

DISCOURSE

COMMEMORATIVE OF THE

REV. THOMAS CHALMERS, D. D.,

BY WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.

Pres. 13 Nov. 1851.

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DISCOURSE

COMMEMORATIVE OF THE

REV. THOMAS CHALMERS, D. D.,

DELIVERED IN THE

SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ALBANY,

ON

SABBATH EVENING, JUNE 27, 1847.

BY WILLIAM B. ^{well} SPRAGUE, D. D.,

MINISTER OF SAID CHURCH.

WITH A LETTER FROM DR. CHALMERS TO AN
AMERICAN CLERGYMAN.

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CORRESPONDENCE.

Albany, June 30th, 1847.

Rev'd Dear Sir.

Though as Scotchmen, we may be supposed to feel a peculiar interest in all that concerns the land of our fathers, we are sure we express the cordial wish of all who happened to hear your eloquent discourse, last Sabbath evening, on the life and character of the late Rev'd Dr. Chalmers, and of multitudes who have only heard of it, in requesting you, as we now respectfully do, to give it to the public through the press, at your earliest convenience. By so doing,

You will greatly oblige,

Rev'd Dear sir,

Yours very respectfully.

A. MCINTYRE,
D. KENNEDY,
PETER McNAUGHTON,
LUKE F. NEWLAND,
JAMES McNAUGHTON,
ARCHIBALD CAMPBELL,
P. BULLIONS,
ALEXANDER WATSON.

TO THE REV. DRS. BULLIONS AND KENNEDY, AND A. MCINTYRE, PETER McNAUGHTON, LUKE F. NEWLAND, JAMES McNAUGHTON, ARCHIBALD CAMPBELL, AND ALEXANDER WATSON, ESQUIRES:

Gentlemen,

I feel gratified and honoured by the favourable notice which you have taken of my discourse on the life and character of your illustrious countryman, the Rev. Dr. Chalmers. The only ground on which I could hesitate in regard to giving it any additional publicity, is, that it is not more worthy of its exalted subject. Nevertheless, the profound veneration with which I have long been accustomed to regard Scotland and her institutions, the grateful and affectionate recollections which I have of this, her most distinguished son, and I scarcely need add, the very high respect which I bear towards yourselves as individuals, will not permit me to decline your flattering request.

I am, Gentlemen, with great regard,

Faithfully yours,

W. B. SPRAGUE.

Albany, July 1, 1847.

DISCOURSE.

MATTHEW XXV, 15.

And unto one he gave five talents.

It is a beautiful feature of the creation that uniformity every where blends with itself variety. The stars that light up so brilliantly the evening sky, bear to a superficial gazer substantially the same appearance; and yet astronomy, not less than Christianity, has certified to us the fact that "one star differeth from another star in glory." The landscape which at first opens upon us merely as an extended field of verdure and brightness, reveals to a closer inspection a thousand variegated tints, each of which is a legitimate subject both of reflection and of admiration. The pebbles of the brook, the flowers of the field, the trees of the forest, each of the various forms both of mineral and of vegetable existence, possess common properties, while yet

each particular specimen is, in some respects, different from every other. The whole animal creation has something in common, and each of the several tribes has more; but here again, whether you compare the tribes, or the individuals composing the tribes, there is no end to the diversity which they exhibit. And what is true of the inferior orders of being, is true of man also: wherever you find him, you find him in all his essential characteristics the same; and yet need I say, that he ranges from a little above the brute to a little below the angel?

This inequality that pervades the human race, is one of the lessons conveyed by the parable in which we find the text;—I mean the parable of the talents. And in the text itself there is a reference to the highest number of talents ever bestowed;—in other words, to an individual most highly favoured in respect to both character and condition. What constitutes the distinction here referred to?

I answer, it is the possession, in an eminent degree, of whatever may be used for the benefit of ourselves and our fellow creatures, or for the glory of God. Let us glance at two or three of its leading elements.

I may mention, first, high intellectual endowments;—a mind originally constituted with extraordinary powers, and subjected to the most vigorous and efficient culture. I may mention also a highly favoured moral constitution;—that native energy that never tires,—that native frankness that knows not how to dissemble,—that native generosity and sympathy that respond instinctively to every tale of woe. And then there is the image of the heavenly deeply enstamped upon the soul by the Spirit of God; there are the Christian graces shining out with unwonted attraction; there are the fervent breathings of a spirit which lives in the atmosphere of Calvary or at the foot of the throne. And last of all, (for I will not include in the present estimate great riches, however legitimately they *might* be included,) there is the providential arrangement of circumstances favourable not only to the highest development, but to the most useful application, of the various faculties;—an arrangement at once creating facilities and supplying inducements to beneficent action. Wherever you find an individual in whom these various characteristics meet,—one who possesses a richly endowed mind, and a noble

spirit, and an exalted Christian character, and who withal occupies a station of dignity and influence, there you find one possessing the five talents. He stands upon an eminence which few ever reach. He is among the greater lights in the firmament of illustrious minds.

