MEMOIR OF SKINNER

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A SKETCH

OF THE

LIFE AND CHARACTER

OF THE LATE

JOSEPH B. SKINNER.

BY HIS BROTHER,

THOMAS H. SKINNER.

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A few only of the early acquaintances of the subject of this memoir survive him. They know what he was in the vigor, force, and diversified spheres of his activity. Those whose personal knowledge of him was limited to the years of suffering and infirmity which formed so large a part of his life, can have but a faint impression of his individuality as a whole.

MEMOIR.

"I HAVE often thought," says Dr. Johnson, "that there has rarely passed a life, of which a judicious and faithful narrative would not be useful." This would doubtless be a true judgment, if it were restricted to good lives, and society suffers loss for the want of such records. There is improvidence as well as ingratitude and injustice, in the general fact, that very soon after the eye has ceased to look upon their persons, "there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool," of the good and the useful more than the worthless. Those of the forgotten dead who faithfully finished their course, are useful still by the results of their activity, and might be also by the continued influence of their good examples, if suitable narratives of their lives had been preserved.

I write a short memoir of a very singular man; a man unusually interesting and dear to his acquaintance; and whose singularity, in every thing striking, was pre-eminently so in his modes of showing kindness and doing good. Nor was he undistinguished as to his position and sphere. Without seeking promotion, which, for its own sake, his nature never inclined him to seek, he rose to it spontaneously by an internal upward force; and his influence was widely felt, not only in offices of friendship and affection, but in legislation, in jurisprudence, in agriculture, and in enterprises of business and beneficence. The memory of such a man deserves some other monument than the mere record of his name, birth, and death on the stone, beneath which his cold and silent dust reposes.* I attempt what I wish some other person had properly performed; for I am to speak of a brother greatly beloved and

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* I do not intend to intimate that more than these in this place were to be desired. Tombstones do not keep, are not expected to keep, the Ninth Commandment. "If a man has left monuments of himself, in valuable works of any kind, an inscribed and figured piece of stone seems an idle superfluity. If he has *not* left such memorials, the monument will be of no use to his name in future times. Nothing is more notorious than the utter unworthiness of

revered, and may find it difficult to be impartial. I do what ought to be done by some one, because I fear it would otherwise remain undone. I shall aim at an exact representation of him, assured that this, whatever faults it may include, will be more than sufficient to gratify my fondest partiality. Of the matters of fact which I record I have certainty; my inferences and judgments are according to convictions which I cannot resist.

JOSEPH BLOUNT was the eldest child of JOSHUA and MARTHA ANN SKINNER, of Harvey's Neck.* His middle name, BLOUNT, was the maiden surname of his mother, a descendant of an English family of high reputation.† At his birth, his father, who was always inclined to piety, and who was a man of quick and ardent feelings, devoted him to God in a

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faith, which, as a *general* fact, is chargeable on monumental tributes. It is *so* notorious, that any particular monument which may bear a *true* testimony, will fall hereafter under the same incredulity, unless it is verified by other known and convincing memorials."—JOHN FOSTER.

* Appendix A.

† Tradition places her in the lineage of Sir Harry Blount, of Queen Elizabeth's times.

transport of natural joy, which vented itself in tears and thanksgivings. He was baptized in infancy by a minister of the Church of England.

His youth, though never intractable or wayward, was marked like his maturer life, by uncommon force and independence. It required and it was subjected to strong government: energy of will was a characteristic of his father: strenuous discipline taught him obedience and self-control. He had the advantage of early culture. His father, though not a liberally-educated man, had a strong sense of the value of education, and his delight in his most promising son suggested the highest ideal of an education for him, that he was capable of conceiving. He was sent to the best schools. His improvement was very rapid. In his thirteenth year, he was admitted into Nassau Hall, Princeton, then under the presidency of Dr. Stanhope Smith.* The president thought him too young, but this objection was overruled by the maturity and fulness of his preparation.

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* *Clarum et venerabile nomen.* Among the most eminent presidents of Nassau Hall—Davies, Edwards, Burr, Witherspoon—Samuel Stanhope Smith, the son-in-law of the last, has no inferior place. In learning and religion—a burning and shining light—an honor to his country and his age.

He did not complete the college course—a great disadvantage, which he always deeply regretted. It was truly to be deplored, that a mind so bright and energetic as his, should have been imperfectly regulated and disciplined in its early youth. The cause was pecuniary extravagance, or what was so in his father's judgment. It is not known that he incurred censure from the faculty, or was in any respect obnoxious to censure from them. He left college in high repute with them and with his fellow-students.* He was recalled by his father, on account of debts which he had contracted, and perhaps from apprehension, possibly misapprehension, as to the habits which, as cause or consequence, might be connected with such imprudence. His father was not a little displeased with him, and showed his displeasure in a most effective manner, by obliging him to exchange the activities of the

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* He made acquaintances in college, who became much distinguished. Among these were the Hon. William Gaston and the Hon. Frederick Nash, with whom he always lived in strict friendship. "I met him for the first time," says Judge Nash, "at Princeton, New Jersey, in 1796, a bright, blooming, and animated boy. I thought him one of the handsomest youths I had ever seen."—See the Judge's letter in the Appendix.

mind for those of manual work. The young collegian was set to his task with laborers in the field.

The father and the son resembled each other in strength of will; yet the son, with a docility as wise as it was filial, yielded a cheerful submission to the father's stern authority. He was never happier at his studies, or in intercourse with his college associates, than he now was in directing the plough. I do not think that in this he was influenced by a calculating policy; his conduct was but true to him, for *will* in him always dwelt with a ruling sense of the fit and the right; but neither can I think that he was blind to the fact, that he was pursuing the course of expediency. He was even in youth astonishingly quick in understanding human nature. He was acquainted with his father's peculiarity, and could not but know that obedience to him was better than insubordination. His punishment was of short duration. The father became more delighted with him than he had ever been. Seeing his noble son so amiably submissive to his austere requisition, he was unable to refrain himself. While diligently employed in his rough work in the field, he went to him with seeming severity of manner, assumed to repress a heart-breaking affection

which otherwise might have overcome him, authoritatively bade him leave the plough, even thrust him away from it, and then silently wept with new love for his precious child. His offence was expiated; his field-labors were over.

But what course with respect to him was now to be taken? His academical education was not to be resumed; he was not to be sent back to college. Probably it was thought that he was sufficiently advanced. He had been, if I do not miscalculate, at least three years at Princeton, and had not been negligent of his advantages. He was certainly better prepared than the generality of graduates to begin a professional education; and to this in his eighteenth year, he applied himself. It is impossible for me to think that this course was wise; but if he was to enter so soon on the next stage of his studies, a better direction to them could hardly have been asked, than that which through an auspicious Providence they received. It was determined, in coincidence, doubtless, with his own strong preference, that his profession was to be the law. Here, I think, there was no mistake; and there was none, certainly—there was a peculiarly judicious and desirable arrangement—in reference to the guidance and ordering of his preparatory law

course. It was his privilege, after atoning so satisfactorily for his college excesses, to pass a year or more with an uncle—a man of uncommon discernment, who took a peculiar pride in this interesting young relative, and became attached to him very closely.* By the advice and agency of this uncle, he became a pupil and an inmate in the family of Governor Samuel Johnston, who had filled the highest civil offices, and who, in all respects, now occupied the summit of power and influence in the State. It was, if I mistake not, on proposing the measure of his becoming a law student under Governor Johnston, that his uncle remarked to his father, with an intelligence which proved to be prophetic, "I foresee that this boy of yours is to be the stay and pride of both our families."

It was a very rare advantage to him—doubtless the chief and most valuable one of his early life, that he was brought so completely and effectively under the influence of such a man as Governor Johnston. He was susceptible to no influence more than to that of example and society. Though he kept his own individuality, and was always and every where felt by others more than they were by

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* Appendix B.

him, he was pre-eminently social, and nothing contributed so much to the formation of his character and habits, nothing was so essential to his happiness, as intercourse with persons congenial with himself, and who commanded his regard. This aptitude of his nature was now perfectly met. He could hardly have desired circumstances more suited to his taste, or better adapted to improve and advance him in all respects. The Governor was a man of high education; learned not only in law, but in politics, in history, in philosophy; but more than all, so far as his influence on his pupil was concerned, he was a man of large acquaintance with mankind, of a highly cultivated character, of refined manners, of personal dignity, and of the most honorable connections and relationships. His domestic sphere, too, had unrivalled attractions. There was not a family in the State where polite life had a purer or richer development; where refinement or honor in either sex had a superior exhibition. It was in its highest stage when our young student of law was admitted into it. A school more to his mind, or of greater force to form his character, and fit him for the stage he was to act on in life, could not have been found.

He was not insensible to the great advantages

of his situation; he knew how to avail himself of them; he was true to himself. Deferential to his distinguished superior, he commanded respect from him by the activity and force of his mind, and by his general bearing, which was in every thing manly, independent, proper, attractive. He became a favorite with his new acquaintances. He was universally acceptable. The Governor became his warm and earnest and permanent friend.

In these circumstances, in all respects so agreeable, so auspicious, his education advanced with proportional rapidity. He learnt the law, he learnt human life, he learnt mankind; he formed relationships, he acquired knowledge of the world, which, in after life, yielded him invaluable advantage. After two years, the regular term of preparatory study, he was admitted to the practice of the law.

He was not quite twenty-one years of age. His new circumstances were suited to give the most favorable exercise to his powers—to display advantageously his very energetic, fruitful, active mind. The bar was a strong one; Brown, Gaston, Stanley, Blair, adorned it. It was quickened and strengthened by his accession to it. He was never ambitious; he envied no one; excellence in others could not but move him to emulation; but this did not

hinder him from appreciating and rejoicing in their gifts, as if they were his own: still nature in him could not act in a low sphere; and without aiming to put any one below him, it would have denied itself by taking an inferior position. It was impossible for him to content himself with a low standard of professional activity. Young as he was, he was a stimulant from the first, both to the bar and the bench.

