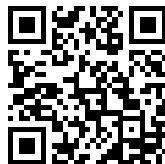

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THE
SUBSTANCE
OF A
SERMON

PREACHED IN

Baltimore and Philadelphia,

On the FIRST and EIGHTH of *May*, 1791,

ON THE DEATH OF THE

Rev. JOHN WESLEY.

By the Rev. T. COKE, L.L.D.

L O N D O N :

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 A S E R M O N, &c.

2 KINGS ii. 12.

And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My Father, my Father, the Chariot of Israel, and the Horsemen thereof.

FUNERAL orations for the great and good have been justified by the universal practice of the Christian Church in every age and country. Certainly then the present subject, which is to commemorate the life and death of the greatest benefactor to mankind that later ages have known, needs no apology.

A Greek Historian * beautifully observes, that History is Philosophy teaching by example. We may add, that the history of an eminent servant of God is Religion teaching by example. And what is an oration for the dead but the history in epitome of the Deceased? And I trust the present will hold forth to you all a most animating example, and very powerful motives to follow him as he followed Christ.

The text contains the words of *Elisha*, when he saw his Master and Father ascending to heaven in a chariot of fire. The exclamation was perfectly natural, if we consider the grandeur of the view, the importance of

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Elijah

* Xenophon,

Elijah to the Church of God, and the tender relation in which he stood to *Elisha*. Respecting the first, I know not but a Minister of our higher dispensation, who has borne a full testimony to all the great truths of the New Testament, to myriads personally, and millions remotely by his sons in the Gospel—I say, I know not but such a one, scaling these truths in the struggles of death, and entering into glory in the full assurance of hope, affords us a brighter view of the efficacy of Grace and of the power of God, than *Elijah* himself in his chariot of fire. And this seems agreeable to that word of our Lord concerning the venerable son of *Zacharias*, the second *Elijah*, “*Verily, I say unto you, among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist, notwithstanding he that is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he.*” *

Nor did *Elijah* himself perhaps stand in a more eminent point of view in the Israel of God, than the great Man whom we are now commemorating. But we shall not anticipate the Parallel we intend to draw between the Prophet and the Christian Minister.

And in respect to the last particular, I will by no means allow that the obligations of *Elisha* to *Elijah* could exceed mine to Mr. WESLEY. For fourteen years I had the honour of enjoying an intimate acquaintance with him. He drew me forth into an extensive field of action, when confined within the limits of a little Parish; and instrumentally, under the Grace and Providence of God, gave me *that* which I value more than all the gold of the *Indies*, and for which alone

* Matt. ii. 11.

alone I would desire to be absent a moment from my Lord—my usefulness in the Church of Christ. In this account I include every thing I have done by the Divine aid, not only in Europe, but in America and the Isles of the sea. He admitted me to his most secret counsels, and in some things placed a confidence in me, the recollection of which even fills me with surprize. So that I may well cry out with *Elisha* (and it was the language of my soul, when I was first informed in Virginia of my great loss) “*My Father, my Father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.*”

The words of my text enable us to explain that command of our Lord in its true qualified sense, “*Call no man your Father upon the earth: for one is your Father which is in Heaven.*” * . Every created being even to the highest archangel, should be considered as the Servant of the Most High, and at the best but as a mere instrument of good. Nor should any one be termed, or thought, a Father or a Master, but in the most perfect subjection to the fatherly authority of God.

Having thus briefly introduced my subject, I shall enter on the main design—the Parallel between the great Prophet *Elijah*, and our honoured, venerable, deceased Friend.

Let us first then take a general view of the character, of the Prophet; and secondly, consider the particulars, in which the two Characters coincide.

I. *Elijah* held a close communion with God. He lived in a light which far exceeded that of his dim dispensation;

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* Matt. xxiii. 9.

dispensation: and frequently the Lord revealed himself to him in a glorious manner.

He was supported by Providence in a wonderful way. Ravens are employed to feed him. An Angel administers to him. And a series of miracles were wrought, to supply the barrel of meal and the cruse of oil, for the daily preservation of himself and the benevolent family which received him under their roof.

His entire crucifixion to the world is evidenced through the whole of his history. There is not a single passage that justifies the least suspicion of self-indulgence.

His boldness and fidelity in reproof make a most eminent part of his history. He was not ashamed to appear before Kings, and tell them their transgressions; though he had every reason to expect that they would persecute him, if possible, to the death. In nothing did he seem to confer with flesh and blood: he only inquired into the will of Jehovah, and found it his meat to fulfil it. He possessed a single eye. He served the LORD.