It may perhaps occur to you that I am scarcely warranted in speaking of eminent piety in this connection as a talent, inasmuch as the parable takes for granted that the several talents referred to, whatever they may be, are not only all to be accounted for, but are liable to be perverted, and thus to bring condemnation and ruin to their possessor. I do not use the text in so strict a sense as this objection would seem to imply. My object is to consider it, not chiefly as illustrating human responsibility, but as pointing to the highest style of human character;—to character considered as the production not of nature only, but of grace. Every good gift that we receive, —every thing that is fitted to advance either our happiness or our usefulness, comes from God: and surely that richest of all gifts,—the gift of an exalted piety, is not only to be referred to the same infinite Benefactor, but is to be referred to him in a far higher sense than any

other of his favours; for while these are to be regarded as the fruit of his common bounty, that involves more immediately the sacrifice of his Son and the agency of his Spirit.

But if all the talents that men receive come from God,—if every thing that enters into an exalted character is, in some sense, the production of his agency, it is manifest that wherever such a character is formed, He has his own purposes in reference to it. It were presumptuous to suppose that we should be able to comprehend *all* his purposes in respect to any thing; but some of the ends which He designs to accomplish,—actually does accomplish, by raising a few individuals to an extraordinary elevation, we may discover at a glance. I will specify two or three of them.

I say then, God designs by this part of the economy of his providence, to exalt our conceptions of the dignity of human nature.

Think not, from the announcement of this thought, that I am going to utter any thing that is inconsistent with evangelical humility. Far be it from me to attempt to throw a veil over the disorder, the degradation, the ruin, that hath overtaken man, in consequence of

his having become a sinner. All the scripture statements on this subject I would not only submissively receive but earnestly enforce as exhibiting the sad reality of our condition. But allow me to say there is danger that, from our being conversant with man in his fallen state only, and especially from our being familiarized to the grosser effects of human depravity, we may actually form too low an estimate of him as a piece of the divine workmanship,—may fail of exercising a due respect towards our own nature,—may undervalue that inward germ of strength and immortality, that susceptibility of being moulded into an angel, that still remains, notwithstanding all the darkness and the wreck that sin hath occasioned. I know not in what God hath supplied a more effectual antidote to this delusion, than in this very arrangement which we are contemplating;—in planting here and there in the intellectual and moral firmament a star of surpassing brightness, in which man may see as if reflected by a mirror, the dignity of his own spirit. You have been contemplating man in that creature of ignorance, whose dark and chaotic mind you may interrogate, but it answers nothing; or in that

creature of sensuality, whose whole life is a struggle to efface every divine lineament from his soul; or in that creature of vanity or worldliness, who envies the butterfly the beauty in which he is clothed, or the serpent the dust on which he subsists. Turn now and contemplate this same being in one of the brighter forms of human existence; in some intellect that has been richly endowed and nobly trained,—in some heart that beats in generous and hallowed pulsations. Mark the kindling of the celestial fire,—the working of the immortal energy. Now the faculty of reflection or of reasoning is put in requisition; and the remoter relations of things are reached perhaps by one searching glance, and not improbably new fields of thought are opened, in which the intellect of the world may labour for an age. Now the memory is set at work; and behold it is giving forth, as from an inexhaustible store-house, treasures of knowledge and wisdom which we marvel should have been accumulated within the compass of a life. And again, the imagination begins to glow; it soars into regions where the eagle's path is not known; it opens to our view worlds of its own creation; it paints with a divine

pencil, and in colours that were mingled and prepared in Heaven; it moves in a radiant course to perform a glorious work. And while the intellectual faculties act with such mighty power, the moral faculties are obedient to the dictates of truth and wisdom. There is a conscience full of light and strength, that would dictate the endurance of the heaviest calamity, rather than the commission of the lightest wrong. And there is that highest form of virtue, which indeed includes every other, magnanimity: you can prescribe no sacrifices too great for it to submit to, no enterprises too difficult for it to accomplish, in behalf of sinning, suffering man. I am not pointing you to a perfect character, because the individual who bears it is yet upon earth; and yet such a character as I have described,—great intellectually, great morally, great spiritually, sometimes actually does appear, shining out from amidst all the world's darkness; and I leave it to you to say whether every such character is not a substantial witness for man's inherent dignity.

And to what practical use, my friends, shall we turn this reflection? Oh, is not the world full of beings, who have not learned to respect

themselves as the creatures of God and the heirs of immortality? And even those of us who profess some higher appreciation of the greatness of man's nature, and who are accustomed to think of him in his relations to God and eternity,—do not even *our* views of this subject need to be corrected and elevated, that we may labour both for ourselves and for others as the magnitude of the case requires? Devotee of the world, idolater of fashion, creature of sensuality, bring before thee some illustrious model of human excellence, and human greatness, and remember that the same nature which thou art contemplating belongs to thyself also; and say whether its noble faculties are not worthy of being trained for a noble destiny;—whether thou art willing to remain in degradation, when intelligence and purity and the life everlasting may be thy portion. Christian, hold the same object to *thy* thoughts, —a fellow creature whom God hath made great both by a creating and a renovating power; and then look abroad upon the multitude who are meanly and madly pouring contempt on God's workmanship in their own persons, and say whether it is not worth a greater effort than thou hast yet put forth, to elevate them

to their legitimate dignity, and render them suitable companions for the angels. Nay, turn thine eye inward, and inquire whether thou art doing enough for the culture of thine own spirit;—whether it be not chargeable to thee as a fault, that thou art so inferior in knowledge and holiness and dignity to some who share the same nature, live in the same world, and have been trained substantially under the same influences with thyself.

