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## Reasons for Particular Consideration Upon the Death of Great Men: a Discourse Delivered in Bath, June 20, 1852, on Occasion of the Death of General William King

John Orr Fiske

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REASONS  
FOR  
PARTICULAR CONSIDERATION  
UPON THE  
DEATH OF GREAT MEN:  
A  
DISCOURSE  
DELIVERED IN BATH, JUNE 20, 1852,  
ON OCCASION OF THE DEATH OF  
GENERAL WILLIAM KING.

BY JOHN O. FISKE,  
PASTOR OF THE WINTER STREET CHURCH.

(N)

BATH:  
PRINTED BY HAINES & FREEMAN.  
1852.

BATH, JUNE 30, 1852.

REV. MR. FISKE:

DEAR SIR,—Your funeral discourse, on the Sabbath morning after the decease of the late Hon. WILLIAM KING, was so acceptable to the relatives and friends, that they concur in the expression of the desire to have a copy for the press.

A compliance with this wish is particularly requested.

Please, Dear Sir, to accept the assurance of the high respect and esteem of

Your obedient servant,

C. R. PORTER.

## S E R M O N .

II Samuel, iii. 38.—“ Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel.”

God speaks to us in his providence as well as his word. “ The Lord’s voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name : hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it.” Lessons of important, saving instruction are continually taught us in the daily operations of Him “ who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working ;” and to refuse to attend to these solemn and salutary teachings of his providential government is a disregard of the Divine authority and of Infinite Wisdom as real, if not as flagrant, as even to slight the volume of revealed truth. The consequences of such inattention to Divine instruction cannot fail to be greatly injurious, and the preacher of the gospel would be seriously unfaithful to the high responsibil-

ities of his sacred office, who did not notice the remarkable events of Providence which occur, and endeavor to present to his hearers the important truths which they teach.

David did this when he put the declarative question of the text to the people assembled at the grave of Abner the son of Ner. The commander-in-chief of the host of Israel, one who had long been prominent and most serviceable in the nation had that day been laid in his grave. David calls attention to the magnitude and importance of the event as one worthy of the most serious regard. "Know ye not," he inquires, "that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?" It was something which ought not to be hastily and thoughtlessly dismissed from the mind.

A similar event has also just occurred among ourselves. A man who in his natural endowments was gigantic—pre-eminently great—towering above his fellows in the massive powers of his mind, as also in the full, noble proportions of his body, the first Governor of this Commonwealth, the chief

agent in our being erected into a separate and independent State—who has held many high and responsible offices, whose sagacious views were broad, comprehensive, reaching to remote periods of time and all the various and extended interests of the people, the advantage of whose leading, controlling influence in legislative enactments is felt at this hour throughout the States of Massachusetts and Maine, and will be felt, especially in Maine, as long as we continue to be a people; a man whose superiority every body recognized, every body felt, who approached him in every part of the country wherever he went,—who has long been the pride of this city and the pride of Maine as her most distinguished son, has fallen, and is no more. That strong heart has ceased to beat, that majestic form has been laid low in the grave. His sun has set; his course on earth has ended; he has gone the way whence he shall no more return. By the wise order of our civil authorities, the roar of cannon and the tolling of all our bells have already proclaimed



the fact far and wide; the shipping has been hung with insignia of sorrow; his fellow citizens, assembled at his funeral in large numbers of all orders and ranks, have combined in testifying their sympathy and respect; the chief magistrate of the State with his constitutional advisers, and others who themselves in former years have occupied the same exalted chair, have gathered from different towns and cities to pay due honor to the memory of the dead; the representatives of a large and most respectable social organization were present to mourn the loss of a valued brother; officers of literary institutions whose prosperity he had at heart, and did much to promote, came to bow at his bier; while, with melting music and all the imposing ceremonies of martial array, the military have conducted, in slow, funereal procession, the remains of a former high and efficient officer to their long repose in the grave. Such a public and impressive funeral occasion has never in this city before occurred; never before have we lost so prominent a man.