His labours were chiefly confined to the ten revolted tribes: I say *chiefly*, for he wrote one faithful Letter at least to *Jehoram* King of *Judah*. However, he filled up his province: and when duty called him, travelled, with the miraculous aid of the Lord, even for forty days and forty nights incessantly.

Great was the glory conferred upon him: and great the power with which he was endowed. He seemed to command the fire of God. His word made the
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skies like brass, and the earth like iron. His word opened the windows of heaven, and replenished the earth with rain. His prayers raised the dead to life. Such honour had this great prophet from the Lord of Hosts.

His situation was of great importance, if we consider him as a center of union to the sons of the prophets. They all acknowledged him as their head, and evidently acted under his direction.

His sufferings were great. The persecutions he endured from *Jezebel* and others, the being obliged to fly from place to place to escape their rage, the being bereaved of every worldly comfort, must frequently have produced such exquisite trials, as would, I doubt not, if they had been minutely related by the inspired writers, have clearly evidenced that he suffered much:—that in his measure, like our Saviour, he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

But let us now take a view of those particulars in the life of the venerable Deceased, which correspond with the life and character of *Elijah*.

1. His Communion with God. Very few alive have enjoyed more opportunities than I, of observing his private walk with God. For months together we have resided under the same roof. For weeks I have been with him continually for twenty two hours or more of the day. The first hour of the morning he consecrated to solemn prayer and meditation: and indeed all his employments were of such a nature, whether he was engaged in public or private, in preaching or visiting the sick, in composition or correspondence, as led him

immediately to God. His mind seemed always bent for God, except during the little time he daily allowed for his friends and his meals. And then, though the most agreeable of companions, every anecdote he related to illustrate his subject, and indeed the whole of his conversation, directly tended to the improvement of the mind. But sometimes on those occasions he would break forth with such an unction and such a power, as would elevate the minds of the company to heavenly things more perhaps than the most eloquent sermon.

2. The life of *Elijah* was preserved by the most miraculous interferences of the Lord: yet our honoured Friend had abundant cause of thankfulness for his repeated preservation in the ordinary ways of Providence. Very often he had falls from his horse, though he never was, I believe, materially hurt. And when his kind friends forced him, at the age of seventy, into a carriage; more than once have his horses taken fright, and brought him into imminent danger. Once I was with him in the Irish Channel, when the packet in which we were, struck against a rock about forty times in an hour, but was preserved, as if some invisible Being had put his arms around it, and shoved it off the rock: Often was he on the very brink of the grave in consumptions and fevers, and yet was wonderfully given back to the prayers of the people.—Besides all the dangers he was surrounded with from time to time, by the persecutions he endured in the infancy of that great work of God, of which he was the primary instrument.

3. His crucifixion to the world no one can doubt that is in the least acquainted with the tenor of his life:

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The employment he delighted in above every other, abstractedly from the consideration of the Will of GOD and the happiness of his fellow-creatures, was

Inter sylvas academicas quærere verum :

to search the records of antiquity, and converse with the *mighty dead* in the groves and gardens of *Oxford*. He had there a handsome settlement as Fellow of a College : and such authority as would have enabled him to enjoy his Philosophic pleasures to their utmost extent. His mind was exactly formed for the abstrusest studies. But he sacrificed the whole to the Will of GOD, and the insatiable desire of his soul for doing good. He accordingly failed for the new-formed settlement of *Georgia*, in hopes of opening a way for the conversion of the heathens.

Those who are acquainted (as I have been) with the difference between one of the most elegant Universities in the world, and a country just laid out for colonization,—between the varieties and luxuries of life in the former instance, and the vast simplicity of living in the latter :—and above all, between a converse with some of the first Literati in the world, and in general with men of very improved understandings, on the one hand ; and only with a few honest planters, living within a mile or two's distance of each other, in the midst of immeasurable forests, on the other,—will estimate the sacrifice made by Mr. WESLEY in the present case as not inconsiderable.

And after his return to his native country, when he might again have entered on the mode of life so suitable to the natural and improved powers of his mind, he chose

chose to preach the Gospel to the poor, and to deny himself all the pleasures of literary converse, that he might spread more extensively the favour of Jesus's name, and communicate more largely, as the instrument of Grace, the happiness which is to be found in God alone.