One of the first, if not the very first, of his speeches in court, gave him great precedence—a fine beginning to his most successful career. The case was one of much importance; a large amount of property was involved. One of the parties litigant was a man of great wealth and greater weight of character, for whom he had the profoundest respect. He could probably have had no special agency in the suit, if he had not volunteered to plead on the other side for nothing. He was to be the last speaker. The prospects of his client were forlorn. Powerful advocates on the adverse part had given to the wrong the fairest appearance of right. His speech reversed this appearance; his client gained the cause. The great loss to the venerable man, his personal friend, whose interest he opposed, was the occasion of greater gain to him.

He intended, he anticipated this result. He had studied the case, apprehended its merits, felt in himself that he could make its merits manifest, and he could not doubt that if he should do so, the consequence which he had in view would be realized. "Joe," said the unsuccessful party, speaking as his familiarity with him warranted, "you must not take another fee against me." "I have not taken a fee," he replied; "I appeared for my client for nothing." "Then," said the other, "you must not appear against me again." "That, sir," he answered, "shall be as you please." He was ever afterwards the counsel of this most estimable man, one of his best friends, whose business yielded him no small part of his annual income from professional practice.*

Never was any one's individuality as a lawyer more distinctively or strongly marked. It was not in him to imitate any one, or borrow from any one. In one respect, no man was more a debtor to others. They stimulated him; their examples were suggestive — their wisdom and their mistakes, were alike useful to him; he was instructed, corrected, admonished, and encouraged by intercourse with them;

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* Appendix C.

but as masters or authorities to prescribe to him, or as patterns to be followed by him, they were infinitely far from his thought. He was, if any one ever has been, unique and original. As a practitioner, his independence was in every thing active and predominant. In engaging himself as an advocate,* in preparing his case, in graduating his charges,† in his pleas, arguments, use of precedents,

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* Judge Nash's remark (see Appendix), "That those he thought mean, he despised and avoided, and would have no intercourse with them," is applicable to his appearance as an advocate. "High-minded and honorable, he could not tolerate a mean action." How could he then employ his great powers as a pleader in giving any form of meanness or injustice a triumph! A man when I was with him as a student, sought his advocacy; he required him to tell his story. When he had finished, he said to him promptly, "You have been telling me a falsehood; now tell me the truth." The man varied his narrative. "Do you think me scoundrel enough," said he, "to accept a fee in such a case as yours?"

† Soon after he began his practice, a friend of his, a senior at the bar, who had been charging for his services more than the applicant was willing to pay, suggested to him when he saw that the man was about to apply to him, that he ought not to charge less. "I shall," he said, "judge when the case comes before me." He became the poor man's counsel for about one-tenth of what his friend had demanded; and as he told him, regarded himself as well paid. The rate of his charges was determined by the demands which his cases

diction, elocution, he was like himself; followed and exhibited his own peculiar personality; and whether he was a pattern to others or not, no one certainly was a pattern to him. The independence, the originality, the spontaneousness of his professional activity, one could no more doubt than its triumphant force and effectiveness.

He was, in the purest sense of the term, a philosophical lawyer. He made no display of philosophical knowledge; he made little use of technical language; his common speech was that of common sense, but he had much sense that was not common. He was truly, as Judge Nash says of him, with admirable discrimination, "profoundly *imbued* with the principles of the law." He was constitutionally inclined to analysis; whatever he examined, he examined minutely, and in thorough detail; he could not cease from an investigation on which he had

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made on his professional talents and application, and they were sometimes much lower, and again very much higher than to others seemed equitable. What his clients might think reasonable, or what competitors might be willing to appear for, he did not concern himself with; his decisions rested on grounds independent of what theirs might be, and if ever they were changed or modified, it was not before, but after trial had shown him that they ought to be.

seriously entered, until he had seen quite through the object of his attention, and enabled himself as far as possible to resolve it into its elements and principles. Thus he had studied law; thus he continued to study it, and to study every thing to which he earnestly applied his mind. He could not stop short of a principle in the examination of particulars; the principle was to him the meaning of the particulars. Hence, chiefly, the power which he exerted in discourse, and especially at the bar. If in speaking his force was great, it was so mainly because his knowledge of his case and of every thing pertaining to it, was complete. He knew well the science of his profession, and the science, if I may so speak, of each particular case in his practice, though he made little exhibition of the form of science.

He was not a rapid or fluent speaker; he did not study beauty, or wit, or gesture; he gave no thought to his manner, which minute criticism could not always approve. The commanding character of his speaking was earnestness, intensity of effort to carry his point, and this was so commanding, that it hindered himself and his hearers alike from paying the slightest attention to his style or elocution. The peculiarity of his diction was that which a powerful

writer ascribes to his own*—"Its *verity* to the ideas; its being composed of words and constructions precisely and directly fitted to the thoughts, with a perfect disregard to any general model." A fitness, it may be added, unstudied, undesigned, spontaneous—the natural effect of his own internal force, under the stimulus of the occasion, and of the end to which it was directed. What he said and what he omitted to say, his entire performance, positive and negative, in matter and manner, had its ground and reason in the absorption of his mind in his work,—the earnestness with which he sought to gain his point. Nature in him would be predominant. His speaking was scarcely less natural than his breathing.

It was in every thing full of life. There was intense vivacity in his eye, in the tones of his voice, in his pauses, even in his hesitations and imperfections of language. It was alike manifest, that he had command of his subject, and that his subject had possession of him; it animated, pervaded, filled, every power of his mind. Imagination adequately aided and recommended his reasoning. It seldom gave elaborate pictures, but it threw a warm coloring over every part, and produced,

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* John Foster.

when they were required, graphic, picturesque, spirited descriptions. He had uncommon talent, which he seemed to exert without any effort or intention, in enlivening his representations, by noting minute circumstances, by short similes, and by rhetorical epithets. By these means he could brighten and vivify with equal success and equal ease, the ridiculous, the atrocious, the painful, the agreeable, so that they would have on the hearers the effect of actual life and presence. The facility and naturalness with which he could describe scenes and occurrences, with which he could color and animate the expression of his thoughts, formed a prominent element of his power in speaking.

Another element was his knowledge of human nature; of no less importance to a speaker than knowledge of his subject. In this respect, it is difficult to be just to him without giving the impression of being very excessively eulogistic. What I say of him I am sure will find the fullest acceptation from those who knew him best. The ability to understand man seemed, as it existed in him, to be a distinctive power of his own. He did not know others only by studying them, or by comparing them with one another, or by intercourse with them —a man revealed himself to him by his mere pres-

ence; he needed no words, no works, no actions, nothing but the man's becoming visible, in order to know substantially what he was at the first sight. I have, when travelling with him, often trembled at the liberties he would take with strangers, but the result invariably showed that, except as to their names and private histories, they were not strangers to him.* He took liberties only with such as were

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* On a journey in the mountains of Pennsylvania, we stopped at a place where mutton was promised us for dinner. The promise was exacted and given with very marked emphasis. On the table there was meat which, we supposed, was mutton, but its taste more resembled that of pork. The inn-keeper was called: "Where," he asked, "is the mutton you promised me?" "Before you, sir." There were many persons at the table. He put into the man's hand a fork, with a piece of the meat on it, and bade him eat it with an authority which seemed to take away all liberty from the man, who put the meat into his mouth, the company staring and wondering, chewed it thoroughly and swallowed it. Then said he to him, "What think you now—is it mutton?" The man awoke from the spell he had been put under; but, instead of becoming angry, he left the room in a fit of laughter. The company were greatly relieved by this termination of the strange scene. I said to my brother, when we were alone, "You took great freedom with our inn-keeper: we were all in a tremor as to the result." "You must know your man," he said. How he got his knowledge of his man, I could not understand.

open to liberties. Persons of worth and character invariably commanded his respectful regard. Of this wonderful insight into men, he availed himself in pleading, and especially when he was addressing juries. Juries to his view were not only discriminated from one another, but in the same jury, one man, or two, or three, would be discriminated from the rest, and the individuality of each would be carefully consulted, and while proper attention was given to all, the address would be shaped with special adaptation to such as he saw it to be most important to convince. This was not done by him with any unfairness or improper policy; if he took advantage of his knowledge of the idiosyncrasies of his hearers, it was to hinder them from exerting an influence against the right. He was a skilful, wise, astute pleader, but he was not a sophist; he would have been weak if he had been insincere or untrue to his convictions. Nature in him could bear no violation; he was constitutionally honest, true, transparent, and his whole personality was infused into his speaking.

His eminence as a lawyer did not appear greater in addressing juries than in discussing points of law and in giving counsel. His knowledge was theoretic, abstract (the knowledge of principles, causes,

reasons), as well as practical. He understood the law yet better in its comprehensiveness, its philosophy, than he did in its details, and he was quite as much at home when the learned bench was his auditory, as when he spoke to plain, unlettered jurymen. And the wisdom and soundness of his opinions brought him more business in private than the court-docket ascribed to him, though that generally could not have represented him as having more, without giving his agency to both plaintiff and defendant. His pre-eminence as a counsellor and an adviser was even greater than his pre-eminence as a pleader.

He was often in the State Legislature, and as to his position and influence there, Judge Nash thus speaks: "At the time he entered into public life, Mr. Skinner was still a young man; but he entered with a mind and character which immediately placed him with the ablest men in the Legislature, and there were many of the highest range of intellect. His mind was eminently practical, and he brought to the discussion of the various matters engaging the attention of the Legislature, a fund of knowledge, of principles, and facts, which occasioned him always to be listened to with profound attention."*

* See the Judge's letter in the Appendix.