Nor was all this a vain, empty, unprofitable display.

David acted wisely in particularly calling the attention of his people to the fact that a prince and a great man had fallen in Israel. There are substantial reasons why the death of men remarkable for their uncommon endowments, their distinguished achievements, or their high posts of honor and trust in society, should be observed with proper solemnities, and considered with grave and prayerful meditation. To some of these let me call your attention. And, first, one reason for particular consideration upon the death of great men is

1. That there is a proper respect which ought to be paid to greatness as such. God is great, glorious, infinite, and deserves our regard and veneration for what he himself is: so are all the great, precious, wonderful works of his hands worthy of our high estimation and respect for what they are. And not only this: the characters of great men, when properly contemplated, kindle in others a generous emulation to rival their



renown ; they expand and elevate the mind that strives to comprehend them ; to celebrate whatever of public good they have done, awakens others to similar public-spirited, self-sacrificing acts ; their moral character, as far as high and pure, is most inspiring and beneficial to the young ; while nothing is more important, in our free and self-controlling republic, where the firm pillars of government rest upon the sentiments and principles in the bosoms of the people, than to cultivate, preserve and *display* a proper respect for official station and elevated rank, that our children may learn forever to revere the constituted authorities of the land. We should "render to Cæsar the things which be Cæsar's," as well as "to God the things which be God's." We ought, then, to admire and commemorate the noble powers with which God may have endowed any of our race ; we shall thereby attain more just and influential conceptions of the faculties and possible destinies of the immortal soul ; what it is to be "but a little lower than the angels ;"

how glorious it is to be saved, and admitted to that world where even those who are now the humblest of Christ's disciples will exceed in their capacities and attainments what the angels are to-day; and, consequently, how fearful and tremendous an evil it is for such a soul to be lost. God's "work is honorable and glorious, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein." It is proper, then, to honor those whom God has made instruments of extensive good; it is proper to honor the memory of those who, having held high authority, have been Heaven's vicegerents on earth, and thus to encourage and inculcate respect for powers divinely ordained, so that we may hand down to children's children the knowledge of their fathers' virtues and achievements, and perpetuate to the latest generation whatever of the fear of God or love of man has existed in any former day.

Again, the death of great men is worthy of particular notice and consideration, secondly, because

2. It is eminently adapted to teach us

our own frailty. Notwithstanding all the admonitions of revelation and Providence, we are prone to pride, to self-reliance, to put far away the evil day, to forget that "latter end" towards which, under the universal, irreversible decree, "unto dust shalt thou return," we are all hastening so fast. But when the great in personal abilities, the great in rank and power, those in whom all that there may be of human permanence and strength seem to have been concentrated, by the mighty impulses of whose minds the great masses of society were moved or controlled; when they "are taken out of the way as all other—cut off as the tops of the ears of the corn"—then are we forcibly reminded of the divine declaration, "Verily, every man at his best state is altogether vanity;" that "his days are as the grass: he cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not." Look at the great man lately among us—with his herculean frame, his deep, rich, commanding voice, the piercing, burning fire of his eye, his impulsive

energy of will that broke through all obstacles, regardless of resistance ; look at him after all his honors, all his business, all his public and private acts, at length feeble, tottering, his perceptive mind beclouded and shattered,—the strong men bowing themselves, those that look out at the windows darkened,—continually dependent on others' ministering care, and controlled by childhood's strength ; and see him now laid low in the still, unconscious slumbers of the grave, and say if there is not an impressive voice to the busy and the strong, to those exerting the greatest influence and forming the most extensive plans, to all in every walk of life, bidding them remember that they are frail, are soon to die, and to be known by their places on earth no more forever. The very greatness of the man most clearly evinces the irresistible superiority of death ; shows that by no possibility can even the strongest wheels of life roll on beyond a certain limit ; that "the silver cord" must "be loosed," "the golden bowl" must "be broken," and

every individual of man's feeble, dying race sooner or later lie down in the dust.

