accompanied also with many Egyptians, making together, “a very great company,” went up to the land of Canaan. Here the fountains of sorrow were opened afresh. Here was the most painful and heart-trying scene. Even the lifeless body—the last sad memorial of their venerable sire, must now be ravished from their eyes and consigned to the dark mansions of the grave. For no less than seven days of unceasing lamentation did they pour forth the agony of their souls, before they could bring their hearts to take the last adieu. “The inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning” and noticed the extremity of their sorrow, and “they said, This is a grievous mourning to the Egyptians.

Thus was the dying request of Jacob faithfully observed. And now, when this company was about to return—when spread over the burying ground and taking a last view of the tombs of their ancestors, what interesting, what deep and mournful reflections, must crowd upon their minds! They walk in pensive grief from grave to grave, absorbed in contemplation, deeply revolving the transitory—the mortal state of man. Many, with anxious solicitude and trembling steps, trace out the spot where sleeps some friend in death. The melting heart o'erflows with sad remembrance, and waters, with falling tears, the silent clods, where earthly sorrows cease. With breathless attention they contemplate the tombs of the Patriarchs. Here Isaac was buried: and there Rebecca by his side.—And in yon conspicuous spot, where the grass is waving to the wind, sleeps the venerable dust of their father Abraham, whose name shall descend, and whose faith and virtues shall shine through remotest periods of future time.

II. Such is the sense of what the sacred penman informs us of the death and interment of Israel. Let us now briefly consider what we learn of his *faith*: “knowing this first, that no prophecy of scripture is of any private interpretation;” it is not the accidental thought or conjecture of a mere private man; but a prediction of the Lord Jehovah concerning the whole race of mortal, sinful man. “For the prophecy came not in old time, by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” By such inspiration did Jacob speak on his dying bed. “By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph, and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.” In that position, being too weak to kneel, he adored and glorified God for those mercies and blessings, which, by the spirit of prophecy, and the eye of faith, he saw afar off. “And he blessed Joseph and said, God, before whom my fathers, Abraham and Isaac did walk—the God which fed me all my life unto this day—the Angel (meaning still the same God) which *redeemed me from all evil*, bless the lads, (the two sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh) and let my name be named on them and the name of my fa-

thers, Abraham and Isaac ;” let them be two tribes, “and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.”

Wonderful are the many predictions which he uttered with his dying breath to his listening family, recorded in the chapter before us, and the one preceeding, affording a reasonable and satisfactory evidence of the truth of revelation. These predictions could not have been by Moses accommodated to the events ; for many of them were to happen hundreds of years after Moses himself was dead. They indeed comprise the whole future history of the Jewish nation. Among many other things, he foretold the pre-eminence of Ephraim above Manasseh, and the sceptre or regal power of Judah which should not become extinct till Christ should come. Since his advent they have no king or kingdom, but the Messiah’s, and no territory without the pale of his church. To christians it may be truly said, “All things are yours, and ye are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s :” for “all things work together for good to those who love him.” “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a law giver from between his feet until Shiloh come ; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.” In brief (for our subject does not require us to dwell on this point) “it is undeniable that events, even unto this day, after more than three thousand years, have, with astonishing exactness, corresponded to his predictions, in a manner which no human sagacity could have foreseen : which indeed no man could ever have conceived.”

In his blessing on Joseph’s children, Jacob notices the source of his own consolation ; he was “redeemed from all evil.” He believed and trusted in the merits of a Saviour ; he knew like Job that his “Redeemer lived, and that he should stand at the latter day upon the earth.” He had *waited*, as he says, *for the salvation of the Lord*, and *beholding* it now he *departs in peace*. “By faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Abraham and Isaac, an heir with them of the same promise,” and *looking*, like them, “for a city which hath foundations ; whose builder and maker is God.” In testimony of his faith in the promises of God, that the land of Canaan should yet be possessed by his posterity, he commands that his body should be carried up to that country, and buri-

ed in the ground which Abraham, by the same faith, had bought. By this same faith Joseph too, as recorded in the next chapter, “when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel, and gave commandment concerning his bones.” “And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die, and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land, unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from hence.” “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.—They desire a better country, that is an heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath provided for them a city.”(a)

“All these things were written for our example”; and their literal accomplishment to the seed of Abraham is intended to strengthen our faith in these glorious promises. The wonderful and miraculous deliverance of Israel from bondage in Egypt is a strong representation of the redemption that is in Jesus Christ. A *land of Canaan*—a *promised rest* has he prepared for the righteous in another world. How great a blessing did the patriarchs conceive it to be in the line of this inheritance! Infinitely greater is the blessing in its spiritual sense. Abraham is the common father of all true believers in the promises of God; and they who have his faith are counted for the seed. Like Jacob it is the duty of each of us to wait for God’s salvation, in the way of his appointment; to repose firm confidence in the truths of his word, and shew our faith by our works: to wrestle and seek and strive for an interest in that “election of grace” which is in Jesus Christ, and to “give diligence to make our calling and election sure.” It is our duty, and it would be our wisdom to give the utmost diligence to obtain, through his merciful goodness, and by the means which he has appointed, a stedfast lively faith and full assurance of hope in those glorious promises revealed in his gospel of salvation.