His connection with the Legislature, which began in 1801, when he was not quite of age, was repeated in several years, until 1833. In 1814, he distinguished himself by his defence of the State Bank against the attacks of its adversaries, who introduced several bills with the design of destroying it. An extensive system of banking, which was characterized as a mammoth bank, was to be established in place of it. The chief advocate of this plan was a very eminent man—a powerful speaker, whose main instruments of strength on this occasion, as they were very often, were wit and satire, of which he had an extraordinary command. He had made a masterly speech of its kind, in support of the mammoth bank measure. Mr. Skinner thought it his duty to answer him; he was very reluctant to undertake the task; but as it was declined by others, to whom it more properly belonged, he could not but put himself in opposition to what he was strongly convinced was against the public good. His answer was characteristic. Whether able to meet his distinguished opponent or not, with weapons at which the latter was so expert, he not only declined employing them now, but insisted that the merits of the matter demanded the laying of them aside, and required rather the soberest strain of thought

and consideration; limited himself, and begged his hearers to do the same on their part, to grave and solid arguments as the only fitting ones, to the jealous avoidance of irrelevant sallies of wit; strictly bound his adversary to do the same in his reply, charged his readers to note whether he did so, whether he met argument with argument in place of satire, or whether satire alone was his argument. The speech was triumphant. The mammoth bank bill was demolished. Judge Nash, who heard this speech, says, that it made an impression on him, which has caused him to remember both it and the speaker with pleasure and pride.

In 1835, he was a prominent member of the State Convention for amending the Constitution; and, as the journal of the proceedings shows, his activity in it was prominent. Here, however, as well as in the Legislature, his most arduous labors were performed at the committee-rooms, in preparing business for the meetings. The toil which he endured in performing these onerous, unnoticed, unappreciated labors, that almost overbore and consumed him, was a privilege to him, as being a service done for the State. It was natural for him to forget himself when engaged in offices of public utility.

In 1824, he relinquished the practice of the law.

He probably would not and ought not to have done this, if he could have thought himself at entire liberty with respect to it. An annual attack of fever, which became more and more severe every season, obliged him to be absent from the Summer and Autumnal courts, an interference with court business too serious to admit of his making himself responsible as a stated agent in it. After twenty-three years of laborious occupation in its duties, his professional life, on this account, was ended. He did not, however, cease from the exercise of his eminent gifts as a jurist. He continued to give advice without charge, and in other ways to subserve gratuitously the interests of justice and equity, until his health altogether failed.

His professional labor had not been unproductive to himself. He rapidly rose to affluence, the fruit exclusively of his own industry—the systematic, steady, and most strenuous application to the business of his calling. He became wealthy, as the natural result of his aptitudes for business, applied as they were by his mode of activity. He gave himself directly not to the pursuit of wealth, but to the functions of his profession, and it was his manner of performing them that conducted him to fortune.

He began with nothing, his resources were in himself and in his opportunities; he made full proof of them, and they bore him forward to affluence as on a tide taken at the flood. He did not owe his advancement to his marriage, or to any fortunate ventures or chances. His marriage gave him an interest in a small estate, which, for the sake of others, he improved; but his career of success, already triumphant, led on to his marriage, was its cause rather than its effect; and independently of advantages from his marriage, which in all respects was most happy, continued to advance with constantly increasing fulness and force, blessing with domestic abundance those with whom he had become connected in his new social relations. Under the direction of a benign and favoring Providence, his success was entirely from the just use of his talents and opportunities.

He had a surprising tact for business, which was itself the most valuable of his talents, and his manner of applying himself to business—the exactness, fidelity, and efficiency with which he executed business, brought him into such demand from those who had business to be discharged by others' agency, that if he could have duplicated himself more than once, he would hardly

have been able to serve all who desired to engage him.* His habits of business were determined by a two-fold force—one from the quantity of work on his hands necessitating the most perfect economy of time, the other from within himself,—a constitutional energy, which in the presence of so much work to be done could not but put itself forth in the intensest mode of exercise. He rose very early, and despatched by candle-light a large amount of correspondence and of preparations for trial. He continued his occupation till dinner, studying cases and receiving visits on business. When several visitors came, as they

* He obtained near the beginning of his course great favor with the Friends, which he never lost, and which in more ways than one, was very useful to him, by his defence of some free negroes who were to have been sold as others had been under authority supposed to be given by an act of the Legislature. He remarked to some one, that the act was misapplied, and did not justify the sale. Very soon, a most honorable deputation from the society of the Friends, waited on him, to engage him as the advocate of the negroes. He consented to appear for them, for the value of a year's hire of each that he should hinder from being sold. They all, under his advocacy, regained their freedom. The pecuniary avails to himself surprised him by their amount; but they were only the beginning of his incomes from the business of Friends. From every quarter they applied to him as an attorney, and never ceased showing him their respect and their gratitude.

often did, at the same hour, he would attend thoroughly to one, and then politely request him to withdraw without delay, that he might give himself to another who was waiting to see him. Sometimes his engagements in his office would allow him to speak to no visitor, and if on these occasions one came to him, he would at once perceive that whoever he might be, he could not make himself then an object of notice, and would presently withdraw and wait till the season of absorption in his work was past.*

It was remarkable, it was worthy of admiration, that a man of so much passion as belonged to him, should have been as subject as he was to the stern command of principle and system—the rule of rigorous and inflexible determination. He has often appeared to me as worthy of a lasting memorial, if it was but for his being an instance of the highest form of self-control. He was profoundly excitable,

* I was sometimes, when a student of law under his direction, much troubled lest his absolute non-attention to very respectable persons, might give them lasting offence. Even Mr. Collins, whom he respected more perhaps than any man, could not always gain his notice. I have known the old gentleman to enter the room, wait some moments, and then depart, without getting from him more than the common, "good morning, sir."

but there was no permanent, paramount despotism over him but the despotism of will, of reason. He had appetites of unsurpassed strength; but he said to indulgence, "thus far, and no farther," and if at any time it did not obey his decree, he had revenge in reserve for it. It was a law of his life, not to forget any thing which he was concerned to attend to; he once forgot a paper, of no great importance, which he was to bring with him from court; he punished himself, by a sixty miles' drive, that he might teach himself not to repeat such an inattention. The value of discipline was to him above the price of gold: How often have I heard him remark when suffering most severely from providential disappointment, that the suffering was a greater treasure than the highest gratification in its stead would have been. Taking the whole of his life together, his measure of indulgence was excessive; he saw and deplored this in his later years; yet in particular parts of his life, and also in the whole, I have not known an example of "reason in passion," by which his was surpassed. The union of these was the chief former of his individuality; his very self would have disappeared by the absence of either.

His rule over himself was as absolute in his time

of indulgence as it was in respect to business. He would be entirely disengaged and at leisure when the hours for his being so arrived: No matters, no visits of business could have his attention when he was to be at dinner. His inexorableness in this respect became so well known that his relaxations were always unmolested; persons wishing to see him on business came before dinner. The after part of the day, though also given ordinarily to business of some kind, was comparatively a season of repose.

He had much company; but though the freedom of the house was given to his guests, his hospitality was tempered by the general force of his character, which in all circumstances could not but have been felt, and the impression it made generally secured a deportment toward himself of mingled ease and restraint. He was convivial, deferential, attentive to every one; all were cheerful and happy in his society; but hilarity in his mansion was not noisy; religion was associated with repasts; at table the blessing of God was asked, and thanks to Him were offered. His company was various; in court time, the judges and the bar, at religious anniversaries, the clergy, were invited to dine with him. At a meeting of the Methodist Conference in the neighboring village, more than twenty of its members

were entertained by him during the session. His noble liberality exposed him to occasional calls from persons who did not know what manners were due to him, but he knew how to treat them, and no one could take liberty with him more than once. It required an uncommonly stupid vulgarity to do it even once.

His style of living, though very generous, was strikingly the reverse of being ambitious or ostentatious. There was abundance of every thing, and the quality was as the amount, but simplicity, not elegant luxuriance, was the characteristic of his domestic life. Splendor of living, the reputation of affluence, display, he did not aspire to, any more than to public distinction and celebrity. He did not despise these in other persons who had substantial worth in themselves; among his most intimate friends there were not a few at the height of external refinement and elegance; but though he was by nature inclined to the highest forms of excellence in every thing, he had no love for elegant display in his own mode of life; and had his fortune been more than sufficient to sustain the style of titled nobility, he would not have used it for such a purpose. His mansion wanted nothing that was

essential to substantial enjoyment; it included nothing that was offensive to simplicity; but it did not offer indulgence to the love of elegance. He had a high relish of true art, but his nature in the position which he held in society, disinclined him to the display of art, and he was in every thing subject to his nature. Besides, pleased as he was with art, he was not a *connoisseur*, and he could not have pretended to be what in his own consciousness he was not. He could have lived in sumptuous elegance; but he could not have chosen a style of living which would have misrepresented either his intellectual or his æsthetic and moral interior. He was doubtless unconscious of any moral hindrance; yet I cannot but think it probable, that one over whom reason and judgment had so strong a control did deliberately think that he could make a worthier use of his means, than to apply them in his circumstances to the maintenance of a splendid domestic establishment.

He was not, in the technical sense of the words, *a man of conscience;* that is to say, conscience was not the commanding power in his nature. As nearly as any one it has been my happiness to know, he was a purely honest man; to know him was to trust

in him; his word was inviolable; he was a terrible unmasker of dishonesty; but, yet, he was not a man of conscience because he was more—his conscience itself received light and authority from a higher law —higher in his constitution,—the law of greatness of soul. Not by conscience or a sense of duty, or by benevolence, as commonly understood, but by an interior nobleness of spirit was this peculiar man ruled and characterized. At the risk of being thought extravagantly partial, I cannot forbear ascribing this high distinction to him—from my very earliest recollections, it has been my privilege to be the perpetual observer and admirer of, so far as I know, its unparalleled manifestations. He stands before my mind in the past, dating from 1803, and thenceforward till he died, as an agent of good to others in manifold forms, and always as exerting benign influences not so much from any distinctive motive as from his nature itself, as the sun shines because it is his nature to shine. Like every other man, he has been an agent of what is not good, but of good performed of his own spontaneity and in his own way, his life for half a century was constantly giving instances.