Again, thirdly :

3. Such events are peculiarly adapted to teach us our dependence on God. It were not enough to learn how frail and feeble we are. That might make us wretched, without affording us any profit. It were not enough to understand how precarious is our condition, unless at the same time we could be directed to some stable object of trust. But when everything around us which we had regarded as strong and secure crumbles and disappears, when we see that not the tallest and most mighty of our race can stand before the terrible advance of death, then the very necessities of our nature seem to compel us to look away from earth to the Almighty—the only unchangeable and eternal ground of repose. Then we feel that "God alone is great;" that, with all the pomp and circumstance and power of the highest authority or the most princely endowments, man is vain and unsubstantial as an object of permanent



trust, and that we must confide supremely in Him alone who presides in changeless majesty, glory and power, over all beings and worlds forever. Who that beheld that eminent man who once exerted such a masterly influence over all among whom he moved, whose frame was so large and well compacted, and all the lines of whose countenance bespoke the impetuous, expanded soul within,—who that saw him in the dilapidation of his closing days, reduced to the debility of a child, but must have deeply felt the force of the Divine declaration, “Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord.” Such spectacles prepare us rightly to appreciate the truth that we are wholly dependent on divine mercy and power. To God the dying potentates of earth eloquently point us, as they helplessly extend their feeble hands for aid.

A great man indeed has fallen among ourselves. The Hon. WILLIAM KING, whose death we mourn to-day, was born in Scar-

borough, in this State, in 1768. He resided for a few years in Topsham, but about the year 1800 removed to this place, which continued to be his residence until his death. From my own opportunities of observation, from the concurrent testimony of many distinguished public men of our own and other States, from the plans which we know he proposed, and the measures which he carried into effect, I have no hesitation in expressing the opinion that, although we have had, and have, many justly celebrated men born among us, whose reputation will be our enduring honor, yet in natural manly and intellectual endowments, Maine has never given birth to the equal of Governor King; and had his opportunities of education been favorable, which, owing to the early death of his father, were extremely limited, he would doubtless have stood among the very foremost and most influential of all in the nation.

In the army, in the town, in the state and under the general national government, he held various high offices for a

considerable portion of his life. He was a member of the Massachusetts Senate and House of Representatives for some years, and was recognized as great and conspicuous among all the public men of our mother state. No other man exerted so strong an influence in effecting the separation of the states, and with almost entire unanimity he was elected president of the convention which formed our constitution.\* With the same harmony and cheerful voice of the people, he was chosen the first gover-

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\* His remarks at the close of the convention are a very happy example of dignity, comprehensiveness, terseness and taste. On motion of Judge Thatcher, between whom and General King it was well known there had been some unpleasant political differences, the unanimous thanks of the convention were tendered to him for the dignified and impartial manner in which he had performed the duties of president. Upon which Gov. King spoke as follows :

*“Gentlemen of the Convention :*

For the sentiments which you have approbated I feel particularly grateful. They come, I perceive, from an old and respected friend, from whom political considerations have perhaps too long separated me. My friend on this occasion does not remember them: they are therefore erased from my recollection forever.

The constitution, gentlemen, which you have presented with so much unanimity to our fellow citizens, an unexam-

nor of Maine; an office, however, which he resigned before the expiration of his term, to accept an appointment under the government of the United States. The wheels of administration in this commonwealth were set in motion under his direction with a firmness and wisdom which fully vindicated the high opinion entertained of him, as unquestionably the most prominent citizen of Maine.

In political life his schemes were large and comprehensive; not formed merely for

pled majority have adopted. Your business has therefore now terminated. To the public it has been most useful: to yourselves most honorable, being now enrolled as the *fathers* of the constitution.

Permit me, gentlemen, to hope that the constitution with which God has been pleased through you to bless us, may long preserve the liberties and promote the happiness of all our fellow citizens; and that for your services you may not only receive the respect of the virtuous of your own times, but the regard of posterity."

These remarks, uttered by Gen. King's deep, sonorous voice, and with all his dignity of manner, must have produced a very happy impression.

