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### Biography.

#### MEMOIRS OF DR. WITHERSPOON.

(Extracted from Dr. Rogers' Sermon.)

**T**HIS great man was descended from a respectable parentage, which had long possessed a considerable landed property in the east of Scotland. His father was minister of the parish of Yester, a few miles from Edinburgh, where he was born on the fifth day of February, 1722.\* This worthy man was eminent for his piety, his literature, and for a habit of extreme accuracy in all his writings and discourses. This example contributed not a little to form in his son that taste and that love of accuracy, united with a noble simplicity, for which he was so distinguished through his whole life. He was sent, very young, to the public school at Haddington: his father spared neither expense nor pains in his education.

\* Dr. Witherspoon was lineally descended from that eminent man of God, the Rev. Mr. John Knox, whom Dr. Robertson styles, "the prime instrument of spreading and establishing the reformed religion in Scotland." The genius, learning, piety, zeal, and intrepidity of this great man, rendered him singularly qualified for the distinguished part he bore in that interesting event. It is recorded of Mary, Queen of Scots, that she said, "she was more afraid of John Knox's prayers, than of an army of ten thousand men." Worn out by incessant labours, he died on the 27th day of November, 1572, in the 67th year of his age. The Earl of Morton, then Regent of Scotland, who attended his funeral, pronounced his eulogium in a few words; the more honourable for Mr. Knox, says the above historian, as they came from one whom he had often censured, with peculiar severity, "Here lies he who never feared the face of man." Mr. Knox's daughter Elizabeth married the famous Mr. John Welsh, who strongly resembled his father-in-law in genius, character, and usefulness in the church: And in this line Dr. Witherspoon descended from this honourable ancestry.

Bodily infirmities began at length to come upon him. For more than two years before his death, he was afflicted with the loss of sight; which contributed to hasten the progress of his other disorders. These he bore with a patience, and even a cheerfulness, rarely to be met with, in the most eminent for wisdom and piety. Nor would his active mind, and his desire of usefulness to the end, permit him, even in this situation, to desist from the exercise of his ministry, and his duties in the college, as far as his health and strength would admit. He was frequently led into the pulpit, both at home and abroad, during his blindness; and always acquitted himself with his usual accuracy, and frequently with more than his usual solemnity and animation; and with propriety and dignity he presided at the last commencement. He was blest with the use of his reasoning powers to the very last.

At length, however, he sunk under the accumulated pressure of his infirmities; and on the 15th day of November, 1794, in the 73d year of his age, he retired to his eternal rest, full of honour and full of days; there to receive the plaudit of his Lord, "well done, thou good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, be thou ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

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EULOGIUM ON THE LATE CHANCELLOR WYTHE, OF VIRGINIA; PRO-  
NOUNCED BY A GENTLEMAN OF THE BAR BEFORE A RESPECTABLE  
AUDIENCE IN THE WESTERN PART OF VIRGINIA—JULY, 1806.

(Extracted from the Informant.)

*Fellow citizens,*

I RISE on this solemn occasion with diffidence, when I reflect on the dignity of the character to be spoken of, and the feeble abilities of the speaker. I have, however, one consolation, when I reflect that this respectable audience is prepared to view the character about to be exhibited, with attention and a fond remembrance. Among the dead no rival is to be found, nor can posthumous celebrity in any degree oppose the professional advancement of the living. By thus paying a just tribute of respect to the memory of the illustrious dead, we hold up their conduct to the imitation of the living, and excite a generous wish to emulate their virtues.

Permit me then to hold up to your view the character of the late venerable Chancellor of Virginia. This illustrious man was born in the year 1726, fifty years anterior to the commencement of the American Independence. It is to be regretted, that this remote part of the State furnishes but few documents from which to collect information relating to the first 50 years of his life. But it may be presumed that the one half, perhaps more, of that period

ed was spent in the laborious avocation of a lawyer, whose eminence at the bar introduced him early into a weight and pressure of business under which alone a mind of ordinary capacity might have sunk. But such was his indefatigable industry, such the strength of his intellect, that we find him during this period acquiring a stock of ancient literature rarely to be met with. His knowledge of the ancient languages was critically correct. The poetical and philosophical productions of antiquity in their original dress, were to him familiar; whilst modern meritorious performances did not elude his researches. At the verge of old age, he for the first time turned his attention to the study of the Mathematics and Natural Philosophy, in which, notwithstanding the period of life and increasing weight of business, he progressed with his usual rapidity. And the science of demonstration became ever afterward the favourite amusement of the few leisure hours, which the official duties of the public station he filled, afforded him.

But while viewing his literary attainments, and before we enter on the more important occurrences of his life, it is not amiss to drop a few remarks on the private character, as a man and a citizen. And here give me leave to observe, that even in his juvenile years he seems to have had but little taste for what is termed *amusements*. These, generally speaking, were beneath the exalted sphere in which his thoughts were taught to range. He did, what every young attorney ought to do—he made the best authors his most intimate companions, his books his principal amusement.