Another reason why God raises a few members of the human family so much above the rest is, that they may take the lead in the great work of renovating the world.

That this world is hereafter to undergo a mighty moral change, corresponding to the change from darkness to light, is ascertained to us by the promise, and I may add by the providence, of God. The world even now is, to a great extent, a theatre of crime and suffering. Men deliberately invade each others' rights, make war upon each others' happiness, shed each others' blood. Multitudes cast out from their minds every thought of God: they abjure allegiance to him as a sovereign; they refuse to do homage to him as a benefactor; and if not formally, yet virtually and in their

hearts, they vote him out of his own world. But this state of things will not last forever: it is to be succeeded ere long by the universal reign of truth and virtue and happiness. The world from having been an Aceldama will become an Eden; its winter season will be past; its storms will be over and gone; the Heavens will bow themselves to smile upon it and commune with it, as a regenerate world; and myriads will shout forth their thanksgivings that God hath fulfilled his promise in creating a new earth.

But this change, vast as it will be, is to be accomplished by human instrumentality. If nothing more than the fact that it is to occur, had been revealed to us, we should have expected no doubt that God would come forth in the majesty of a miraculous agency for its accomplishment; but instead of that, he sets his own children at work, and he works in all their efforts, and one of the brightest honours which they will wear in Heaven, will be that they had been joined with him in this blessed coöperation. But while the whole sacramental host of God's elect are thus put in requisition, and while the labours of even the weakest and the humblest may be turned

to good account, each one labouring in his proper sphere, it is manifest that there are needed for the conduct of this enterprize, spirits endowed with unwonted discernment and energy and purity;—bright and heroic minds that can comprehend the whole world in their benevolent regards, and diffuse their influence every where, like the breath of the morning. And as we actually find some individuals of this exalted character, *who* can doubt that they are raised up for this very end; that they fulfil their mission chiefly by concentrating and directing the energies of the church for the redemption of the world?

Need I say that the position which I have here taken, is illustrated and confirmed by the whole history of the race. No great enterprize has ever been projected and brought to a successful issue, but that some master-spirit has been identified with it. Who but Abraham laid the foundation of the Jewish economy? Who but Moses carried the people of Israel through the wilderness, and became the permanent law-giver of the nation? Who but Joshua conducted the enterprize that secured their settlement in Canaan? Who but Solomon built the temple? Who but Paul gave

the decisive impulse to Christianity, which was so quickly felt to the ends of the earth? Who but Luther and a few illustrious associates, erected the standard of the Reformation, and carried terror and trembling to the very heart of the Papal power? Who but Washington delivered our country from political thralldom, and gave us a name among the free? Who but Wilberforce stopped the traffic of the British nation in immortality, and finally brought about the deliverance of the slave? In these several cases, there were indeed a multitude of hearts beating, and a multitude of hands employed, for the accomplishment of the respective objects; and yet there was not a pulsation nor a movement but the ruling spirit animated and directed it. Those great men were the primary agents; and can we doubt that He who made them great, made them so in reference to the work which He had designed for them?

Another reason why God thus distinguishes some of his creatures is, that mankind may have the benefit of a pure and lofty example.

There is a power in example which we are all ready enough to acknowledge, but which perhaps none of us suitably appreciate; and it

may reasonably be questioned whether most men do not actually accomplish as much of good or evil by this insensible influence, as by any course of direct and positive effort. A good example produces an atmosphere in which virtue flourishes and vice decays; whereas a bad example represses the energies of virtue, and gives to vice a more deadly luxuriance. The world in its present state would seem to have a fearful preponderance of selfishness and iniquity; and there needs to be a strong counter-acting influence to prevent the farther progress of evil, and especially to advance the great cause of human renovation. Whenever a man distinguished for his greatness and goodness appears, there are multitudes who take knowledge of him that he is good and great; and God means that what he does and what he is, shall be copied into the habits, the characters, of those who come within the range of his influence. One end for which the Son of God descended from Heaven was, that there might be in this dark world one perfect example; and can we doubt that his design in raising up those who share in human imperfection and depravity, and yet approach nearest to the perfect standard, is to bring true

greatness in contact with our very senses, so that we may always have before us specimens of what man may become, even before he reaches the fulness of the stature of a perfect person in Christ.

