

MISSIONARY MAGAZINE;

OR

EVANGELICAL INTELLIGENCER.

THE

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OR

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THE LIFE OF DOCTOR JOHN WITHERSPOON.

Doctor Witherspoon was born at Yester, a few miles from Edinburgh, on the fifth of February, 1722. His ancestry was respectable, he being lineally descended from the Rev. John Knox, "The prime instrument in spreading and establishing the reformed religion in Scotland." His father was minister of the parish of Yester, a man of exemplary piety, and eminent as a critical scholar. The education of the son was such as might be expected under the direction of such a father. He early acquired a fondness for literary pursuits, with a love for accurate investigation, and a noble simplicity, which have since characterised him in the various scenes of his life.

When very young he was sent to the public school at Haddington. Here he was distinguished for assiduity in his studies, and for possessing a quickness of perception, and correctness of judgment.

At the age of fourteen he was removed to the University of Edinburgh, where he continued till the age of twenty-one. During this time, while attending the different professors with his companions, some of whom have since appeared in the highest stations in the literary world, his talents and judgment were always noticed, and in the Theological-Hall they were much admired. His correct taste for sacred criticism, added to an uncommon quickness and perspicuity in forming and expressing his ideas, always enforced conviction or incurred pointed opposition.

After leaving the university he was invited to be an assistant minister with his father. But he preferred accepting an invitation from the parish of Beirth. Here he was ordained to the ministry and continued several years. From Beirth he was translated to Paisly. In both these charges he performed his parochial and ministerial duties with a fidelity, which gave general satisfaction. In the last, particularly, his reputation became extensive, and a large party of friends, besides his own people, became warmly attached to him. In the ecclesiastical politics of his country, he was the head of the *orthodox* party. He first gave unity and harmony to their proceedings, and convinced them of the necessity of systematising their operations. Shortly after, he had the satisfaction to witness their respectability, and even success, in the General Assembly. As his popularity extended, a growing, mutual, and affectionate regard was formed between him and his people.

They admired him as a preacher, and loved him as a friend and a father. Soon after this he received invitations severally from Dublin, Rotterdam, and Dundee, to assume the ministerial charge in those places: and also, one from Trustees of the College of Princeton, in New Jersey, to preside over their institution. At first he rejected all those solicitations, thinking it impossible to overcome the feelings of tenderness which mutual fondness had nourished *in his own heart and the hearts of his family and people*. Being, however, strongly urged to come to America by some of his most confidential friends, and flattered by the goodly prospect of extensive usefulness to science and religion, he determined to sacrifice those feelings. He therefore yielded to a second application, and soon after embarked for this country where he arrived in August 1768.

During his presidency at the College he introduced many improvements into the classical course of studies. He adopted a system of education more extensive, scientific, and more particularly *useful* than that previously established. Himself a happy model, as a good writer, and of improved taste on subjects of literature, he taught by his own example. Under his direction the patronage of the College became every year more extensive, and the institution more flourishing, till the event of the revolutionary war.

In 1776 he was chosen to represent the people of New Jersey in the Congress of the United States. He continued a member of that illustrious body for seven years, during which, his name, as President of the College, continued to give celebrity to the character of the institution. As a politician he is well known and his judgment highly commended. The decision, simplicity, and systematic manner, which characterised him in his accustomed walk of life, accompanied him to the councils of the nation. Here his political knowledge and extensive acquaintance with men and things, gave a high value to his opinions. His ready and powerful talents, as a writer, enabled him to correct the biased judgment of opposing party, and to excite the exertions of many, who, through interest or discouragement, had abandoned the common cause. Neither, during this anxious period, did he suffer himself to forget the great object of his profession. He omitted no opportunity of preaching the word of God and of discharging other ministerial offices.

At the close of the national struggle, the Doctor had a wish to retire from Congress and the public duties of the College,

and to spend the few remaining years of his life in domestic retirement. He was afterwards, however, induced to make a voyage to Europe to promote the interest of his favorite institution: but on his return, finding his attention less necessary than formerly, and his years and health not enabling him to support the burden of College duties, he visited it but occasionally.

Doctor Witherspoon had now educated five hundred and twenty three young men, one hundred and fifteen of whom were afterwards ministers of the Gospel. He had the satisfaction to see many of his former pupils filling the first offices of trust under the Government. And on returning one day from the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, then sitting in this City, he remarked to his particular friend "I cannot, my dear sir, express the satisfaction I feel, when I observe that a majority of our General Assembly were once my own pupils."

For more than two years before his death he was afflicted with blindness. But while blind he was often led to the pulpit and always displayed his usual strength of mind, and sometimes an uncommon fervor. This bodily affliction, however, weakened his system and hurried on other complaints. But under his sufferings he seemed never impatient and was even sometimes cheerful. He continued in this state till overcome with accumulated infirmities, he died on the 15th day of November 1794, in the 73rd year of his age.

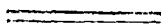
He was buried in the public burying ground in Princeton, where a handsome monument is erected to his memory, with a latin inscription detailing many of the leading events in his life.