He was elected president of the convention, having received 230 out of 241 votes; and soon after was chosen governor, receiving 21,083 out of 22,904 votes.



the necessities of the day, but extending far down into times when those would govern the state who were not then born. When in the Massachusetts legislature, he took a leading part in causing to be passed certain amendments to "the Religious Freedom Act," more completely exempting the people from the constraint of paying for the support of one common religious establishment, and affording to each one more unfettered liberty in providing for the maintenance of whatever minister of the gospel he himself preferred; a measure of religious toleration which does the utmost honor to the mind capable of embracing and establishing it at that early day, and one to which Gen. King was often accustomed to refer with manifest gratification; excepting that he afterwards expressed the doubt whether it was wise and safe to grant the same religious toleration to Roman Catholics as to all other sects. Of the value of his opinion in this respect, time will enable us to judge.

Another law, called "the Betterment Act," of which he was the proposer and



leading promoter, was of inestimable value to the citizens of Maine in the adjudication of conflicting land-claims, and in securing to the original settler the value of the improvements he had made ; thus providing for the rights and interests of the poor, though, as he himself assured your speaker, greatly to his own pecuniary loss. And had the suggestion which he so sagaciously made and with all his influence earnestly enforced, been heeded and adopted,—had Maine, in accordance with his counsel, purchased the lands then held by Massachusetts within our borders, as could have been done at a very small comparative expense, it would have added millions of dollars to our resources, and tended powerfully to promote our growth. I have the testimony of one who himself has held the office of governor with signal ability for a succession of years, that Governor King was the best chief magistrate we have ever had ; and in all his other public trusts he was found efficient, far-seeing and faithful.

He was not of those whom the people curse for withholding the corn ; but, in a

time of unexampled scarcity, imported a large quantity of grain, and generously sold, without discrimination, to all who came, a certain amount for bread; accepting for his assurance of payment, in default of money, their notes to the amount of thousands of dollars; which, as a reasonable man, he never could have expected to be paid, and which, as a matter of fact, are unpaid to this day.

He was an eminent and successful merchant,—among the first of that circle in the state,—and his advice and opinion were sought with eagerness and confidence even from distant places, in all that related to commercial and mercantile affairs. As a man of strict integrity, as a steady consistent friend, as an advocate of good morals, as a firm, intelligent, active promoter of temperance through his life, as a wise and liberal patron of colleges and of the cause of education at large, as a respectful supporter of the institutions of religion, the community will long mourn his loss; while in the hallowed family circle, where, even to the latest pulsations of life, with all

his great powers and mighty impulses, he was gentle as a child, faithful, kind, yielding, forbearing, regardful even of the most faintly whispered wishes and opinions of those whom he so strongly loved,—in that sacred family circle there will be for him the most tender remembrances of respect and affection, as long as a heart shall throb. But his long and honored life has closed; he will no more return to the scenes in the midst of which it gave us an honest pride to see him move; we have paid to his memory the best tribute of our respect, and it only remains that we properly treasure in our hearts the salutary lessons we have been taught.

I cannot, then, more appropriately conclude this discourse, than by taking advantage of this providential admonition to urge upon all the value of the religion of Jesus Christ,

1. As a preparation for death. We have seen the end of all earthly grandeur and glory. However much of riches any one may acquire on earth, “when he dieth he shall carry nothing away; his glory shall

not descend after him." However much of honor and distinction he may here enjoy, it must all be laid aside ; his robes of office must be taken off, and he must stand on a level with the humblest before the bar of God. However energetic, brilliant and admirable may be his powers of mind, they may, even in the present life, desert him, and will certainly at last augment the weight of responsibility which will be found resting upon him before the great white throne. We are all passing away. The authorities of this city, who have so properly united in rendering all suitable honors to the memory of one who was so long so greatly distinguished among us; the chief magistrate of the state, and all the public officers and associations of men who were collected at the burial of one of the nobles of the land ; you men of business and influence,—our present merchant princes,—who well occupy the places of those whom you have attended to the grave,—all must in their turn go to the same narrow home, and to that tribunal whose decisions no tides of popular favor or clamor can bias,