Anticipating his retirement from the labors of his profession, he had some years previously to it

been preparing for himself another sphere of activity—that of a planter, for which he had always felt a strong affinity. He commenced his second career before he had finished the other, the termination of which was doubtless hastened by the very lively interest which he had in agriculture. His energy here revealed itself as efficiently as it had done at the bar. His course still was that of originality and independence. His incentive was peculiar; it was not to increase his fortune, which was already large enough to satisfy him, but to please his taste, to give himself agreeable and useful occupation, to improve the mode of farming, to teach his neighbors, at least, a better mode, by his example. His ideas in regard to farming were at first thought to be chimerical. His neighbors and friends were startled by what they supposed to be contempt of experience; so they interpreted experiments which he made for the purpose of enlarging experience.* He intended to

* The extent of experience is to be measured, not by the number of the repetitions of an experiment, but by the number of instances in which different experiments, both in the same and other things, have been made. His uncle used to ridicule the former notion of experience, by a fictitious story—that of a boy who in carrying his grain to the mill, put that in one end of the sack and a counter-weight of stone in the other: When some one asked the boy

apply science to agriculture; a comprehensive experiment involving many particular ones, and as a consequence, multiplying lessons of experience. He did this in anticipation of the aids which chemistry has of late contributed to make agriculture a scientific pursuit. Those who twenty or thirty years ago left the beaten path of farming, a path still too much trodden—that of wearing out cleared land and then clearing new, had to depend altogether on their own observations of the results of self-suggested experiments. They of course were often unsuccessful; a fact which discouraged from imitation others of less enterprise, and established the generality in their prejudice against innovation. When Mr. Skinner purchased his plantation, even his friends, who thought he had made a bad bargain, predicted his failure; his first operations confirmed their forebodings; they could not appreciate the intelligence and sagacity, the sound philosophy which directed them; they saw nothing but blind innovation, in the unflinching and indomitable steadfastness with which they were prosecuted. He was much amused one

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why he did not put half of the grain in the place of the stone, he replied that his father had always carried corn to the mill as he was doing.

day to hear an old acquaintance who was riding by in company with several others, call out to them in a loud voice, which was intended for his ear: "You see great works, neighbors, great works; every stalk of corn costs him not less than a quarter*—what are to be the profits?" Time soon instructed them on this last point. Agriculture was to be scarcely less available to him, than had been his law-practice.

While by his strenuous industry, the forest with surprising rapidity became a fruitful field, the waste and exhausted field was renovated and became equally fruitful. The only cleared land he had, had been long used as a race-ground; a part of it was low and marshy; by his method of draining and manuring, it was so improved that in the second year he realized a harvest of wheat from it, which he sold for nearly treble the cost of the land, though he had given for it, it was thought, double its value. Much of his plantation was covered with gall-berry, a growth always indicating great acidity in the soil; by deep draining, and the due use of lime, he corrected the acidity and made the land quite fertile. Having no guide as to the quantity of alkali to be

* Twenty-five cents.

used, he failed partially at first, by over or under-dosing; but from patient observation, he taught himself how to administer the medicine in just measure. The productiveness of his fields was a matter for wonder.

He greatly enlarged his possessions in lands, and whether the wilderness was to be subdued, or the cultivated field to be fertilized, his efficiency alike revealed itself, to the surprise first, and then to the imitation of other planters. Those of his survivors who were acquainted with the state of his lands in Yeopim and Hervey's Neck twenty-five years ago, can judge of his efficiency, by the changes which he produced in this sphere of his enterprise.

The bar, the legislature, the farm did not limit his business activity. He was the leader in those fishing operations, which now require for their accommodation almost the whole extent of both sides of Albemarle Sound. "To your brother," says Judge Nash in his letter to me,* "I have always heard, the residents on the Chowan and the Albemarle are in a great measure indebted for their fisheries; not that he was the first to spread the seine in

* See Appendix E.

their waters, but that he was the first to perceive their natural importance, and the first by his enterprise and energy who brought that knowledge to the use and benefit of the community at large. To him the State is indebted for having led the way in the development of this great national interest." The Judge is right in saying that "he was not the first to spread the seine in their waters," if he uses the plural form "waters" by enallage, or from the continuity of the two waters which he mentions; but he was the first, as Governor Iredell says in his obituary notice of him,* to spread the seine on the Albemarle. I know this well, for I was a member of his family, when, in the spring of 1807, he began his fishery at Eden-House. The nearest approach to a fishery on the Sound before this date, was one which the first Mr. Collins established on Edenton Bay; but this, which was comparatively very small, was not on the Sound, and when my brother informed Mr. Collins of the project in which he was about to engage, and inquired if he would let him have a loan to facilitate its execution, the venerable man frowned on the undertaking as venturous, if not impracticable. Indepen-

* See Appendix F.

dently of all men, he proceeded; one of his friends, a man of much executive tact and force,* he associated with himself in the management of operations; but he provided all the means and kept the chief superintendence of every thing in his own hands. It was the writer's fortune to serve as a sort of subaltern clerk, being then in his sixteenth year, in this the first of the fishing seasons on the shores of the Albemarle.

It might be inferred from what has been said of this large-hearted man, that his sympathies and views were too extended, not to embrace all the interests of humanity. Nothing but necessity itself, could restrain or limit the generous exercise of the peculiarities of nature, which formed his individuality. He appreciated justly the value of education, professional and popular, of which, especially in his native State, he was a zealous and liberal supporter. He was a trustee of the university of North Carolina, whose prosperity and usefulness he promoted by his influence and his purse. Science as applied to the arts, and especially to the cultivation of the soil, had no sincerer or more earnest friend; he was

* Ebenezer Paine, Esq.

a liberal subscriber to institutions of literature in its various departments. In the truest sense of the terms, he was a politician and a patriot. He had no temporal interest, which held as high a place in his regard as the interest of his country: He knew its history minutely; he was profoundly acquainted with its constitution; he revered the memory of its heroes; he studied with the utmost care and with ever-growing pride and admiration, the character and services of Washington. His knowledge of American affairs, American statesmen, American politics, American jurisprudence, art, trade, commerce, institutions, was both singularly exact and singularly comprehensive. With his constitutional clearness and thoroughness of attention, he read daily the political newspapers and pamphlets, of which he always kept at hand a very liberal supply. I have not known any one who on matters pertaining to general politics and to the legislature and government of the nation, possessed more minute, more exact, more reliable information. Indeed, as a man of general knowledge in contradistinction to a man of learning, technically so called, it would have been difficult to find his superior, whether respect were had to abundance, or exactitude and perfection of knowledge. He made no pretence, in any way, to

uncommon knowledge, but it was always found that he had it, when the test of attainment was applied. It was the habit of his mind to look minutely at every thing that earnestly engaged his attention; to examine it in detail, to separate it into its parts, then bring the parts together, and look at it synthetically; and as he was by his constitution intensely inquisitive, inclined to examine almost every thing deserving of thought, a constant student of books as well as of men and things, the consequence was unavoidable, he could not but have become a man of great knowledge, and of knowledge the most substantial and most available.

He could not but have been interested and active in works of general philanthropy; he was an efficient member of a philanthropic association; the melioration of the condition of man, the improvement and elevation of the race in all respects, was an end for which he lived, which engaged his sober reflection, and which he pursued as an individual as well as in co-operation with others; yet his judgment and conduct in respect to modes of beneficence, means and requisites for advancing the true good of mankind, were often very peculiar, and in some instances they were directly against the convictions and approbation of others. He gave however as good proof of

sincerity, if not also of superior thoughtfulness and intelligence, as he did of characteristic independence. He did not, for example, think it incompatible with philanthropy, to hold men in servitude, under certain circumstances; he was himself a slaveholder. But, unless the terms imply a contradiction, he was a benevolent master; and on a sufficient guarantee that his slaves would be happier than he could make them, he several times offered them gratuitously to others. To those of his slaves to whom he thought freedom would be an advantage, excepting certain of them who could not be persuaded to accept of it, he not only imparted freedom, but means also, by which they might be enabled to use it for their own real advantage.* In the management of his slaves,

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* He had a very excellent man-servant, who he thought would probably improve his condition by removing to Liberia; he offered him, including his family, amounting to eleven persons, the means of transportation, and of a favorable beginning in the colony. The slave accepted the offer. The master, whether from self-interest or friendship for his faithful servant, or from both, now became unwilling to part with him, and made him another offer—his freedom at home and five thousand dollars as a portion, still desiring him to act in the matter without constraint. Abraham determined to make the experiment of a visit to Liberia, promising to return to his master if he should not find there a desirable position. After a year,

he followed the same convictions as to the rule and mode of benevolence, which determined him to retain them in servitude. It was, he thought, no unkindness to oblige them to keep strict order, to exact labor according to strength, to punish strictly dishonesty and disobedience. His government was so strong that resistance could not but seem inexpedient; yet it was the exercise not of tyranny, but of considerate, intelligent, humane authority—authority tempered with benevolence. He made the physical condition of his servants a happy one; they lived in comfortable homes, had good clothing and food; had good nursing and medical aid, in sickness; had time to rest, and time to work for themselves; were relieved of labor and in all respects carefully provided for, when they were old and infirm.

There was no insubordination, no special appearance of unhappiness, no source of complaining or dis-

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he wrote to his master, stating that he had satisfied himself as to the expediency of his remaining;—that he would return for his master's sake; but that otherwise, the value of the State of North Carolina would not be a sufficient motive to induce him to leave Liberia. He would doubtless have become a man of distinction among the colonists, but for a premature death. He was a man of excellent character and sound sense.

content on his plantation. It would be difficult to make the condition of persons of this class, better in all temporal respects, than that of his slaves actually was, under his most energetic, firm, and wisely-conducted economy. Nor was he negligent as to their spiritual well-being. They held religious meetings among themselves; they attended public worship in the neighboring village; he sometimes assembled them in his own presence, to hear preachers whom he requested to address them; and while he did not compel them to attend religious services, he would suffer no one to intermeddle with them in the orderly use of their religious liberty. For a time he employed a minister of the gospel to preach to them regularly, and if he did not always afford them this advantage, the cause was that he could not find a minister whom he thought suited to be useful to them.