(a) *Gen.* L. 24, 25. *Heb.* XI. 13—22.

This subject, in its general application, is highly important, and to do it justice, we ought to pursue it. Further inferences however will be submitted to your own reflections, while your attention is invited to a few words of improvement from what has been said, more especially applicable to the present occasion.

1. Our thoughts were first led to some remarks upon the historical facts, with which the text is connected. And surely you need not be told how obviously applicable the most of them are to the sorrowful event which has called us to this house, and the painful duty which now remains for us to perform. Nor will any further apology be required for having dwelt on that head more minutely, than might otherwise have been expected. Those venerable remains which lie before our eyes; various circumstances of his life—his family—his sickness and death, interest our hearts in the death of Jacob and the mourning of his family, and prepare them, I hope and trust, to profit by the instruction given us in that part of sacred history.

Funeral characters we know are often exceptionable, “as exhibiting an assemblage of virtues”—an indiscriminate eulogy, “the portrait of partiality—the child of fancy,” with little resemblance to the original. It should teach us caution but not injustice: it should not induce us to withhold a tribute of respect justly due to characters of eminent distinction. The man who has been exemplary in any, though but an ordinary station of life, is entitled to the praise and grateful remembrance of every survivor. But where one has been distinguished by eminent talents, and a long and steady course of active and useful life; has filled many public offices of high trust and importance, with much honour to himself and benefit to society, and in all the various duties and relations of professional—of civil, social and domestic life, has uniformly supported the character of justice—of patriotism, integrity and benevolence,—“to suffer such a one to drop unnoticed from the scene”—to quit the stage of life without a plaudit, “would be criminal ingratitude.”

To enter minutely into the history and character of the deceased would not be an unpleasant, though to do justice to the subject might be an arduous task. Understanding how-

ever that this task has been assigned to another, (a) it is judged inexpedient to anticipate the subject. And is it necessary that I should speak on the subject to an audience better acquainted with it than myself? You know his manner of life. I speak to those who are not strangers to his history or his character—to those whose hearts are deeply impressed with a sense of his virtues. Many of you still remember the high and important station he filled, and the character he sustained during the arduous conflict of the revolutionary war, and how very much he contributed, by his example and activity, to obtain and secure that liberty and independence which we now so happily enjoy. Where, on this side the grave, will you find another whose services were more essentially important during that interesting period? You now enjoy, and we trust in God your posterity will continue to enjoy, for many generations, the glorious fruits of his public labours. You have also seen him sitting in the Councils of the Nation, a Senator of the United States, assisting to regulate and manage the concerns of a vast empire. In this State you have seen him a principal magistrate. Many years has he been actively and usefully employed in various honourable branches of professional business, in which he was blessed with prosperity; and his benevolence has rendered that prosperity a blessing to many others. In him the poor have found a friend, equally able and willing to relieve their wants. Oft have they tasted the bounty of his liberal hand, without knowing to whom, under God, they were indebted for the favour. May God, who is able, supply their loss in his death, by raising up others to imitate his virtues.

A rich man, with a good heart, is surely one of the greatest blessings which God sends on the earth. And though, as the sacred scriptures often and solemnly forewarn us, temporal riches are a snare and temptation which too naturally corrupt the heart and endanger the soul; yet the virtue, which escapes the snare and resists the temptation, shines with peculiar lustre. How eminently the deceased is en-

(a) *The sermon was to have been followed by an oration and eulogy on the character and history of Gov. BRADFORD, which unfortunately failed through the indisposition of the gentleman appointed to deliver it.*

titled to this praise you are not now to be informed. You have seen him in public—you have seen him in private life. And you see him now a lifeless corpse. The active limbs which so long have served his country and blessed his friends; the tongue to which Judges and Senators have listened with pleasure and instruction; those hands which so oft have administered medicine to the sick, and to the poor relief, are now returning to their kindred dust—"earth to earth; ashes to ashes." Here is a funeral character in which all are deeply concerned. "The days of our age are three score years and ten." Labour and sorrow are the usual—death the certain portion of those who survive them. So soon does life pass away: so soon our earthly hopes are gone. The life of man, even the longest, is but short: in time 'tis but a span—in eternity a point. Jacob after living one hundred and thirty years, says, "*Few* and evil have the days of the years of my life been." "Man walketh in a vain shew—he heapeth up riches and cannot tell who shall gather them." Day follows day and year comes after year in quick succession, like waves on the ocean, "till one more fatal sweeps us to the grave."