but where sentence is pronounced by that "God of knowledge" by whom "actions are weighed." Would, then, that the impression might sink deeply into the hearts of all, that they, too, soon must die, that they are fast hastening to the hour when the most valuable business they have ever done will be found to be the business they have done for God,—the faith they have exercised in his Son. In the midst of this changing, transitory world, religion points us to a Saviour "who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,"—who hath provided the means of our laying up a treasure that can never waste. Through him you can extend the rewards of your exertions to a future, an eternal existence; and though the clods of the valley will soon cover you, yet at the voice of the Son of Man you may wake from your pillows of dust, and come forth from your narrow abode "to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away." You may die surrounded by friends, ministered to with the most assiduous, affectionate



care ; your departure from life may be solemnized by the greatest and most appropriate funeral honors, but if unprepared, your flesh upon you shall have pain, and your souls within you shall mourn,—nothing short of the renewing grace of God will then prove of the least avail.

On the day preceding his death, at a time when there had just been manifested an unusual lucidness of mind and tenderness of heart,—while his wife and other Christian friends, by his bed's side, were uniting with his pastor in prayer to Almighty God,—our departed friend suddenly raised, clapped repeatedly, and clasped convulsively his aged hands, as if some new and strange thrill of joy was pouring its full tide through his heart. Who can tell but that at that hour those prayers which had been offered for his salvation so fervently and so long, at home, by near relatives at a distance, and here lately in the sanctuary of God, were heard and answered ; that the compassionate and gracious God recognized and rewarded that faith which had firmly trusted that this very work of renewal would at some time or other be wrought ; and that thus that noble, gigantic nature, regenerated and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, was prepared

to stand in glory before the throne,—a trophy of redeeming, incomprehensible love,—to spend his great powers among the angels in God's service forever? “Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty.” And if so,—if actually redeemed through the blood of Christ,—what a loud and ecstatic song will his freed spirit lift in the high arches of heaven, to the praise of matchless, sovereign grace, which thus, even at that late period,—the eleventh hour,—rescued him from the ruin of sin, raised him to expand in more glorious, grander proportions, and made him pure and holy before the throne! We know it could be done,—“all things are possible with God,”—and that God is the “hearer of prayer.”

But even if such were the happy case with him, how large a portion of his life was lost to the service of his Master, and how perilous must it be to defer to the uncertainties of the eventful, fleeting hour of death a blessing which God is willing to bestow to-day. Respected and honored business men of Bath, let me assure you, all your complicated and most successful enterprises in which God is so richly rewarding your labors, your far-reaching plans, your indomitable perseverance, your iron industry in worldly occupations, are

all but puerile and delusive employments, if, for their sake, you lose your souls. I would conjure you, as in prospect of that heavenly glory which you may attain, of unutterable regrets and despair into which you may sink; of the fearful, paralyzing touch of death which you may soon feel; in regard of the favor and smiles of God which even here on earth you may richly enjoy; as beholding the decaying mortal remains of this great man, whose days no worldly honors, no medical skill, no constant attentions of love could prolong, and whom you have just laid in the grave; I would conjure you to make the everlasting realities of religion your highest, your immediate concern.

Again, secondly, let the value of the religion of Jesus Christ be urged,

2. On account of its consolations in life. No situation or sphere on earth, however exalted, however greatly it may have been blessed, presents at last any exception to the general statement, "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble." The families of the great as well as the humble must drink the cup of sorrow. This is a world of disappointment and trial, and we need something better than earth can afford for our comfort. Our