It is an evidence of divine wisdom that each successive generation has its own illustrious examples, besides having, to a great extent, the benefit of those which have gone before. History embalms a few of the noblest minds of every age; and though they may have passed off the stage centuries before we came upon it, yet in the record of what they were, we can sit at their feet and learn from them lessons of exalted wisdom. We cannot, however, gain such vivid impressions from the dead as from the living; and hence the living great and good are always among us;—if not the greatest and the best, yet those who far exceed the ordinary mark of human endowment and attainment. Let the silent teachers of the past then be duly revered; let every monument of what they were be sacredly cherished and diligently studied; let their very graves be resorted to as places where Wisdom's voice is heard:—but let us keep our eye upon the living as long as we can; and when the

grave claims them, let it be our privilege to reflect that they have done that for us which death cannot undo, and that we have a treasury of hallowed recollections and impressions derived from our observation of their example, which are already incorporated among the elements of our virtue and our bliss.

And yet another reason,—the last which I shall mention,—why some individuals are thus specially honoured of God, is, that by their departure from the world, they may render Heaven more attractive to us as the gathering place of illustrious minds.

Here where faith exists in so much imperfection, we need all the helps that we can command to enable us to gain even a feeble impression of the things that are not seen and are eternal. Revelation has indeed carried her light up to the gate of Heaven,—nay to the very throne of God; but even where her light is the strongest, she has left mysteries that will yield only to the experience of the glorious future. When I have gathered from God's word all those bright passages that are designed to tell me what Heaven is, and when I have reverently and earnestly inquired concerning the sublime import of each, I feel

that my conceptions of that glorious world are infantile and unworthy; and I anticipate with joy the day when this seeing through a glass darkly shall make way for the higher privilege of seeing face to face. But meanwhile I know not how to strengthen my impressions of the reality and glory of that world better, than by contemplating it as the resting place of those exalted minds, in whose light I have been privileged here to linger. Who does not look towards Heaven with more veneration and rapture, because Abraham and Moses and David and Paul are there; because all the great and good who have come out of the tribulations of the world are there; especially because the Son of God, part of whose history relates to a sorrowful sojourn and a mighty work on earth, is there? They have all lived and laboured and suffered here; and here the history of many of them remains; and here their influence is still felt; nay, if the Saviour himself and two of the old saints be excepted, each one of them is still represented on earth by a part of his own person; for their dust is here in the keeping of the Resurrection and the Life, waiting to be re-collected and fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body. Oh,

brethren, does not this reflection make Heaven so real that every thing else seems shadowy? Does it not bring it so near that we seem to be refreshed by its gales, to be entranced by its melodies? Does it not give us such a sense of its glory, that we are sometimes ready to say in the spirit of a holy impatience,

“Fly swifter round ye wheels of time,
And bring the welcome day?”

Yes, ye illustrious minds, sharers with us of a common nature, ye were inhabitants of the earth once, but ye are inhabitants of Heaven now; and our hope of Heaven is the richer and the sweeter, because we know that ye are of the number of its glorified population.

One of earth's most gifted and venerable minds has just passed away to mingle in the scenes beyond the veil. Scotland was the country of his birth, and the immediate field of his labours; and to her will belong the honour of building his sepulchre, and of giving up his venerable dust into the Redeemer's hands at his second coming. But his name, his character, his influence, she cannot monopolize: they belong to the world; and they will descend as an inheritance through

all coming generations. And let me say that, as his life belonged to the world, so does his death also;—a fact most impressively demonstrated by the air of deep sadness which the tidings of his death produce, wherever they circulate. It is this feature in the dispensation,—the fact that a light has been extinguished that shone upon the whole world,—at least upon all Protestant Christendom, that renders it a fitting service for *us* to commemorate his exalted character; and though I cannot suppose that I am speaking to more than a very small number who have ever heard his voice or seen his face, I feel persuaded that I am not speaking to an individual who is indifferent to the greatness of my theme; not one who does not heartily respond to the sentiment that the world has lost a benefactor. It is only a hurried and exceedingly imperfect notice that I shall be able to take of him; but even though I should say nothing that is not familiar to all of you, I shall not regret having spoken; for I shall at least have given utterance to my own sense of his exalted worth, and shall have held up to your contemplation and imitation a character of superlative excellence.

Doctor Chalmers was born at Anstruther, a small village in Fifeshire, March 17, 1780. His parents were worthy, respectable people, in the middle walks of life. Having graduated at the University of St. Andrews, he determined to devote himself to theology as a profession, though it would seem without any adequate sense of the nature of true religion, or the claims and responsibilities of the Christian ministry. After being licensed as a preacher, he officiated, for some time, as assistant to a clergyman at Cavers, near Hawick; but after a brief sojourn there, he removed to Kilmany in 1803, where he laboured for several years, and where occurred at least *one* of the most memorable events of his life. It was nothing less, as he himself regarded it, than a radical change of character. Previous to that period he seems to have looked upon the duties of his profession as a mere matter of official drudgery; and not a small part of his time was devoted to science, particularly to the mathematics, to which his taste more especially inclined him. But having been requested to furnish an article for the Edinburgh Encyclopedia, on the evidences of divine revelation, in the course of the in-

vestigation to which he was led in the prosecution of this effort, he was brought into communion with Christianity in all its living and transforming power. He not only became fully satisfied of its truth, of which before he had had only some indefinite and inoperative impression, but he discerned clearly its high practical relations; he surrendered himself to its teachings with the spirit of a little child; he reposed in its gracious provisions with the confidence of a penitent sinner; and from that hour to his dying hour, he gloried in nothing save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. He stood forth before the world strangely unlike what he had ever been before. There was a sacred fervour, an unearthly majesty, in all his utterances and all his writings. Scotland, Britain, the world, soon came to look at him with wonder, as one of the brightest luminaries of his time; as destined to exert a controlling influence upon the age, if not to mark an epoch in the world's history.