If we consider however the ordinary period of human life, we may observe, with pleasing satisfaction, and with gratitude to the Father of mercies, that the worthy character, whose death we mourn, lived to a good old age. For the great comfort and happiness of his friends and beloved family; for the benefit of society and an example to the world, his life has been preserved beyond the ordinary age of man, and he is almost (a) numbered among those few, "who are so strong that they come to fourscore years." Like Jacob's also his reason and other mental powers were preserved in perfection till the last: his mind, like the setting sun, appeared in greater magnitude, and clothed with new and milder beauties. With unshaken fortitude, and wonderful composure of mind, he viewed the gradual approach of the King of Terrors: and, with pleasure we may add, that he freely and most cordially acknowledged his full and undoubting faith in God, and the truth of divine revelation, and humbly and devoutly looked for life and salvation

(a) He was in his 80th year.

to that blessed source alone, from whence Jacob drew his consolation. He consigns his mortal body to the tomb, beside the sleeping dust of his once loved consort, in the assurance of hope that God will visit his people, and deliver them from the bondage of death—that “the dead shall hear the voice of the son of God, and they who hear shall live.”

2. And now it remains for us, respected audience, to perform this last—this painful duty. Like the family of Jacob, you are now to bear the lifeless remains of this father in Israel, to that “field” of death appointed for all living. You are now to visit that storehouse of human clay where the remains of your ancestors sleep in death: where the most of you have parents—have children—have wives or husbands—have brothers—have sisters reposing beneath the silent clods. While you pay the tribute of tears at their graves; while you survey the ground appointed for your future habitation; while you assist our mourning friends in depositing what remains of their venerable parent in the grave, and sympathize in their distress in taking the last adieu, forget not, I beseech you, the divine consolations of your Father who is in heaven. Forget not then the proper improvement of the foregoing observations. Lift up your hearts to God, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith. “Come and see the place where the Lord lay.” View the grave as the sanctified receptacle of seed “sown in corruption,” to be “raised in incorruption—sown a natural body,” to be “raised a spiritual body,” through the power of him, who has burst the bars of death, and led captivity captive. With the faith of Israel, look forward to that glorious day when God shall visit and redeem his people;—when he shall bring them forth from distant lands—from North and South and West and East, to sit down in his heavenly kingdom with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—in those eternal mansions of peace and felicity prepared for the righteous. Now, in a time accepted, devote yourselves to God in a holy life. Strive with Jacob that you may be named of Israel, and of the seed of Abraham according to promise. *Wait for God’s salvation* in the way of his own appointment, and you may securely rely upon it in every event of his providence. For you to live will be Christ: his pre-

fence will be with you ; his example will lead, and his spirit support you. And to die will be gain ; for henceforth there is laid up for you a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge shall give to you and all who love and wait for his appearing.

To you, beloved and much respected friends, whose hearts are more nearly interested in this mournful scene—to you the children and grand children of the deceased, is our subject at this time most applicable. Like the family of Jacob, you are called to a “grievous mourning.” For though, like them, you have received from the deceased every thing which children and grand children can expect from an earthly parent, the *mourning* is not for that the *less grievous* : the loss is the more afflicting : the separation the more painful.

There are none I presume here who feel uninterested in the cause of your sorrows : there is no heart present which does not sympathize in your distress. I surely, from heart-feeling experience, can testify of one who has lost a friend. While vital warmth shall animate this feeble frame ; while memory shall retain its grateful powers, a sense of his goodness, I trust, will not be obliterated from my mind. What then must be the affections—what the gratitude of those who have much longer experienced his amiable and benevolent virtues ; and chiefly of you, respected mourners, who have been the more immediate objects of his affection and tenderest care. I would not call your sorrows up afresh, by dwelling on this subject. His care—his labour on earth has ceased. He has left you and the world, and is “gathered to his fathers” in a good old age. His spirit we leave in the hands of a merciful God and faithful Creator. His body you are now called to resign to its native dust. May God mercifully give you the faith and consolation of Israel, and strengthen and support you with the power of his grace in the discharge of this last duty to your parent. May you behold the grave as the place where the Lord Jesus lay, nothing doubting but the time is fast approaching, when “the earth and the sea shall give up their dead, and the corruptible bodies of those who sleep in the Lord shall be changed and made like unto his own glorious body, according to the mighty working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself.”

Sorrow not then as others who have no hope. Long shall the memory of your father live in the annals of fame, and in the hearts of a grateful people, embalmed by the prayers of widows and tears of orphans. While we deposit these venerable remains, beside the sleeping dust of your other long departed parent, let a grateful sense of all God's past and present mercies comfort your hearts and lift them up to him. Devote yourselves to God, that he may bless and prosper you and yours, and make you a blessing to your country and the world for many generations. Improve this awakening call to a serious consideration of your own approaching dissolution. Lay hold of those blessed hopes of immortal life which God has given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ, that you may have an unfailling support in all the varying scenes of this mortal state, and finally die the death of the righteous, and your last end be like his.

Let us all, as far as in us lies, make every suitable improvement of the solemn duties of this day. Let us cherish the memory of the deceased : let us imitate his virtues, and not fail, from this instance of mortality, to realize the uncertainty of all terrestrial things, and seek for an unfading interest in the glories of the eternal world ; that when, as soon it must, the time of our departure draweth near, we may have God's Spirit go along with us, and give us rest eternal in heaven.

That such may be the happy portion of us all, God of his infinite mercy grant ; to whom, " the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen."