There was a sphere in which the influence of my brother was most signally benign and useful to those by whom it was felt—that of his domestic relationships. I am constrained to speak of it by the love to him which it has cherished in my own heart, by a sense of family obligations to him, and by the persuasion that no form of virtue more deserves a memorial than such an interest in re-

lations as he evinced. Why should I not tell of his singular kindness to myself? Even from my childhood, I was as a first-born in his family. My father, who with limited means, had a numerous household to provide for, relinquished the care of me to him,—most advantageously to myself, in regard especially to my opportunities for acquiring an academical education. But for his kindness, I should not have been sent to college. Under his direction and at his expense, I prosecuted a course of preparation for the bar until near the time of my admission to it, when I tried his affection to the uttermost, by what he could not but regard as a very sudden and rash refusal of his choice of a profession for me. Tempted strongly, by my disappointing thus his fondest and long-cherished hopes respecting me, to leave me to myself, after a short season of intense displeasure from him, his former munificence returned to me, to forsake me no more till we were separated by his death. Wherever I have been, there have ever been with me decisive proofs of his thoughtful and constant affection. In my seasons of severe trial I have always had the aid of his wise counsel and his effectual sympathy; and when my usefulness has been restricted by want of opportunity, his hands have been opened to provide the

means of supply. For my favorable position in Philadelphia, the latter half of my course there, the seed-time of my ministry, I am mainly indebted under the divine blessing to his influence, his suggestive wisdom, and his purse. When in another city, I was exhausted and faint from labor, he urged me to travel in Europe for my restoration to health, and put at my disposal the means of compliance with his plan. He has always been afflicted in my afflictions, and happy in making me and my household happy. And this tribute from me may be taken as an indication of what he was substantially to his other relations. He has been the guide, counsellor, stay, as well as chief honor of the whole family of which he was a member. To his advice and his means they owe, beyond their own power of estimation, the position of respect and prosperity, to which by the smile of their Heavenly Father, and their own industrious use of their advantages, they have attained. He was as a father, also, to the family of his uncle, according to the prediction of that uncle concerning him, when he was yet in his boyhood. He was to his uncle himself a faithful, affectionate, devoted friend to the day of his death; none more tenderly lamented him; none showed such interest in his children after the death of their father.

His attention to the happiness of his relations, was from a principle of goodness, which showed itself, also, in noble acts of friendship to others, with whom he was not specially connected by ties of nature. He was a friend in deed, as well as in word, to many other individuals, with whom occasions and providences brought him into acquaintance. Nor did he limit himself as to ways and methods of showing private friendship. He advanced several poor young men to be enterprising planters, and intelligent and useful citizens, by taking them to live with him, sending them to school in the neighboring village during the day, and giving them occupation in the house morning and evening, and, during vacation time, employing them in profitable labor on the farm.

His peculiarity in religion was very remarkable. He made no profession of religion in early life, and he certainly was not then a man of piety. He was not a disbeliever, but he was very far from being a spiritual Christian. When I was deliberating, while a student of law under his direction, on exchanging the bar for the pulpit, he generously offered me the best advantages for obtaining a theological education; he thought the study of theology, especially

of such books as Hooker's Ecclesiastical Polity, would be useful to me in the legal or any other profession; but he could not consent to my becoming a minister of the Gospel, or appreciate the impressions which induced me, very suddenly as he thought, to forego such prospects as I had of worldly advancement for those which a preacher's life presented: He regarded me as deluded by visionary views: then, and for several years afterwards, he had no power of spiritual discernment:

> "I saw a hand he could not see; ...
> I heard a voice he could not hear."

But after the restoration of the Episcopal church in Edenton, he acquired from the first minister of that church,* who was several years an inmate in his

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* The Reverend John Avery, who to the church was an eminently instructive, exemplary, and faithful pastor, and to the family of my brother especially useful—a dear and greatly esteemed friend. Though not a popular preacher, Mr. Avery was a favorite with my brother, who interested himself in promoting his usefulness and comfort. After the repair of the church, when the pews were to be sold at auction, he attended the sale, intending that its avails should meet, at least, the expenses. He had assessed the pews at a rate which would secure this result. But, except himself, there was no purchaser at this rate. All the most desirable pews were pronounced

family, a new interest in religion, and from about the middle of his life he was a communicant. But if he was to be regarded at any time as a man of evangelical piety, the standard of judgment was to be not a little modified by respect to his unique character. Sometimes, certainly, he did not give the ordinary indications of piety. He never openly took the side of irreligion or of error; on the contrary, he would be roused by expressions of impiety or the avowal of heretical opinions on the part of others, into intense and indignant antagonism to them; but he would occasionally express himself in a manner most startling to pious sentiment, as it generally prevails among spiritual Christians. Under other circumstances he would make an entirely different impression of himself; piety would appear in him unusually attractive and beautiful. I have often known him evince the tenderest and deepest interest in as highly evangelical exercises of religion as the most spiritual taste could desire: I cannot forbear referring to the following as an instance. At his de-

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to be his by the auctioneer. "What will you do with these pews?" said a gentleman to him, who desired one of them. "Put my negroes in them," was the prompt reply. The pews soon were sold again at the assessed prices.

sire, I preached, on a Sabbath day, to the church which my father had been accustomed to worship in: there was a large attendance of my father's descendants; and my brother requested me, after dismissing the congregation, to perform a religious service for them exclusively. There were about seventy of them present. After a short address, to which the occasion could not but give peculiar emphasis, we united in prayer. My brother's frame of spirit inspired the whole company with tenderness; he sat weeping profusely during the whole service; and there was a sweet, solemn, gentle, subdued state of feeling in him through the remainder of the day, which could not but be felt by those who came into his company. It seemed to me, that I had never perceived the true spirit of the Gospel in greater purity, or in greater depth, than I did in this manifestation of religious feeling on the part of my dear brother. It was to me a very memorable occasion, and it does not stand alone in my reminiscence of incidents indicative of what he was in a religious point of view.

He was earnestly attached to his own church, but his preference was infinitely far from magnifying itself into exclusiveness or unchurching bigotry. He loved grave and decent form in religious service, but

he had an intense contempt for form when it would take the place of the spirit—for a ceremonious stateliness or pompous reserve, especially when it would in any society or in any individual, however humble, dishonor, or overlook sincere, simple, unpretending piety. He had religious friends and acquaintances whose piety he could not question, in the different denominations; the unchurching of them or any one of them he would resent, and denounce as sacrilegious arrogance, by whomsoever undertaken. He was not a stranger to ecclesiastical polemics, and knew well the merits of the controversy on church order; but, apart from this knowledge, he had an intuitive sense of the absurdity of the dogma which denies the regularity of administrations, though not without the seal of both divine and human approbation, merely because they are not in a certain supposed succession, or maintains their regularity when in that succession, though the administrator be an infidel or a man of bad life.

The church of his choice was dear to him, but not so dear as Christianity. He preferred the Episcopal order of service, but he had no objections to free prayer that could hinder his taking high satisfaction in the service of Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists, or Methodists. He was in entire

and cordial fellowship with all these denominations as branches of the Holy Catholic Church. There was a noble catholicity in his nature which was inconsistent with the want of ecclesiastical catholicity and all superstition in religion.

The last years of his life were years of great suffering. His constitution, which had been gradually impaired by annual attacks of disease, was assailed by a new malady, with which he was to have an appalling, fatal conflict. The human frame could hardly endure more violent pain than that which he suffered during the latter part of this visitation. Speaking of it in a message to myself, he said, "You can know nothing of it but by coming to see me; no language can describe it." I had seen him some months before he sent me this message, and I was not surprised that he spoke so strongly now. The pain at last affected his mind, and a short time before his death, his understanding was perfect only at intervals. He was entirely intelligent in his closing hours, and the manner of his departure was calm, and in remarkable harmony with his general character. During his last illness he looked to religion to sustain him, and he was not disappointed; his mind was in peace: he died in hope a painful yet tranquil

death. He had found the book of Job a peculiar solace to his severe suffering;—a book, as he said to me, speaking from his experience, particularly designed for the consolation of sufferers. It became a very precious book to him, and he signified his attachment to it in a singular way. He directed that, after death, he should be placed in his coffin in a dress of black, such as he had been accustomed to wear, with the Bible under his head opened at the book of Job. He directed, also, that his prayer-book should be placed upon his bosom with his hands resting upon it. These directions were not merely sentimental; they were solemn indications of piety, and in a nature such as his was they had a specific meaning. He designed that the arrangement and appearance of his body might testify to those who should look upon it before it was committed to the grave, that death did not discompose him; that he was in life and death the same; that he drew his support in suffering and death from the word of God, and especially from the portion of it which was intended particularly for the assuagement of suffering; and that he received supplies of strength from the inspired word by looking to God for it, in humble supplication and trust. In life and death, how peculiar a man was Joseph Blount Skinner!

I subjoin a few traits which have not been brought to view in the foregoing notice of him. There are often striking contrasts, seeming inconsistencies, in characters of the highest order; there were in him, and they sometimes occasioned his being greatly misjudged by persons who had but few opportunities of observing him; and even those who were well acquainted with him might have impressions from them for a time, which were not just to him regarded in the assemblage of his qualities. He had little prudential reference to what others might think of him; his friends, on that account, sometimes had occasion to regret misrepresentations, or erroneous impressions which he would make of himself; but nature in him would generally have free course in the direction in which it was moving, without much thought of others' approval or displeasure. If the direction were such as to make him appear to advantage, he would be very attractive and interesting; if it were otherwise, he might produce in others interest very far from agreeable to them, and perhaps anxiety as to the consequences. In one instance he would seem extremely severe; in another he would exhibit the most touching tenderness, the purest and loveliest form of affection, the most generous and self-denying friendship; and if both instances belonged to one

occasion, or were near enough to each other in time to qualify and temper one another, the effect of their contrariety would be most happy as an index of his character. But the severity apart from the tenderness, as sometimes it would be, led strangers to look upon him with feelings as unjust as possible to his character as a whole. Severity in him was not tyranny; it was the mode in which his great decision revealed itself. When he began with severe measures, he was seldom to be turned aside from them until they were completed; others would tremble, would wonder, at his persistence; but his regard was immovably fixed on the end, and for the end's sake, which with him in such cases was not selfish, but others' highest good, he would go through with the painful process according to the measure in which he had judged it to be necessary.