4. His self-denial also kept an equal pace with all the other fruits of true religion. For three years, whilst in Georgia, he lived on nothing but vegetables, milk, and water. And when his amazing labours indispensably demanded in the general more substantial diet, yet still, when the work in which he was engaged, required it, he would endure exquisite hardships for want of food, even to the supporting of himself, and his companion who travelled with him, on the very berries which grew upon the hedges of the field. And his whole life was perfect order and regularity; and cannot be described more completely than by a common observation of his friends, "He moves like a clock." And this perfect regularity was, no doubt, under the blessing of Providence; highly conducive to his health.

5. His boldness and fidelity in reproof have perhaps been equalled but by few. All that attended his ministry, and all that have read his writings, well know how he freed himself from the blood of all men, both rich and poor. No one has borne so complete a testimony against the great sin of England—dissipation and ungodliness: no one has borne a more pointed testimony against the great sin of America—the slavery and oppression of the negroes, than he. But this was not all. His private reproofs were not excelled perhaps by those which were delivered from the pulpit and
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the press. These indeed were only known to a very few confidential friends. And if the task were not invidious and improper, and perhaps even a breach of fidelity, I could mention some of the first men in England, as well as of the chief members of his society, to whom he wrote the most faithful letters which fidelity itself could dictate.

6. His singleness of eye throughout the whole, made one of the most shining traits of his life. No one could pass a full judgment on this, but those who were his most intimate acquaintance; and were enabled to take so minute a view of his proceedings, as to connect whole series of actions, and draw their inferences accordingly. And from such a view taken for many years, I can without hesitation declare that I never knew one, concerning whom I could form any mature judgment, that sacrificed ease, pleasure, profit, friends to the welfare of the Church of Christ, with so much readiness, with so much freedom as Mr. WESLEY. Nay, these sacrifices were made with such perfect liberty, as to be rendered on that very account quite hid from the inattentive observer: and yet, few, if any, could feel more sensibly than he; he was formed for friendship.

7. His Benevolence was unbounded. Thousands of the poor will remember him with grateful acknowledgments, while life continues. All that he gained by the extensive circulation of his writings, was laid out in this blessed channel. Sometimes indeed, the Love which believeth and hopeth all things, of which he possessed so large a share, laid him open to impositions; and wisdom then slept at the door of love: and if there

was any fault in his public character, it was an excess of mercy.

8. But how shall I describe his labours ! how follow him for two generations, for near sixty years, from country to country, from kingdom to kingdom, crying to hundreds of thousands, "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved!*" O this was the burden of his discourse, *Faith in Jesus Christ, the faith that works by love*, while his congregations hung upon his lips, and were delighted with the music of his voice.

Again, how shall I describe the labours of his Pen ! how follow him through a hundred volumes and more, in Divinity, Philosophy, History, Physic, Grammar— as an Author, Translator, Abridger, Compiler ! How was it possible that a man who travelled annually four or five thousand miles ; who preached regularly till within a short time of his death, twice or thrice in the day ; who constantly kept up an extensive correspondence through *England, Scotland, Ireland, America*. —How was it possible, it may be reasonably inquired, that a man so engaged, should publish such an amazing library for the benefit of his people—for the benefit of mankind ? I answer, he husbanded every moment beyond any person I ever heard or read of. He gathered up all the fragments, and left none, as it were, remaining. *Origen*, one of the old Fathers of the Church, was perhaps the nearest to him in labours : but if we consider the vast variety of our deceased friend and father's labours, and the difficulty and cross of continually changing from one to another as he was obliged to do, I think we may safely say he far exceeded:

Origen.

Origen. Nay, in this point of view, I know not but we may challenge the benefactors of mankind in the present and past ages, and say, without excepting *St. Paul* himself, that he was "more abundant in labours than they all."

For this end he allowed himself but six hours and a half in his bed for about sixty years, rising every morning at four o'clock, excepting after a watch-night spent with his people in singing and prayer, at which times he lay from midnight till six in the morning. Indeed, his constant early-rising, and his invariable improvement of his time whether sick or well, whether his head ached or was at ease, might be induced as two of the strongest instances of self-denial that a Christian can display.

How different was this great man from too many—I was almost going to say, from all his cotemporaries—who squander away years of their lives in minutes, quarter and half-hours, instead of "paying," as he through Grace was enabled to do, "each moment for the purchase of its worth."