It was of course impossible that such a mind as he had now shown himself to possess, should remain buried in a comparatively obscure country charge; and hence we find that in the year 1815, he was translated to the Tron

church in Glasgow. His appearance there awakened an intense interest through the whole city; and it was quickly found that there was a far higher effect produced by his ministrations than mere admiration;—that the sword of the Spirit, wielded with such unwonted energy, was doing its legitimate work: for worldliness could not bear his rebukes; skepticism could not stand erect in his presence; while a pure and living Christianity was constantly reproducing itself in the hearts of some or other of his enchained auditors. It was in the year 1816 that he was called to preach before the King's Commissioner, in the High Church in Edinburgh; an occasion that was signalized by one of the most magnificent efforts which even *he* ever put forth. The discourse occupied what was then a comparatively unexplored field,—the reciprocal relations of theology and astronomy; a subject upon which he afterwards poured still more exuberantly the riches of his genius, in that incomparable volume which has long since become, in its way, one of the wonders of the world.

In 1819 he was removed to a new church in the parish of St. Johns, where, for several years, he continued to exercise his ministry

with undiminished popularity and usefulness. In 1823 he accepted an appointment to the professorship of moral philosophy in the University of St. Andrews; and though this was a new sphere of labour, it was one for which his previous habits of thought had abundantly qualified him, and in which he acquitted himself with the highest honour. In 1828 he was called to the theological chair in the University of Edinburgh, which his genius and piety continued to adorn and elevate, till 1843, when he vacated it by reason of the disruption of the Church of Scotland. As he was the master spirit of that great movement in the beginning, so it continued to engross his energies to the last. He has since not only discharged the duties of a professor of theology in the Free Church, but has been charged directly or indirectly with almost every interest belonging to the new enterprise. Not a small portion of the Christian world will concur in the opinion that his last labours were the most important of his life; and that there is no point from which his character appears so glorious, as from amidst the sacrifices and struggles that attended the disruption.

Notwithstanding he had reached a good old

age, he had so much of vigor and elasticity still remaining, that those who felt most deeply the value of his life, ventured to hope that a few more years at least might be added to it. But the tidings of his death went forth, as if a thunder-bolt had burst from an unclouded sky. The week before, he had returned from a journey. The day before, he had attended public worship. The evening before he had passed with his family. And that very morning on which his spirit took its upward flight, his voice was to have been heard in the supreme judicatory of the church. But he came not from his chamber at the accustomed time, and the delay awakened anxiety; and when inquisition came to be made, lo! the earthly tabernacle was all that remained! We might have wished indeed that he could have been advertised beforehand that death was approaching. We would fain have known what were the last words which his lips would have uttered; what would have been the actings of such a mind as his, when the glories of Heaven were shining down upon it through the night-clouds of death. But who, after all, will say that an instantaneous transition may not have been the better for *him*; that it was not

the very highest privilege he could have enjoyed, to be awakened from his slumbers by a voice, saying, "Come up hither?" I can imagine there was something of the glory of a translation there. The bidding farewell to friends was dispensed with; the dying testimony to the value of the gospel was dispensed with; the protracted physical agony that often attends the last hour, the watching of the monster's progress towards the end of his work,—all, all was dispensed with; and that glorious mind had the passage of only one conscious moment from earth to Heaven. Venerable saint, we thank God for his goodness to thee in thy death, no less than in thy life!

The intellectual character of Dr. Chalmers was distinguished chiefly by its wonderful combination of the imaginative, the profound, and the practical. If there be on earth, or has ever been, a mind constituted with greater power of imagination than his, we know not where to look for it. It might be represented by the brilliancy of the sun, the beauty of the landscape, the terrific roar of the cataract, the soft grandeur of the evening sky; or rather by all of them in exquisite combination. And because he was so preëminent

in respect to this quality, I am inclined to think that some have underrated his more strictly intellectual powers;—his ability to comprehend the more distant bearings of things, or to grapple with the subtleties of abstract philosophy; and they have reached their false conclusion, on the ground that it were impossible that a mind so highly gifted in the one respect, should be alike distinguished in the other. But if his productions may be allowed to speak for him, I think it will be difficult to show that he was not equally at home in the depths as in the heights; and some of his works, particularly that on Natural Theology, exhibit the two qualities blended in beautiful proportions. I hesitate not to say, that any man who could reason like Chalmers and do nothing else, or any man who could soar like Chalmers and do nothing else, or any man who could contrive and execute like Chalmers, as is evinced by his connection with the whole Free Church movement, and do nothing else, would be a great man in any country or in any age; but the union of the several faculties in such proportion and in such degree, constitutes a character at once unparalleled and imperishable.