He was a man of great courage. He often saw no danger where others thought there was much; but when he knew there was danger in the way which he took to be that of duty, his self-possession enabled him to face it without fear, and he would advance against it thoughtfully and prudently, but with unshrinking determination and firm composure. He was not rash, yet he often did what others regarded as rashness, and which in them probably

would have been rashness. Of this inflexible, thoughtful daring he once gave an example in an attempt to quell an insurrection among his slaves. They had armed themselves against the overseer with clubs and axes. He went sedately amongst them unarmed; commanded them to submit; and not being obeyed, passed through the midst of them into the house, where there were firearms, of which he did not wish them to have possession. With the means of self-defence at hand, he stood in the door of the house and renewed his command; his word now had an authority not to be disregarded; he made one of the slaves bind another, until all were bound who had been in rebellion; and having caused exemplary punishment to be administered to the ringleaders, released them, with no fear that they would again use their axes as armor. He was entirely alone and unsupported in this movement. The number of the insurgents was large; their subjugation was the mere effect of courage and authority; for, though he prudently secured himself, his having done so—itself an achievement of intrepidity—was not known to the slaves. He intended that they should not know it, for he would not have had them think that he depended on firearms in maintaining the command of his servants.

He was astonishingly quick in the invention of expedients; was never at a loss for the means of accomplishing his ends. His determination as to the pursuit of particular ends comprehended a perception at once of their feasibility, and of the means he would have to use. In small as well as great matters, I have been struck with his fertility in devising means. In journeying with him I have often had the advantage of it, in obtaining small personal attentions from servants and innkeepers; all difficulties in our travel would vanish almost as soon as they presented themselves. He could afford to get himself into peril, on account of the ease with which he could get himself out of it. About thirty years ago, he was journeying in western New-York, in very feeble health. The road was one from which the roots and stumps of trees had not been removed, and there was racing between the stage-coach he was in and another. He remonstrated with the driver in vain; the racing was kept up, at the peril of health and life, until the coach arrived at the end of the stage. He sent a letter of complaint, signed by all the passengers, to the proprietors of the coach, requiring, under penalty, the displacement of the driver. On his return by the same way a short time afterwards, the driver who had been displaced

was with him in the coach, and enraged at seeing the author of his loss of place, he became insolent and abusive. "If you do not cease," said he to the ex-driver, "when the coach stops you shall be tied and flogged." The man became outrageous in his abuse, and when the coach stopped, dared him to execute his threat, and prepared for battle with him. "You mistake," he coolly said to him. "I did not threaten to flog you, but only that you should be flogged." And then asking the attention of the passengers, of whom there was a coachful, he described the case of the racing with its aggravating circumstances, and then said, "Now, gentlemen, I leave it to you to decide what shall be done with this fellow." They replied with one voice, "Give your orders, sir, and they shall be executed." The coach was about to start again: "Get in," said he to the man, "and if you open your lips again, the thing shall be done." The man gave him no further annoyance.

He has always appeared to me, after I began to think of him as a specimen of singularity, to be as much distinguished by a negative quality as by any positive one that belonged to him. This was, the absence of ambition in the precise meaning of the word. He was in a good sense proud; too proud to

do a mean thing, or to countenance any form of meanness in others; too proud to desire the reluctant favor of any man; too proud to acknowledge dependence for his position and influence on a showy style of living, on equipage, display, costume, ostentation of wealth; too proud to receive honor which was not paid to him as the free, unasked expression of sincere respect. But this very pride hindered him, as did also the very frame and structure of his nature, from being selfishly ambitious. He could not rise by an outward force, nor by any inward force other than the spontaneity of his nature. Not that he never proposed himself as a candidate for a place;* but that when he did this, he did it not for

* It was desired by his friends that his pre-eminent abilities as a jurist might have their appropriate exercise on the bench; but though he repressed all proposals which had his elevation to this honor for their object, he accepted and solicited the office of a justice of the peace after his retirement, in the hope that he might add dignity and respectability to the proceedings of the county-court, promote order in its sessions, and justice in its decisions. He gained his ends. The proceedings of the county-court became, under his direction, as respectable as those of the higher courts; from its decisions there were few appeals; and the effect of the change in diminishing expense to clients, in training the younger lawyers, and in saving time in the superior-court sessions, was generally and grate-

self-aggrandizement in any form, but for purposes of public utility, or from opposition to unworthy men. He did not shrink from contests when there was a sufficient cause for them, but his motive was not his own advancement except as this might be necessary to an ulterior end. If this man's ambition had been equal to his power; if he could have put his whole force under the sway of personal ambition, and could then have governed his ambition itself with the sagacity and energy by which all his pursuits in life were directed, I doubt not that, under ordinary circumstances, he might have exalted himself to the highest stations of honor and influence. But it was no part of his nature to court factitious distinctions or popular applause. He could not study effect; nature in him would have its way; he lived according to his nature; perhaps no man ever came nearer than he did to being perfectly willing to pass for his exact value. He did not even aim at this; he rejoiced in the friendship of the good and the great, of which it was his privilege to have a liberal share; but he did not gain this happiness by distinctively seeking it, by efforts intended and pursued with

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fully acknowledged. His example has been followed by other retired lawyers, and with the same results, in several counties of the State.

reference to it; it was an inevitable adjunct of his nature as developed in his life, its just product, as the fruit is the product of the tree. Some have thought that herein he was unjust to himself, that he ought to have cultivated his faculties, and arranged his plans of life, with reference to advancement to positions of civil honor. They may have been mistaken. Ambition might have abated his inherent strength. It would certainly have given him another individuality; it would have deprived his character of its most marked and interesting singularity; it would have given him indeed another character.

Of his faults I do not think it necessary to speak particularly. They were prominent like the other traits of his character, and the chief of them may be inferred from what I have said of him. They were such as are too apt to proceed from a bold, energetic, singular nature, such as gave him his peculiar individuality. Without being irritable, he was very excitable; without incivility, he was sometimes exceedingly keen and incisive; without unkindness, he was sometimes too sternly reprehensive; without vanity, of which he was entirely destitute, he sometimes had a manner which, to strangers especially,

appeared boastful. Judge Nash has referred to a fault, which, as a general fact, should not perhaps be called a fault—his free exercise of a sense of the ridiculous, which he had in an uncommon measure. He was in this, no doubt, occasionally excessive; but it rendered his conversation unusually entertaining, and generally it was a means of exposing persons to themselves or others who required to be exposed. Under an exterior which sometimes had the air of roughness, he had, as Judge Nash says, as kind a heart as ever throbbed in a human bosom.

He died December 22d, 1851, at seven o'clock in the morning, aged 70 years, 11 months, and 4 days.

Soon after he had established himself at the bar, Mr. Skinner was married to Miss Maria Louisa Lowther, daughter of Mrs. Penelope Lowther, and a relative of Governor Johnston. She was a lady of high cultivation, and, from uncommon inherent worth not less than from her family connections, held a position among the highest in refined and polite society. She was a contrast to her husband in respect to his masculine, bold, aggressive, forceful traits; but the opposites of them belonged to his ideal of female

perfection, and her taste and affection were gratified by the prominent and commanding individuality which they imparted to him. The particulars of their resemblance and affinity to each other were sufficient to form a ground for the highest measure of mutual esteem and sympathy; and their dissimilitudes tended only to enhance, on the whole, their complacency in one another. They had great happiness in their union, which was terminated prematurely by her death. She died September 22d, 1822, in her 36th year. He survived her twenty-nine years, and never ceased to lament her with sincere and profound sorrow. If the sanctuary of domestic love and grief might with propriety be opened, I could present a view of him in the depth of his affliction in which he would appear strangely contrasted with himself in the severe and strong peculiarities of his character—as if he was the personification of submissive, prostrate, flowing, gentle grief. They had no child until fifteen years after their marriage, when, in close succession, two daughters and a son were born to them. Of his descendants none remain except his son, T. L. Skinner, Esq. and Maria Louisa Warren, a child of a deceased daughter.

I conclude with a brief notice of Mrs. Lowther, the mother of Mrs. Skinner. She was a granddaughter of Governor Gabriel Johnston* and Penelope Eden, daughter of Governor Eden. Her parents were William and Penelope Dawson; her husband was Tristrim Lowther, Esq., a man of refined manners, who had a high standing at the bar, and was esteemed and beloved for his kindness to the poor, and the general excellence of his character.

Mrs. Lowther was distinguished by birth and education, in both of which she had every advantage, less than by intrinsic excellencies; such, especially, as form the highest grace and charm of the female character. Her person was a rare model of beauty and delicacy; in height, in shape, in complexion, in every feature and line so exquisitely fashioned, that, regarding it in the class of forms to which it belonged, art itself could scarcely suggest an improvement or desire any variation; one, at least, could note no defect, could attempt no criticism, in the presence of so much that was so surpassingly beautiful and attractive. I cannot imagine that any one not insensible to beauty could see Mrs. Lowther,

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* A brother of Governor Samuel Johnston's father.

though in a multitude of "the fair," without having his eye riveted by her distinctive, queenly appearance. And yet she was the complete contrast of ostentatious beauty. The charm of all her charms was a palpably evident self-unconsciousness of being in any degree uncommon or distinctive. She could not be hid, yet it appeared to observers that she would be if she could. It gives me singular pleasure, at this remote day, to contemplate such a specimen of unaffected modesty; I have never conceived of any thing, of its kind, which I think more entitled to be termed celestial. And the adornments and movements of her person were invariably consistent with its peerless symmetry and elegance. Her dress, her steps, her attitudes, her looks, were always such as became her inherent modesty, the true dignity and nobility which belonged to her nature. For six years during which I was an inmate of the family, according to my best remembrance of those happy years, I saw her do nothing which had not a decorum and propriety in entire keeping with her character as I have represented it. She had always a tasteful and beautiful air, and to look upon her face or hear her voice, at any time, was a refreshment.