THE PLAN AND ADMIRABLE ADDRESS OF THE "BIBLE SOCIETY," TO WHICH A PART OF THE FOLLOWING EXTRACT REFERS, HAVE LATELY COME TO HAND; FROM WHICH WE HAVE EXTRACTED SOME REMARKS THAT WILL FOLLOW IN THEIR PROPER PLACE.

Extract of a Letter from London, dated August 27, 1804.

"The Missionary Seminary at Berlin I understand is a very valuable institution and likely to be productive of much good. Five young men educated there have lately sailed, or are now about sailing, from Bremen for Charlestown, with missionary views towards the Indian nations: they have gone to that port in consequence of a free passage being offered them by the owner of the ship; and their place is to be matured after arriving in the United States. I mention the circumstance from a persuasion that you will have pleasure in communicating advice or information to them, should a proper opportunity offer through any connexion of your society that may reside in Charlestown.

A society has been lately formed in this metropolis, of Christians of various denominations, for the express purpose of promoting the circulation of the Scriptures at home and abroad: it is countenanced and supported by many characters of eminence and influence, and sanguine expectations are formed of its being rendered extensively serviceable to the cause of religion. An offer of assistance has been made from the friends of the society for the establishment of a similar society in Germany, which has been cordially accepted, and it is ardently hoped that the flame will spread in many directions. The plan and address published previously, and on the occasion, have been just put into my hands, and I send them to you with pleasure:—it may be the means of giving rise to an institution somewhat similar in your quarter, through the different situations of the labouring class of the community in Europe and America renders it likely to be more extensively beneficial here."



Extract of a Letter from a member of the Synod of Pittsburg, to a minister of the gospel, in Philadelphia: dated August 8th, 1804.

"You may recollect that in the last General Assembly I gave you some account of an Indian named Barnet, who brought

in his little son and left him to the care of our Presbytery to be instructed and prepared for usefulness to his Nation.

This Barnet having spent a few days with us, and had an opportunity to attend with us several times, both in public and private worship, and had considerable conversation with the ministers and other christians, being about to go away, was asked if he did not feel troubled to leave his little boy at such a distance amongst strangers. He replied not half so much as he was troubled about his poor tribe of people who were destitute of the light of the Gospel and the precious privilege we enjoyed in this country.—This he has evidenced since his return home, by his exertion amongst them, as you will see from the following extracts I give you of a letter I received from him, written for him, I think, by a George Fulks, who lives on Beaver in my brothers Congregation. He has been for a considerable time a trader amongst the Indians at Sandukie, and understands their language. Barnet states in the letter that when the Indians were collected at the Lower Town, he addressed them as follows, “God has sent me here this day to speak from the bottom of my heart. Nobody knows but God, what I felt last tuesday night. I prayed to God to instruct me what I should do, as I could not rest in my heart till I spoke to my friends of the Upper Town; and I told all the people in the Lower Town that God urged me to go and speak to the people of the Upper Town. Then some of the Chiefs rose and said that it was right, and that they would go round and see what wampum could be raised to strengthen his speech and the good work of the Great Spirit.” They, or the greater part of them, gave wampum to support the cause. Then Barnet and the little Cornstalk rose and went up and made known their errand, for which a number of the people at the Upper Town, came forward and gave wampum to support the cause. My dear friends and Ministers of God, I hope you will remember me to my dear little son whom I have left with you. I hope God will protect you and him. Dear brothers the ministers of God, you must pray for me and my people. My heart is full and my eyes are steady shedding tears, that I cannot say in my letter come. But I should still pray to God to send you as soon as he thinks best, yet I shall look for you in thirty days; and if not then, I hope God has set a day when you and I may meet and shake hands together. As it seems to me, that if God will only remember us, and the ministers of God, who take care of the good work, will pray for us, that I

never will, never will forget them. I know I am a sinner and have a wicked heart, yet I hope God will save my soul."

June, 18th. 1804.

Here BARNET signed his name by a mark.

N. B. On Sabbath last I was called by the Chiefs to come and hear them, accordingly I did, when they all that were at that town, were collected together for society at the house of the Chiefs Long-house, one of the young men rose and spoke, and I think continued his discourse one hour and an half, and then told them to kneel down and pray to God to save their souls.

Signed by GEORGE FULK.

He also mentioned that the quantity of wampum collected was three feet long and as thick as a mans arm. I expect that one of our ministers, Mr. Scott, is this week going to Sanduskie, and we are encouraged to expect some more young Indians will come in with him. At the meeting of our Synod I expect that something further will be done for this needy people, who appear to be by God excited to so much anxiety and concern about their best interest.

*Extract of a Letter from New-Hartford (State of New-York)
dated October 20th, 1804.*

"I attended Synod which met at Troy the week before last. There was a very full meeting. From the conversation on the state of religion in the bounds of the Synod, the aspect of it is still more encouraging than last year. A revival of religion has taken place in the Congregation at Sherburne, under the care of Mr. Joshua Knight, a minister of our Presbytery, whom we ordained and installed in March last; he has had forty eight communicants added to his church. Three children of the same parents, but in different families, were brought under conviction at the same time. The attention to religion appeared first among the young."