Nor were the moral qualities of Dr. Chalmers less striking than the intellectual. The first thing that would occur to you on meeting him, was his perfect simplicity and humility,—the absence of every thing that indicated even the consciousness of his own superiority; and this became more and more a matter of admiration, as it was seen in connection with the kindling of his faculties under the influence of some exciting topic. And then there was a frankness, an honesty, which impressed itself upon you from the moment that he opened his lips: you felt that you were in contact with a guileless spirit, that was incapable of taking an unworthy advantage. There was a melting tenderness that vibrated quickly to every note of sorrow; there was a winning condescension that seemed to annihilate the distance between himself and the humblest visitor; there was a noble generosity that cast a withering look upon every thing mean and selfish; and, above all, there was a lofty enthusiasm, which burned to his inmost soul, and which, perhaps more than any thing else, gave the complexion to his life. His countenance, while in a state of repose, might not have particularly arrested your attention;

but when lighted up by thought and feeling, it became quite another thing: it was a mirror that reflected all the graces of the mind, and all the graces of the heart; and sometimes it was pervaded by such a flood of illumination, that it would remind you of Stephen, whose face is said to have shone like that of an angel.

Such being the intellectual and moral constitution of Dr. Chalmers, it is not difficult to account for what he was in the various spheres of public action; especially when it is borne in mind that his faculties were thoroughly baptized with the spirit of Christianity.

It were to be expected that such a man should be, as he actually was, a prince among orators. For his mind was a soil in which great thoughts were produced spontaneously. It was a region of incomparable beauty, full of glorious images, that seemed like so many reflections from the upper paradise. It was a fountain of heavenly fire, that darted into other minds with an irradiating and electric power. It is generally conceded that the highest efforts of eloquence are the effect of sudden and strong impulses, and so far at least as the language is concerned, are unpremeditated; for in

a process of great mental elaboration, neither the imagination nor the sympathies are likely to be much enlisted. But with Dr. Chalmers it was quite otherwise. He wrote nearly every thing that he uttered; but so well balanced were the intellectual and the moral in his constitution, and so harmonious was the action of one part of his nature with the other, that his most elaborate compositions were often those into which were infused the deepest feeling, and which in the delivery produced the highest effect. If you were to hear a preacher described as doggedly chained to his manuscript, with his head bowed towards it, with one hand keeping his place, and with the other sawing the air, you might not improbably ask where such a man was to be found, but it would be only that you might be sure to keep out of his way. And yet this was the manner of Chalmers; but in spite of this manner, he held his audience as by a spell: it was as if they were gazing upon a dark cloud, when the lightnings were playing upon its bosom; as if they were contemplating the waves of the ocean borne mountain high on the wings of the tempest; as if they saw the heavens spanned with rainbows, whose

varied hues had gathered an overpowering lustre; as if Hell had unbosomed herself, making her tortures visible and her wailings audible; as if Heaven had lifted her portals, and disclosed to mortal vision her crowns and thrones, and whatever else goes to constitute her glory. I remember to have heard one of the most intelligent men in Scotland, and yet not one who sympathized with Dr. Chalmers in his religious views and feelings, remark, that he had heard from him strains of eloquence, especially on one occasion on the floor of the General Assembly, which not only greatly exceeded any thing that he had ever heard from any other person, but he fully believed, equalled the highest efforts of Demosthenes himself.

What has been said of the mental and moral qualities of this great man, may farther explain to us the fact that he was so eminently a philanthropist. There was not a department of human want or wo that escaped his wakeful and discerning eye; nor one which his circumstances allowed him to reach, in which he was not an active and efficient labourer. He sympathized with the slave under the wrongs which he suffered, and lent his elo-

quent voice and eloquent pen for his redemption. He remembered the perishing heathen, and was the life of every project for sending them the gospel, that was started within his reach. He considered especially the cause of the poor, in relation not only to their own intellectual and moral education, but to the common benefit of the race; and to this the energies of his great mind were especially directed. I do not undertake to pronounce upon the soundness of all the views he may have held, or the expediency of all the measures he may have urged, in connection with this general subject; but that he laboured in this cause as if he were acting under the influence of a ruling passion,—that in general he laboured with great wisdom as well as great energy, and that his labours tell and will tell most benignly through many generations, both upon his country and upon his race, I may assert any where without the fear of contradiction. It required a heart full of love to God and man, like his, to dictate the high purpose of giving so much of his life to the improvement of the humbler classes; and it required the vast comprehension, the indomitable energy, the untiring perseverance, the

seraphic eloquence that he possessed, to contrive and put into operation that system of Christian economics which has already immortalized him as the benefactor of the poor.