And if she was so lovely and beautiful in ap-

pearance, she was yet more beautiful within. She did not aim at effect; if she studied to please others, as she certainly did, it was for their sake, not her own. It seemed to be as much her nature to be unselfish, as it is the nature of man generally to be the reverse. She always appeared, for she always was, happy in what made others so; and in the afflictions of others, how spontaneously, how sincerely, how deeply was she afflicted. When the weather was stormy, her sympathies were with the weather-beaten mariner; when the pestilence was raging, they were with sufferers in the chamber of disease and death. I never heard her, I cannot think any one ever heard her speak an evil word of any person. She would extenuate the faults of others, and the more so, sometimes, when she herself was the sufferer by them; and if she could find no excuse for them, she would weep, and comfort herself as far as she could with that "charity which hopeth all things." Her cultivation and politeness gave her no inferior place among persons of refined and elegant manners; but in intercourse with the humble and the poor, even such of them as were of lower habits, while she retained her lovely individuality, she was as familiar as if she had been one of their own class. She gave such evidence as no one could question, that she

esteemed those she had intercourse with, whether of high or low rank, better than herself, and even forgot herself, in the interest which she took in them. She had a bright and well-furnished mind; her proper sphere was that of the highest cultivation and intelligence; but she was quite at home, also, with persons of inferior name and condition.

The loveliness, the grace of Mrs. Lowther's character, as now regarded, though advanced and matured by education, was merely natural; it was what belonged to her by her original constitution, as given her by her Maker. That such native excellence should have been crowned and sanctified by evangelical piety, was not a fruit from itself, and not to be on any account anticipated as a necessary or certain result. In my early acquaintance with her I do not think she was a spiritual Christian. Her goodness was constitutional, natural, not from the renewing influence of the Holy Spirit. But when the change occurred in myself, which led to a change in my choice of a profession, she was simultaneously and similarly changed; she sympathized with me in my new feelings, began a strictly religious mode of life, and, until her death, continued to give most decisive evidences of renovation by the Spirit. Her religious character was improved by time; she was

a mature and established Christian when she died; and her death was serene, touching, triumphant. One circumstance of it was remarkably characteristic. When the last struggle was about to commence, observing her daughter, who sat near her, overwhelmed in sorrow, she said, "Let Maria be removed; what is about to take place is more than she can bear." She arranged her person, with her own hand pressed her falling chin upward, and so calmly and peacefully yielded up her spirit into the hands of God.

In reviewing what I have said of a dear friend, I am not conscious of any exaggeration; however it may appear to others, in my own vivid conviction it is but an utterance of strict, sober truth. Until but a short time before her death, she lived with her daughter, the pride of the family, as she was also of the eminently cultivated and refined social circle to which she belonged.*

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* Appendix D.

APPENDIX.

APPENDIX.

A. page 9.

They had thirteen children; Joseph Blount, Mary, Charles Worth, Sarah, Elizabeth Blount, Martha Ann, Thomas Harvey, Margaret Harvey, John, Benjamin Smith, Joshua, Edmund Blount, and Josiah Collins; of whom but one (John) died under age. He suffered shipwreck, near the mouth of the Mersey, England, in his seventeenth year. In his natural character, he resembled his eldest brother, and with equal cultivation and advantages would probably have been quite his equal in general force and efficiency: he was, if possible, superior to him in his command over others, which was his distinguishing trait. The other children married and were prosperous. Mary, Sarah, Margaret, Josiah, and Edmund, died of consumption in the order in which they are here named. Joshua died of dysentery, at Saratoga, last summer.

My parents were respectable persons, simple and plain in their mode of life, distinguished for their probity, hospitality and kindness to the poor, beloved and honored by the community, pious and strict in the training and education of their children. My father was by birth a Quaker, my mother was an Episcopalian. Their marriage was the means of his separation from the Friends. They became members of the Baptist Church, under the highly evangelical and faithful ministry of the Rev. M. Ross, who had married my paternal aunt, my mother first about the middle of her life, and her husband ten years afterwards. They were both bright examples of spiritual religion, and died in faith and in peace.

My father was inclined to piety from his youth. Before he became a member of the Church he was severe in his morals, and loved the company of the pious. His neighbors, who were generally his near relatives, were persons of distinction, who had no sympathy with him in his religious peculiarity. They held him in peculiar esteem; he was intimate with them all; but there was a wide difference between him and them in regard to religion and modes of life. They were fond of fashion and gayety, in which he took no part, against which, indeed, he sometimes protested in no indecisive manner. His difference from them was in nothing more marked than in the government and order of his household. His discipline of his children was severe—more so, doubtless, than it would have been, if the families of his neighbors had been less fashionable. The proximity of such a display of the world's spirit, perhaps led him into an extreme

of the contrary spirit. As to this, however, I am far from a full persuasion; his success with his family—the blessing of God on the course which he took in respect to it—was very signal, and unusual.

He often had preaching in his house, before he made a religious profession; afterwards his activity in family religion became much greater; his children and servants were assembled for worship daily; and in these daily meetings, he appropriated much time—an hour or more each evening—to reading and prayer. His house was much frequented by religious persons, and especially by preachers: when the latter visited him, the neighbors were invited to hear sermons from them. He had his house furnished as a church, and three Sabbaths out of four he conducted public worship in it himself. The service in the church, twelve miles distant, was monthly; the intervening Sabbaths were his own seasons for conducting divine service. He did not preach; he prayed with the people, read the Scriptures to them, and read also a sermon, generally one of the village sermons, or one of Davies', whom he preferred as a preacher to all others: he united exhortation with his reading; his children conducted the music. He saw the fruit of his pious pains: God blessed his family greatly, and made him a blessing to his neighbors. He continued these meetings until his strength failed, from old age and disease.

My dear father, though not himself a liberally educated man, was desirous that others, and especially his children should, as far as possible, have the advantages of education. A school-house formed part of his domestic esta-

blishment, and a schoolmaster was a constant inmate of his family. From my earliest remembrance, the school-house which stood on his premises, was that to which the children of the neighborhood were sent. He was a lover of knowledge and a constant reader, his mind was well furnished with general information, and his conversation was unusually interesting and instructive to those who were about him. He suffered greatly from disease, especially in his later years, but excepting some short seasons of nervous depression, his life was very cheerful, and he was on the whole a very happy man.

He was not a man of pretension; his simplicity and transparence were the chief ornaments of his character. He was capable of severity, but tender sensibility was predominant in him. He was very energetic, was as far as possible from being merely negative in his position or influence; but he was characteristically a man of peace and good will. He never was in debt to any man, and never had a law-suit. Humane, hospitable, generous, upright, pious, and died lamented by all his acquaintance, in a good old age. His will was an index of his character: it closed with a charge to his children, in the patriarch's words, "See that ye fall not out by the way."*

My mother was a striking example of gentleness and unconscious excellence, of patient endurance, quietness, fewness of words, propriety of deportment, the properties which com-

* Genesis xlv. 24.

mand tranquil respect and strong enduring affection. I have supposed that the subject of this memoir received the extraordinary strength and force of his nature by inheritance, through his mother chiefly, yet she herself seemed to be characterized not so much by these, as by gentleness and delicacy. The former qualities were to be found in others of her lineage ;* they were by no means wanting in herself; she had a symmetrical and lovely character ; but her distinction certainly was softness and gentleness rather than their opposites. For a mother such as she was, her children had cause for special gratitude to God.

She was small and delicate in person; my father was larger and more robust than the generality of men. He lingered long on the bed of death; she was in comparative health while he lived, but soon after he was separated from her, she began to decline, and in two years her beloved form was sleeping by the side of his in the grave.

At the close of this note, I add a word concerning the residence of these persons, at their first son's birth. It was quite different in some respects from what it is at present. Their house, situated about a mile from Harvey's Point, like the other dwellings on the Neck, was of humble appearance; the settlement of the Neck was comparatively recent; and the land was very imperfectly cleared. But it was more populous than it is at present, and having been the seat of

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* Pre-eminently in her elder sister, Mrs. McNair.

Governor Harvey, whose descendants were then its chief occupants, the society was cultivated and fashionable, and the Neck was often the scene of much gayety and pleasure. There was, on the northern side of the Albemarle, no locality more desirable. The woods abounded with deer and other game, and immense flocks of swans and wild-geese swam on the waters both of the Sound and the very beautiful river,* feeding on a sweet grass which then grew on the bottom. The waters were at that time saline; they are not so now, and the grass, and, with it, the swan, have disappeared. The bank of the Sound has, of late years, been rapidly giving place to the ever-beating wave, which has at length removed the foundation of the house in which my parents lived.

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* The Perquimons.

B. page 14.

This uncle was a younger brother of my father, Mr. John Skinner, who resembled him in the prominent points of his natural character, especially in its artlessness, affectionateness, sincerity, energy, generosity. He was in some respects, however, very different from him. He was much more a man of society, a man of the world, much more conversant with men of station and office; and he held positions of honor and influence, to which my father did not aspire. He had a very vital, vigorous, active mind, which, without being liberally educated, was very familiar with politics and history, and was richly furnished with general knowledge. It was through his agency, as well as by his advice, that my brother became a pupil and an inmate in the family of Governor Johnston.