With respect to morality, he did not think it enough to be negatively good, to do no harm—but he rightly conceived, that man was placed in a state of society for the purpose of being positively virtuous, of doing all possible good. Hence, every hour not beneficially employed was criminally lost. He saw no medium between omitting a good action, when opportunity offered, and the actual commission of evil. Hence his time was not spent in those pursuits which are supposed to be indifferent. He would not engage in what might merely not be condemned; but with an ambition truly laudable, he aimed always to engage in what is useful.

In his habits of life he was strictly temperate: yet he was always fond of the company of a few friends, whose minds were congenial with his own. In the domestic circle his manners were gentle and unassuming. The placid smile of good nature still sat on his countenance, and diffused to all about him the sweets of domestic felicity. He had a peculiar aptitude of giving to conversation not only a pleasing, but a useful and instructive turn; inasmuch that few of his acquaintances visited him without going away better informed than when they came.

Mr. Wythe, though in low circumstances when he first approached the bar as a pleader, disdained the office of a barrater. He could not reconcile it to his moral sentiments nor to the honour

of his profession, to excite litigation, that he might profit by the misfortunes or folly of mankind.

He has been known to return fees, when he found he could render no service, or his client had deceived him by a false statement of the cause. He would decline pleading for a hardened, atrocious criminal; but youth, and the unwary in their first aberrations from the line of rectitude, always attracted his commiseration.

He has been known to shed tears for the degraded state of his country, on account of so many of its inhabitants being held in bondage and thereby administering to the spread of licentiousness, rather than that of valour and patriotism; which caused him to look forward with a mournful presentiment for its future destiny, when an odious intermixture might take place; and then instead of being a peculiar people, be a mongrel, feeble race, the derision and scorn of all Europe.

The overreaching schemes of speculators he abhorred: witness his decided opinions given in his elegant and instructive reports. And so fixed was he in this principle, that the persuasive tongues of P. Henry and D. Ross, could not induce him to take a share in the Georgia Mississippi company, or any other of the enormous speculations secretly fabricated in those days. This shows beyond dispute, that he conscientiously observed the golden rule of *doing to others as he would be done by*; that he was what a celebrated author emphatically terms "the noblest work of God."

But I must hasten to another part of the patriot. The character and talents of Mr. Wythe being such, it is natural for us to suppose, that in a time of threatening danger, he would be called on by his country; and his patriotism being such, it is equally natural to expect that he would cheerfully step forward to defend her injured rights; and such was the fact. When the pride and ambition of England had driven her into a kind of political phrenzy; when she resolved to violate every sacred tie which bound her and her then colonies together; at that interesting period, it is known that Virginia was not among the last to assert her injured rights, and that George Wythe was among the first of her patriotic sons who afforded his services in the civil department, for which he was eminently qualified. Let us now view him as a member, an active, a useful, a leading member of the Congress of 1776; that Congress who had exhausted all schemes of a pacific nature to avert a civil war, and had remonstrated without effect; and who, finding the court of Britain disposed to treat every peaceable effort with contempt, and to add insult to injury, did at length declare the United States of America to be free, sovereign and independent; a declaration which the parliament of Britain affected to treat with contempt, as an act of temerity; but which they were well pleased to see, as it afforded them a pretext to carry into effect those ~~murder~~ murder, rapine and desolation, which they had already concerted.

concerted. It was then the British fleets infested our harbours, and British armies spread their hostile banners before our towns. Then it was that the patriotic blood of our citizens began to flow in the sacred cause of freedom. Then commenced the glorious revolution, which under the auspices of benignant Heaven so happily terminated in the humiliation of the boasting foe, and in the establishment of liberty, independence and peace throughout all our borders. Then it was that different states, confederating for common safety, became so closely united, cemented, as it were, by the blood of the patriots and heroes, that the Union has hitherto been and we trust will continue to be indissoluble: and under the denomination of "the United States of America" assumed that grade among the nations of the earth to which her situation and political advantages so justly entitle her. During this important struggle, we find the venerable Wythe still actively engaged in the grand council of the nation, concerting successive plans of defence, and with discernment and the most unabating ardor forming political measures adapted to successive emergencies.

When the independence of our country was at length established, and the return of peace afforded the nation leisure to review the articles of confederation, we find him called on by his country to make one of that honourable convention who formed the Constitution of the United States; that constitution which is the boast of every American citizen, the admiration and envy of all the nations of the earth.

When the constitution was about to be adopted by the different states, we find him a member of the Virginia convention, who offered the memorable and important amendments to that constitution, which have been finally adopted. He was appointed one of a select committee to review the laws, and to recommend to the state legislature such acts as were thought suitable to a republican form of government. This committee was to consist of five; but the whole task, arduous as it was, devolved on three, one of whom was the late Chancellor. This important duty those sages of the law executed with a degree of discernment which shows that they possessed minds sufficiently capacious to take in at one comprehensive view, not only the present but the future prosperity of the whole commonwealth.