It were to be expected, moreover, that a mind like his should lend itself vigorously and cordially to the cause of religious freedom; and I bless God that he was not suffered to die, till the honour of having achieved a glorious triumph in this cause, was awarded to him. I say not this in the spirit of party crimination, as if there were not in that memorable conflict great and good men who saw with other eyes and acted another part, and yet were honest in doing so. We are not to forget the power of education, the power of habit, over the judgment and even the conscience. Chalmers himself, during the greater part of his life, was a very champion in the cause of ecclesiastical establishments; and I believe he held to the theory, in some form or other, to the last; and we scarcely marvel at it when we remember that he was nursed in the bosom of an establishment; that his earliest religious associations were identified with it; that it opened to him his field of labour, and supplied him, to a great

extent, with his means of usefulness. If you reproach him for his adherence to what you consider a false system, you forget that he was a man, or rather you virtually assume to be more than a man yourself. But though he had always defended the union of church and state up to a certain point, believing as he did that this was most conducive to the perpetuation and progress of true religion, yet when he became satisfied that the state was assuming spiritual dominion, — was interfering with the liberty wherewith Christ makes his disciples free, he instantly took the attitude of stern resistance. He reasoned, he expostulated, he predicted results, he poured his honest and glowing eloquence into the ear of those who stood nearest the throne; but when all proved unavailing, he bowed to the dictates of sovereign conscience, and went out, weeping and yet rejoicing, the captain of a great host of the Lord's freemen. Oh, that was a day memorable in the annals of religious liberty, — a day that will bear witness to all coming generations of the might and the majesty of Christian principle; and rely on it, it will be chronicled with the greater glory, because it will associate itself forever with his venerable name.

If there has been a man in modern times of whom it may be said emphatically that his field was the world, that man is Dr. Chalmers. He wrought with mighty power upon the destinies not merely of a nation, but of his race. Scotland was indeed his immediate theatre of action; but such is the relation that Scotland, as a fountain of intellectual and moral renovation, bears to the world, that every effort directed especially to her improvement, vibrates in a thousand nameless influences to the ends of the earth. But he acted not only indirectly but directly upon other countries than his own. Wherever his writings have circulated, (and they are like household words wherever the English language is spoken) they have a powerful though insensible agency in moulding and elevating human character.

If I were to attempt an estimate of the influence of this wonderful man, as it has been and is hereafter to be exerted upon the world, I should speak first, of what he has done for the cause of a pure Christianity. I should ask you to estimate, if you could, the privilege of being able in a conflict with the enemies of our holy religion, to point to one of such rare endowments and such superlative excellence, and

say that he accounted it his highest glory to be an humble learner in the school of Christ. I should next refer to that noble vindication of the claim of Christianity to a divine origin, in the prosecution of which he first attained to an experience of its life-giving energy, and in the study of which, misgiving and terror, and finally conviction, have not unfrequently overtaken the boldest skepticism. I should speak then of the wonderful charm with which his eloquence hath invested evangelical truth, without diminishing aught of its power; of the just proportions in which he has brought out the various parts of the Christian system, so that each part sustains its legitimate relation to every other, and the whole is rendered the most attractive and the most effective. I should undertake to show that to him more than any other man belongs the honour of having established a goodly fellowship between Science and Christianity; for it was his astronomical discourses that gave the first great impulse on this subject to the popular mind; and that was only the beginning of a bright series of efforts which he directed to the same object. I should dwell moreover upon the acknowledged fact that he has set forth

the Christian religion, not only as an eminently spiritual and practical, but an eminently intellectual thing; and that those who will have it that its doctrines are the appropriate food of weak minds, may find in every part of his writings a rebuke that should not only awe them into silence, but cover them with confusion.

But it would be an inadequate view of the extent of his influence which should include that only which he has done for the cause of evangelical truth: to do justice to such a theme, it would be necessary to trace out the practical workings of his great mind in the general progress of human society; more particularly to ascertain the results of the plans which he projected, of the agencies which he originated, with a view to the elevation of the lower classes. Especially would it be necessary to illustrate the importance of that last and greatest movement of his life, in its bearings on the universal reign of religious freedom, and the ultimate regeneration of the world. I look over the nations now, and the multitude are subjected to a debasing and withering thralldom. Even where liberty of conscience is in some sense recognized, there are still almost

every where trammels which the dignity of the rational man requires should be shaken off. I mark the heavings of human society, in some instances even the tottering of thrones, which proclaim in no equivocal manner that it shall not always be so. Wait till the history of what is now in progress shall be written, and you will find the banner of an unshackled religious freedom waving over all the nations; and I am no prophet if it does not then appear that Scotland had a mighty agency in this work, and that some of her noblest efforts were put forth in the person of the illustrious man whose virtues we commemorate.