9. His success under the blessing of God was equal to all the rest. If he wrought not such miracles on inanimate nature as *Elijah* did by the power of the Most High, he did by the same Divine power what was infinitely greater, he converted souls—he brought immediately and remotely, by himself and his sons in the Gospel, myriads of immortal spirits out of darkness into light, and from the power of Satan unto God.

In respect to his personal labours, we learn from his Journals, that when he first stepped forth in the name
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of the Lord, to set his public seal to the truth of that fundamental doctrine of the Gospel, Justification by faith, people daily fell down as dead under the power of his word, through the force of divine conviction. But when the Lord had raised up a number of helpers for him, men after his own heart, men who had no other desire but to spend and be spent for the good of mankind,—though still his gift for the awakening of souls more or less remained, yet his grand Talents appeared to be the establishment of Believers and the government of the Church.

In regard to the first, I know no one that was at all to be compared to him : such an unction accompanied his word, when he opened the heights, and depths, and lengths, and breadths of the Love of Christ, as was unknown to all but those who possessed, or panted after, the perfect Love of God. Nor could the most cruel opposition, even from professors themselves, in the least degree restrain him from opening to the faithful all the high privileges of the Gospel, all the treasures of Grace.

In regard to the latter,—his government and management of the vast connexion under his care, was, I think I may say, the wonder of the world. That a single person should raise a Society of christian professors, amounting at his death to at least one hundred and thirty thousand ! and should preserve an union among them on the strictest principles of christian discipline, is, I believe, not to be paralleled in the history of the Church. Not that I suppose all among us to be Israel that are of Israel, or that all of them do so steadfastly adhere to our rules of discipline as they should ;
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but what he did, with the aid of his Preachers, in preserving the union and in enforcing the discipline of this great Society, is astonishing, and would be hardly credible to one that has been entirely unacquainted with our Economy, if the whole was minutely related.

10. In this point of view also we may compare him to the Prophet *Elijah*. *Elijah* was the center of union to the Sons of the Prophets. • They must have been numerous, for fifty of them were assembled together to behold the departure of *Elijah*. They were persons particularly consecrated to the Lord: and their education was intended to prepare them for such services as the Prophet, under whose direction they were, might from time to time judge proper for them. They seem to have been all endued more or less with the proper Spirit of prophecy: for the sons of the Prophets both at *Bethel* and *Jericho*, said to *Elisha*, "Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to-day?"

And our honoured, deceased Friend was a center of union to about six hundred preachers of the Gospel, that were entirely given up to the work of God: and, perhaps I may say, to two or three thousand that were only partially employed in the same blessed work.

11. The last point, in which I shall carry on the parallel between the two great men in consideration, is *their sufferings*. The great Prophet, as intimated above, endured much: and so did our venerable Friend.

When he and his little company at *Oxford*, declared themselves friends of holiness and of God, they immediately

diately became a term of reproach. Nor could this be only a trifling suffering to our dear Father,—to be treated with deep contempt by men whom he had highly respected, and with whom he had formerly held sweet converse, and on those sciences particularly which had most engrossed his attention.

Again, when he resided in *Georgia*, his journeys through the woods from *Savannah* to *Frederica* and other places, were attended with great dangers and hardships; even so far as once to oblige him to lie in the woods a whole night in the winter, when he was almost frozen to death.

But when he returned to England, and felt his duty call him to preach the pure Gospel against a world of opposers, here was a trial indeed! We may say of him what was observed of *Athanasius* on another occasion, *Wesley contra mundum*, Wesley against the world. He was for some time all alone. Elevated on tables, chairs, horseblocks, he spoke for Jesus in the fields, the streets, the highways. The consequences were what every judge of human nature would expect. "*The carnal mind is enmity against God,*" and his zealous ministers. Showers of stones, of rotten eggs, of dirt, followed him wherever he went. He was dragged through the mire and through the water. And all this did he bear like his great Master, like the Lamb of God.

But all this was little in comparison to the usage he received from many professors, yea, and from some (there is reason to believe) of the children of God themselves.—Because he constantly held forth the offers of grace to all men, and because he pressed believers to
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look for entire conformity to the nature and entire devotion to the Will of God, and assured them of the willingness and readiness of God, even to circumcise their hearts, that they might love him with all their heart : therefore, many of his Calvinistic brethren, and chiefly of those who were indebted under grace for all the religion they possessed to the labours of that venerable man of God Mr. *Whitfield*; said and wrote all manner of evil against him : charged him with errors which were as far from his mind as Atheism itself, and with crimes which his holy soul abhorred. Their Father in the Gospel, Mr. *Whitfield*, was of a different spirit : he loved and revered our honoured Friend to the close of his life, as his last will and testament evidently demonstrated. These sufferings came near to his soul : but even for these he was thankful. He has himself told me, that he received them from the suffering hand of God, as a necessary balance for the great success which he and his Preachers were blessed with in the conversion of souls.