As a Judge, this great man has been deservedly admired. For a number of years he was sole Chancellor of Virginia. The immense business which devolved on him in that station required a mind possessing the greatest energy, firmness and patience. To be daily poring over voluminous rolls of dry, unentertaining papers, to attend to lengthy discussions, to investigate and decide complicated and intricate cases, must have kept his thoughts perpetually on the stretch; surely a mind less capacious must have sunk beneath the weight; a person less attached to the public good must have abandoned

abandoned the business, at least before the infirmities of age came on. But for this important station the great Wythe seems to have been particularly qualified. His comprehensive mind, his deep penetration enabled him to look through the most complex case, and to discover at first view the point on which the controversy turned; while the conspicuous views of justice which he possessed, and his legal knowledge enabled him speedily and righteously to decide. If the formation of chancery district courts took some of the weight of business off his hands, still he did not allow himself an idle moment. Resolved to spend his whole life in doing good, he employed every leisure hour in teaching others, in forming the minds of young men so as to fit them for future usefulness in public life.

Thus in whatever point of view we look at this great man, we are struck with admiration. We see in him the man of extensive erudition, the acute lawyer, the wise legislator, the able statesman, the sound politician, the true patriot, the genuine republican, the impartial judge, and the honest man.

This useful, this laborious life was continued for fourscore years; and yet our rising sighs proclaim that "Heaven has called too soon." But let us check each murmuring thought, and while we hasten to follow him to the grave, "the house prepared for all living," let us cheerfully acquiesce in the wise counsels of Heaven.

We must now turn our attention to a more solemn scene, a part of this important portrait, in which we are all immediately interested. However inadequate most or all of us may be of acting the part already noticed, the part now to be brought into view we must all sooner or later engage in. Though we may never be lawyers, legislators, statesmen or politicians; yet we ought all to be patriots, republicans and honest men. And whether we are these or not, we shall all inevitably be dying mortals; dying mortals did I say? nay, he was, and we may be more than this....we may be dying *CHRISTIANS*. View then, for a moment, that good man in his last hours; though his body underwent a peculiar degree of pain, occasioned, as it is thought, by the corrosive nature of that deleterious substance which base ingratitude had mingled with his morning repast; yet his mind was calm and serene, his thoughts were perfectly collected; and in that awful hour, while standing on the crumbling margin of the grave, he had the consolation which the retrospect of a life dedicated to virtue could afford; the delightful presentiment which the prospect of a happy immortality could create. Hard was the struggle. Long did nature combat the destructive effects of that pernicious draught. At length she yields. The voluntary and involuntary motions of the system wax feeble: the natural and vital functions become impaired. Those eyes, which often rolled with melting sympathy, o'er the scenes of human misery,

misery, are now forever fixed : those hands, whose wave commanded the collected attention of listening crowds, now cold, feeble and nerveless, fall uselefs down : that tongue, whose sublime and convincing eloquence was so often employed in his country's cause, now faulters in his mouth : that heart, so long the seat of virtue, now fails to beat : that breast, which heaved the philanthropic sigh, to view his country's wrongs—alas ! shall heave no more. Behold the breathlefs remains, over which the tears of a nation flow !

Virginia stoops with melting eyes,  
To view the mouldering urn ;  
Her sister States all sympathize,  
And join with her to mourn.

It has lately been emphatically expressed, that *Socrates died like a philosopher*. GEORGE WYTHE had the same trait in his character, and was taken off by the same means. But he in his last hour also displayed the fortitude and resignation of a Christian. What a sublime example !

Thus we have followed our venerable fellow citizen to the tomb. But it would be improper, if not criminal, not to carry our thoughts one step farther. That soul, whose features we have endeavoured in some measure to delineate, is not dead ; it lives in renewed and immortal vigour. Now let our thoughts take a lofty flight. Let us for a moment pursue the happy spirit, clothed with an imperishable body, ranging through extended regions of ever fresh delight : And here, if I might be permitted to offer an opinion, I would suppose the pious and philosophic soul of Wythe, not gazing with a vain curiosity at the wonders of creation and divine Providence, but learning and practising, in a much higher degree, the pure maxims of justice and equity, by a consociation with angels and his brethren once of this world ; who have obtained the victory, and are arrived safe before him, enjoying ineffable bliss, in contemplating real order, beauty and harmony, and in viewing the beatific vision of the Holy of holies ; in seraphic praise and adoration of the Author of all good, the only wise God. Let us check our premature judgment of the matter. Whether are we going ? Am I attempting to look into heavenly mysteries ? Vain attempt ! to delineate a scene, which celestial eloquence would fail to describe. This much we may venture to declare ; “ as there is a God above, he must delight in virtue ; and that which he delights in must be happy.”

Let us then endeavour to emulate the virtues of this great man ; and we shall not only follow him through a life of usefulness to the grave, but share with him its great rewards—glory, honour immortality, and eternal life.