If Chalmers had any contemporary with whom he might be fittingly compared, it was Robert Hall. But while in some respects they were strikingly alike, in others they were no less strikingly dissimilar. Both possessed transcendant intellectual gifts; both were fine examples of simplicity and humility; both were constituted with a glowing and generous enthusiasm; both were the idols of their country, and the admiration of the world. But admitting that they had the same degree of intellectual capacity, Chalmers had the more glowing imagination, Hall the more exquisite

taste. Chalmers kept you entranced by the endlessly diversified hues which his mind shed upon a single truth; Hall carried you forward from one field of thought to another, with a graceful facility joined to an irresistible energy, which perhaps scarcely any other man ever possessed. Hall's style may be studied as a model to the end of time; whereas Chalmers' style, radiant though it be with beauty and instinct with power, could never serve as a medium for any other thoughts than his own. Hall's life was a perpetual conflict with bodily pain; Chalmers was blessed with a fine constitution, and rarely suffered from disease. As a consequence of this, Hall lived chiefly in his study, and only occasionally looked out upon the world; while Chalmers was always on the arena of public action, and moved visibly in every great and good project that invoked his aid. They were not only mutual friends, but each was an admirer of the other's genius; each rejoiced in the other's light; and it is a delightful thought that they have now met again at the close of life's wearisome pilgrimage, in a communion of glorious thought and hallowed feeling, which shall be commensurate with their own immortality.

If the extinction of this great light hath caused an unusual gloom to pervade even this distant country, what think you, my friends, of the sorrow which has been diffused through the circles of his more immediate influence; over the country which is honoured to call him her son? What say you especially of the tide of grief that must have set in upon that branch of the church which owes not only its rapid growth but even its distinct existence, in a great measure, to his labours and sacrifices? Nor is this the first time that the Free church has had to go into mourning because one of her pillars has been stricken away. The accomplished Welsh, with whom the hopes of her prosperity were in no small degree associated, was cut off, almost whilst she was breathing her earliest thanksgivings to God for his gracious interpositions. And then there was the illustrious Abercrombie,—the Christian philosopher of the age,—distinguished alike for the greatness of his mind, the purity of his heart, the beneficent activity of his life, and that beautiful modesty that constitutes the finest finish of an exalted character,—he too was taken,—and taken so suddenly that his own children supposed he was

yet among them in his accustomed vigor, even after he was in Heaven. Christian brethren, though the ocean separates you from us, and ye hear not these expressions of our condolence, we share in the sorrows of your bereavement; we bespeak for you the presence of the heavenly Comforter. Venerable Scotland, mourning Scotland, we tender you our heartfelt sympathy; we honour your illustrious dead; but because we belong to the world, we claim that your Abercrombie and your Chalmers, like the light of the morning, or any other of Heaven's universal gifts, are ours also.

LETTER OF DR. CHALMERS.

The following letter was addressed by Dr. Chalmers to an American clergyman, who had visited him a few days previous to its date, at his residence on Burnt Island, near Edinburgh. It can hardly fail to be read with deep interest, as well for the sober and discreet reference which it makes to American slavery, as for the spirit of good will and confidence which it breathes towards the American people.

BURNT ISLAND, May 12, 1836.

My Dear Sir:—

I grieve to understand that you should have received any annoyance in a country and among a people who owe you nothing but the utmost courtesy and respect. And I hold it to be particularly offensive that this should have been inflicted upon you by the illiberality or intolerance of any set of men on the ground that you cannot bring your mind into a state of precise adjustment with theirs, in all the details of a difficult and complicated question. It reminds me somewhat of an injustice I myself had to suffer, though in a greatly smaller degree, when, a good many years ago, I ventured, in opposition to the unconditional and immediate abolitionists, to argue, first, for a compen-

sation to the planters, and secondly, for a gradual emancipation, though for the immediate adoption of measures, that, if then entered on, would have completed the liberation of our slaves in a much shorter time, and at a greatly less expense to the public than we have actually been forced to undergo. I beg to present you with a little volume which I printed on that occasion. I feel myself greatly too ignorant of the state and statistics of slavery in America, to judge whether the process I then ventured to recommend for the British West Indies be applicable in any degree, or if so, in what degree, to the Southern States of your Union. There is one sentiment, in which I feel quite sure you must be cordially and decidedly at one with me, and that is, that, whatever the right path may be for arriving at it, the most desirable landing-place is a complete emancipation of slaves and the utter abolition of slavery; so that men of every colour and of all countries shall at length be admitted to equal rights and as much liberty as is consistent with good government and the order of society all the world over.

I cannot adequately express how much both Mrs. Chalmers and I have been interested by your visit to us. I am quite sure that nothing would more conduce to a good understanding between the two countries than more frequent personal intercourse on our part with American citizens; and I speak experimentally, when I say that nothing would serve more effectually to elevate the respect of Britain for the piety and intelligence of very many in your nation than a closer acquaintance with the authorship of your best theologians. I was too well aware of the influence of Jonathan

Edwards over the American mind not to feel assured that there must be a numerous generation of sound and powerful and correct thinkers in America; and I was strongly confirmed in this anticipation by the perusal of your own work on a subject which of all others is the best fitted to test both the christian feeling and the christian philosophy of those who write upon it.

Mrs. Chalmers and my daughter G. both join me in kindest wishes for your prosperous voyage; and with our united best regards to your family,

I ever am, my Dear sir,

Yours most cordially,

THOMAS CHALMERS.

1. Nov. 1851.

13 Nov. 1851.