We must not omit to remark, that for sometime before his death, all these sufferings were ended. He lived long enough to convince the three kingdoms, that he was a good as well as great man. And all his Calvinistic enemies were silenced, particularly by the means of that holy Saint and great polemical Divine, the Rev. *John Fletcher*. In short, the Lord was pleased to vindicate fully the character of his injured servant, and to make his "innocence," in respect to all the accusations of his enemies, "as clear" to every candid person "as the noon-day light."

And now, after all that has been said of our venerable Father in God, we must still acknowledge he was but

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a man. He had his defects : and those who were best acquainted with the earthen vessel, knew them best. But O ! that Vessel contained most precious treasure ; and its great Master did delight to make his Spirit of glory shine upon it.

It remains to speak a little concerning his death. In this part of my discourse I am much limited, as the letters I have received from Europe, were written on the very day he died, when sorrow must have filled and employed every breath.

My much respected Brother *Brackenbury* writes thus :

“ I am just come from the solemn scene of our honoured Father's exit from the regions of mortality. I believe it will leave a lasting impression on the minds of all that were present. The blessed testimonies he gave, while his strength and speech remained, of his faith and hope in the Lord Jesus, will, no doubt, be a confirmatory seal to thousands of the truths he maintained in the long course of his Ministry. O that all his Sons in the Gospel may prepare to meet him, by filling up usefully their life's short day as he did, and O that a double portion of the Spirit may rest upon them all. Amen.”

Another, (my dear friend *Rogers*, our Assistant-Precacher in *London*,) writes, “ I have awful tidings to communicate—awful indeed ! This day * at half past nine in the morning our ever dear and honoured Father Mr. WESLEY fled to Paradise in a most glorious and triumphant manner, after a sickness of five days.”

Thus died *our* dear *Elijah*, as he lived—a flame of fire.

And now permit me to make a few remarks on the whole, and then conclude.

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1st. When we consider the amazing benefits which we and myriads have received by the instrumentality of this mighty man of God, how great should be our gratitude to the Lord, that he lent him to us so long! Often has he snatched our dear friend from the brink of the grave, from the very verge of eternal bliss, and sent him back into this world of trouble and vexation, in answer to the prayers of the people! For this and all his benefits may all that is within us bless his holy name.

2dly. How should we humble ourselves before God at the removal to the Church triumphant of one who has been so great a Pillar in the Church militant below! We deserved to lose him. Such has been our unfaithfulness, that we were by no means worthy to have him among us on earth so long. Indeed we are less than the least of all the mercies of our God: and far less deserving than must we be, of being blessed for fifty years and more with such a burning and shining light.

3dly. What a time is this for prayer! The religious world stands still, as it were, in awful suspension. How important to the world is the union of such a body of Professors as that, over which our honoured Friend presided—a body of Professors, who have sent Missionaries to the East and West, and the North and the South, to spread the favour of the Gospel to the farthest ends of the earth! What a time for Satan, the Spirit of division, to use his utmost efforts! O that our prayers may daily arise as clouds of incense before the Throne, and find acceptance in the sight of God—that all the wiles of Satan at this important crisis may be over-ruled, and the cause of peace, of union, of love, of CHRIST prevail. And O that, above all, our gracious Intercessor may now most eminently enforce *that prayer*

before the throne, "I pray that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou has sent me."*

4thly. Here remains our hope, "our rock, our fortrefs, and our deliverer; our God, our strength in whom we will trust; our Buckler, and the Horn of our salvation, and our high Tower." Jesus alone is the King of his Church. O what a comfort! What a ground for faith to exercise all its powers! And for hope to fix its anchor! "Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar, and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God: the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early.†

O for more faith in CHRIST, and we shall see greater things than ever! The glorious SHEKINAH in which is the residue, in which is the fulness of the Spirit, is ever open of access. Let us ask largely, for he giveth liberally, like a God!

He will then supply the place even of our honoured Friend. He will at least divide the gifts, the spirit that rested upon his servant, among the many. And in a little time he will come himself and make the whole world flame with the glory of GOD! Amen. "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

* John xvii. 20, 21. † Psalm xlvi. 2.—5.