strongest earthly supports, our most cherished earthly treasures, are sooner or later removed, and we are often driven to a sense of helplessness and desertion too bitter for language to express. We have witnessed the imposing ceremonies very judiciously and doubtless very sincerely observed by our civil rulers and the public, at the burial of one whom they have cheerfully honored. They have all mourned; they have all felt their loss; and their public demonstrations were adapted to affect all hearts. But there is a feeling far keener, far more consuming to the spirits than this which is expressed by the mournful tolling of bells, the booming of cannon, the long procession, the gathering of our great men, the shops and public buildings all darkened with the sad habiliments of woe. This may be more easily assuaged; but there is another, a deeper sorrow, that requires divine consolation and relief. As I have seen, at other times, the long files of soldiers marching, with serious face, with slow and measured tread, with the most plaintive and touching strains of music, mourning as they went to lay in the dust some brave and valued comrade-in-arms, who would no more wake to the stirring call of the trumpet, or march with cheer-



fulness and pride in their well-ordered ranks, my heart has been tenderly affected with sympathy. I have looked upon it as a most melancholy occasion, and have largely participated in their sorrows. But when their lengthened column, and that of other bodies and associations uniting with them in these last offices of respect, had all passed, and unexpectedly the wife, the parents, the children and other near family friends of the deceased appeared, here have I recognized a far more piercing, agonizing, withering affliction; and my own soul, which seemed deeply stirred before, has been struck with a thrice-sharper pang: then only were all its deep fountains broken up. The military and other associates who came first, though they would still respectfully cherish the memory of the departed, would return from the grave to mingle at once in exciting business or pleasures, dismissing the burden of their sadness with the consciousness of having properly attended to these funeral rites; but the wife and the family, who came last, were mourning their own bereaved and lonely house, and would return to the enduring consciousness of broken, aching hearts. We see these public, military funeral pageants, which so much affect us, but seldom; but



the world abounds with frequent instances of this other, deeper grief,—grief occasioned by the sundering of the strongest natural ties,—grief that often enters, as to-day, the circle of the most favored and the great. Yet for all the various and intensest kinds of sorrows, the gospel and the gospel alone presents in its promises and hopes a real, complete solace and cure. In this most precious volume of inspired, everlasting truth are words adapted to every case. “Fear thou not,” is the gracious assurance to the desponding, fainting, forsaken spirit, “for I am with thee; be not dismayed” at the terrors which frown over thy future path, “for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.” Let not the bereaved, stricken widow, mourning the loss of the husband of her youth, the guide of her life, despond, “for thy Maker is thy husband; the Lord of Hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel.” “A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows is God in his holy habitation.”

“ Oh, when the heart is full—when bitter thoughts  
 Come crowding thickly up for utterance,  
 And the poor common words of courtesy  
 Are such a very mockery—how much  
 The bursting heart may pour itself in prayer!”

To this full and inexhaustible fountain of consolation, in drawing near to God in prayer, the gospel invites; to it multitudes of believers, who have themselves experienced its blessed virtues, gladly, triumphantly point the afflicted. We tell them of the joy of a perfect faith. We assure the sorrowful disciple of the Saviour, in words that cannot deceive, "There is none like unto the God of Jesurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky. The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."

May such be the supports of those who need them to-day. This inestimable gospel is an unfailing refuge in all worldly disasters. Thus was it heralded to the reception of our feeble, dependent race: "Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness; and princes shall rule in judgment. And a man shall be as a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

A prince and a great man is fallen this day in our Israel. As a towering, majestic oak, which had long lifted its wide-spread branches to the skies and the storms,—which had not in all our forests its equal

in lofty pride,—he has fallen. No more will he walk his spacious halls; no more extend to numerous friends the cordial hand of his generous hospitality; no more shall we behold that manly form in our streets; no more may we gaze on that striking face and brow, that, even to the close of life, declared him a great, an uncommon, a commanding man. He has gone to give account to Him “that standeth in the congregation of the mighty; that judgeth among the gods.” Thus forcibly reminded, then, of our own frailty and dependence,—of our own liability to afflictions and calamities, and of the speedy approach of the hour

“When all that mortal life has done  
God’s judgment shall survey,”

Let us all earnestly seek, through Christ and the aids of the Holy Spirit, that we, however obscure our present condition, may at last become “kings and priests unto God and our Father,” and stand in greatness, in purity, and everlasting glory before the throne.