

THE
S L A V E S T A T E S
OF
A M E R I C A.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

FISHER, SON, & CO.
NEWGATE ST. LONDON; RUE ST. HONORÉ, PARIS.

CHAP. IV.

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On the morning of the first Sunday after our arrival at Athens, we attended the public funeral of the venerable Judge Clayton, one of the most distinguished members of the community here. The service was solemn and impressive. The judge, though a man of great integrity, and unexceptionable morality, was throughout life an avowed unbeliever in Christianity. He was one of the first graduates of the University of Athens, and its most zealous friend and patron: he was learned, intelligent, virtuous, and universally honoured and esteemed, both for his public and private character; yet he made no scruple to avow himself openly a

deist ; and this, too, it would seem, without in any degree lessening his standing in society. About twelve months since, he was struck with paralysis—being then fifty-five years of age ; and feeling that death could not but be near at hand, his mind and heart became subdued. He expressed a desire to see the minister of the Methodist church ; and the result of the interview was, that the judge, as soon as he had sufficiently recovered from the first shock of his paralysis, publicly joined this church, by going up to the altar, in the face of the whole congregation, on a Sabbath morning, when the church was full, and there giving in his public adhesion as a communicant and member. From this time onward, he continued in close fellowship with the Methodist body ; and died in the fullest and most unreserved communication of his steadfastness in the faith, accompanied with deep regrets that he had lived a life of unbelief, by which he had lost “oceans of happiness”—this was his expression—to himself, and set a dangerous example to others.

These circumstances gave unusual interest to his funeral, as it was to be made the occasion of a public address over the body of the deceased, by his own pastor, who had attended him in his last moments. The time chosen for the service was the forenoon of the Sabbath ; and each of the three churches of Athens suspended their regular morning worship, for the purpose of uniting their respective congregations in one. The place of assembling was the chapel of the University, the largest of the public buildings here ; and at nine o'clock, the hour appointed, it was filled in every part, the lower floor being occupied by the

white population, the females in the centre, and the males at the sides, and the galleries being filled by negroes, one side by the men, and the other by the women; this separation of the sexes being usual among the Methodists, in all their assemblies for public worship. On the platform were seated the whole of the clergymen of the town, including Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodist. Immediately before them, and elevated so as to be seen by the whole audience, was placed the coffin containing the corpse. This was borne into the chapel by six gentlemen, personal friends of the deceased, who carried it on two longitudinal poles; they wore white scarfs or sashes, thrown over the right shoulder, and fastened in a knot on the left side, with crape ribbons hanging or floating from the right arm. The coffin was made of oak, and quite plain, there being neither handles, escutcheon, gilt or silver nails, covering or pall of any description, but everything was characterized by the extremest simplicity.

The Methodist pastor, Mr. Smith, of Charleston, conducted the funeral service, which differed in nothing from the ordinary routine of public worship, in the succession of prayer, singing, and preaching, except in the sermon being one especially adapted to the occasion. It was marked by great solemnity, powerful argument, and forcible appeal, and sufficiently imbued with sorrowful feeling, to make it at once devotional and affectionate. The bereaved family of the deceased occupied the pew immediately in front of the corpse, while the numerous personal friends of the late judge, surrounded these mourning survivors; and the united effect of the scene, and the

address of the speaker, was such as to fill the assembly with tears. Excepting the Quaker funeral which we witnessed at Saratoga in the summer of the last year, I never remember to have seen or heard anything more impressive, or better adapted to awaken the most indifferent to the duty of preparing for death, than the scene before us on this occasion.

Mr. Smith was followed in his address by Mr. Hoyt, the Presbyterian clergyman, who had also had opportunities of personal communication with the deceased, between the period of his first paralysis and his death, and who, therefore, thought it his duty to corroborate much that had been said by the previous speaker, as to the openly avowed scepticism and infidelity of the late judge up to that period, and his sincere conversion to a belief in the truth of Christianity, in which faith he died. In the course of his address, however, he stated, that though he had been a minister of the gospel for upwards of twenty years in this country, this was the only well-authenticated instance that he had met with, during all that time, of a man who, like the judge, had been thirty years an unbeliever, and had afterwards avowed his conversion to the truth. He had generally found that men died as they lived, and that real conversion from long-established and openly-avowed infidelity was very rare. He, moreover, asserted his conscientious conviction, that the great majority of the men whom he saw before him, were in the same condition of unbelief, as that in which the deceased had passed nearly the whole of his life; and though many of them, perhaps, attended religious ordinances for the sake of standing well with their neighbours, yet he

feared very few of them had any active belief in the truth of Christianity, but were infidels and sceptics, living without God and without hope in the world : all which seemed to be silently received as matter of course, and, as far as I could judge, excited neither surprise, nor any symptom of dissent, from any portion of the congregation.

At the close, the corpse was borne to the grave by the same personal friends of the deceased who brought it to the chapel, and was followed there by his sorrowing family, and a large concourse of his fellow-citizens, the greater number in carriages, and many also on foot.

In the evening of the same day, we attended the anniversary of the Athens Bible Society, at which I had been specially invited, and strongly pressed to deliver an address, especially as to the state of those pagan countries of the East, with which my travels had made me acquainted, and the influence of their idolatrous worship on the morals and happiness of the people ; a duty I readily consented to discharge. At this meeting, some statements were made by the agent of the American Bible Society, to which this association of Athens was an auxiliary, that were as startling as those made by the Presbyterian clergyman in the morning, as to the number of sceptics and infidels joining in the ordinances of religion. The agent, Mr. Goulding, a native of Georgia, mentioned, that there had been no meeting of the Bible Society in this section of the State for the two years preceding this ; and that the whole sum raised in the entire State for the purpose of assisting the American Bible Society in their operations, the chief aim of