There was a strong affinity, a remarkable similarity of tastes, a peculiar intimacy and friendship between this uncle and his nephew. Their intercourse with each other was entirely confidential, and it never was interrupted till death separated them. He lived to realize his anticipation of his nephew's advancement in life; and he could hardly have had a higher pleasure and pride in it, if he had been his own son. My brother reciprocated fully his uncle's generous, singular interest in him. Living, dying, and after death, his

affection for him was evinced by offices of devoted friendship, of which I have known few parallel examples.

In one particular, my uncle's mind was distinguished above any one I have been acquainted with. His imagination was so inventive, so fertile in fiction, that he could almost improvise a novel in his ordinary conversation, if by means of one he could secure his purpose. He would not exert this singular power merely for amusement; but if (e. g.) he wished to rebuke impertinence, or rudeness, or vanity, he would, without any appearance of effort, fabricate a fictitious story, an extended complicated parable, which it would require no little time to repeat, and after entertaining the company, and none more than the person for whom it was intended, with the graphic, well-wrought recital, as if it were a matter of real history or experience, he would apply it to his object, with an efficacy not to be resisted and never to be forgotten.

It is refreshing to me to recall the evidences of fraternal affection, of free, noble endearing interest in one another, by which intercourse between my uncle and my father was always marked. Their spheres of life were in some respects contrasts to each other. My uncle had no sympathy with my father in his religious tastes and preferences; they differed much from each other in their ideas of family government, and the training of children; they had minds of dissimilar aptitudes and capacities; they were open and unrestrained in the expression of their respective peculiarities; but they were not divided from one another, in the smallest degree, on account of their points of dissimilitude and dis-

agreement; in all substantial matters they were identified in life and in interest; and it was always palpable to each that notwithstanding their very different individualities, nothing except death could touch the ties of their brotherhood. A glance at my uncle's distinctiveness in one respect may be obtained from an incident. My father had spoken to him very freely and faithfully, as to what he regarded as a serious mistake in the mode of training up children: my uncle was exceedingly sensitive to the implied rebuke, and his wounded feeling revealed itself in no measured terms. They parted without any apology from my father, for the freedom he had used. It was not long before my uncle made him a visit, to pour out to him a heart of love and thankfulness for his faithful admonition: "You are right, Colonel," said he; "I see and lament my mistake; there shall be nothing more of what with so much frankness and fidelity you have spoken to me about." My uncle, like my brother, was constitutionally a very proud man; but the resemblance between the two held in another respect; they were both pre-eminent in simplicity and transparency of nature.

C. page 18.

The first Mr. Josiah Collins. I think I have a sufficient apology for mentioning the name of this most excellent and venerable person, in the unusual relation of intimacy and friendship which always existed between him and my brother. He held no inferior place in my brother's esteem. Next to his uncle, if even he should be excepted, there was perhaps no man in his acquaintance whom he so deeply respected. Nor did he value him too highly. There was not in the community so commanding, so impressive an example of dignified, systematic, undeviating application to business, of enlightened, judicious, successful enterprise, of devotion to the public interest, of beneficence, of kindness, of cheerful gravity, of decorum of manners, of integrity and urbanity. He was a man of great wealth, of great simplicity of life, and of singular wisdom and discretion in the stewardship of his substance and his influence. His memory deserved to be held, as it has been, in peculiar respect and honor by the community, of which he was, on the whole, the most distinguished member. He was a public benefactor. The Church and the Academy of Edenton, are among the many monuments of his munificence.

D. page 72.

Persons of high excellence are seldom found in a state of isolation from one another. The stars appear in groups. When Mrs. Lowther was in her prime, she was one among a rarely distinguished number with whom she had intimate intercourse. In her day, especially in the former part of it, there were persons in the society of Edenton who gave that beautifully situated village a prominence of interest and importance, unsurpassed probably by any other town in the State. In its external appearance, and particularly in its religious condition, Edenton has improved. The old church was then a ruin, and there was no other religious building, and no minister of religion in the place, until, through the liberality of the venerable Mr. Collins, the church was restored. But apart from religion, which was every where neglected, as if it had been a reproach to man, Edenton was most honorably distinguished. There were families in it that would have given elevation to any place;—those, for instance, of Iredell, Tredwell, Collins, Littlejohn, Blount, not to mention others. Where can a society be found that would not be honored by the accession of such a member as the mother of the Iredells, or of her eldest daughter? There was no display in the manner of living in this circle of true refinement, but every thing in it indicated a pure, enlightened, and cultivated taste.

Blessing and prosperity to the place it adorned! It cannot but be always a place of very peculiar interest to me. There my worthy Masters Metcalf and Freeman prepared me for college, there under my dear brother I studied the law, there I first tasted the sweets of the purest, simplest, most beautiful social life, and, more than all, there, I hope, God met me with His renewing and saving mercy, when amidst the pleasures and temptations of the world, I was estranged from Him, and exposed to destruction.

E. page 41.

LETTER FROM JUDGE NASH.

HILLSBOROUGH, Nov. 29th, 1852.

DEAR SIR,

MY acquaintance with your late brother commenced early in life, when we were both boys. I met him for the first time at Princeton, in New Jersey, in 1796; he was just leaving and I just entering college (not that he had graduated), a bright, blooming, animated boy: I thought him one of the handsomest youths I had ever seen.

We did not again meet until the year 1814, at Raleigh, as members of the assembly. The acquaintance of youth was soon, very soon, ripened into the friendship of manhood, a friendship which I am proud to say continued down to his death.

At the time he entered into public life, Mr. Skinner was still a young man, but he entered with a mind and character which immediately placed him with the ablest men in the Legislature, and there were many of the highest range of intellect. His mind was eminently practical; and he brought to the discussion of the various matters engaging the attention of the legislature, a fund of knowledge, both of principles and facts, which occasioned him always to be listened to with profound attention. The leading character of his mind

was a sound, discriminating judgment; evidenced not only in his political, but in his private life, by the success which uniformly attended him. To this principle he mainly owed the large fortune he accumulated while still young, for I have understood from him that he entered upon his profession as a lawyer without means. As a lawyer he was eminently successful, as the records of the courts in which he practised will show; and up to the time when he retired from the bar, he stood, if not at the head, with the most eminent in the profession. And it was as a lawyer that the predominating character of his mind availed him. Profoundly imbued with the principles of the law, he at once perceived the true points of his case, and brought to them a power of investigation, which rarely failed to carry with it the minds of the hearers. With juries he was very successful, for his knowledge of human nature was great.

To your brother, I have always heard, the residents on the Chowan and the Albemarle are, in a great measure, indebted for their fisheries. Not that he was the first to spread the seine in their waters, but that he was the first to perceive their great national importance, and the first by his enterprise and energy, who brought that knowledge to the use and benefit of the community at large. To him the State is indebted for having led the way in developing this great national interest.

Under an appearance of roughness was concealed a heart as warm and kind as ever throbbed in a human bosom. Devoted to his friends, he was no one's enemy. Those he thought mean he despised and avoided, and would have no

intercourse with them. High-minded and honorable, he could not tolerate a mean action.

He had a keen relish for the ridiculous, both in character and manners, and was perhaps too much in the habit of drawing amusement from what he saw of the ridiculous in men. This character of his mind led him to indulge in exciting the admiration of strangers, by an amplification of facts, a play of imagination, sometimes injurious to himself, where not well known.

Such, sir, is a very slight and imperfect sketch of the character of Joseph B. Skinner. Just and upright in all his dealings, true and steadfast in his friendships, honorable and high-minded, judicious, useful and active—his loss will be severely felt and long deplored by the community of which he was a member. I loved him as a brother, and lament his loss as a brother.

With sincere respect,

F. NASH.

F. page 42.

BRIEF OBITUARY NOTICE BY GOVERNOR IREDELL.

DIED, on the 22d ult. at his residence near Edenton, JOSEPH BLOUNT SKINNER, ESQ., in the 71st year of his age.

Mr. Skinner was no ordinary man, and his loss will be deeply felt in the community in which he resided. After spending some time at Princeton College, he studied law under the late Governor Samuel Johnston. He lived two years under the roof of that eminent man, enjoying not only the benefit of his legal instruction, but the still superior advantages of his accomplished manners, and his interesting conversation, his varied and extensive learning, and his thorough knowledge of the world. Soon after engaging in the practice of his profession, Mr. Skinner obtained a high and enviable position at the bar. Distinguished for his integrity and close application to his duties, his excellent sense and skill as an advocate, rather than for any brilliant display of talent, he was a leading counsel in every cause of importance within his circuit. So lucrative was his practice, that in a few years he found himself possessed of an ample competence. He then exchanged his profession for a pursuit more congenial to his taste, and purchased a farm, on which he has ever since resided, in the neighborhood of Edenton.

Farming in that section of the State was at that time conducted in a most negligent, slovenly, and unscientific manner. Few of the farmers, rich as their lands were, produced more than sufficient for the support of their families, and a large portion of them were in debt at the end of each year. Mr. Skinner undertook to correct this evil. The skilful and profitable management of his own farm gradually produced a most favorable effect in the increased improvement of others. He did more; he took an active part in exhorting, advising, and instructing his neighbors, and, when it was necessary, extending pecuniary assistance to them. It was one of his most cherished objects, to impress upon the cultivators of the soil a proper estimate of the dignity of their station in the scale of society, to rouse their pride and teach them the ennobling nature of their pursuits. His efforts were admirably successful, and are to be seen in the present highly improved condition of agriculture in that beautiful region of country—beautiful beyond any other in our State—which is bordered on the south by the broad and sparkling waters of the Albemarle.

Mr. Skinner also gave the first impulse to that valuable branch of industry in that section of the State, the herring and shad fisheries. The fisheries had been confined to the Roanoke and Chowan rivers and their tributary streams, and were few in number and of small extent. Mr. Skinner, with his characteristic energy, first ventured upon the experiment, then deemed visionary and impracticable, and launched his seine upon the wide and oft-vexed Albemarle itself. His

example has been followed, until the northern shore of the Sound is literally studded with fisheries, creating a new source of wealth, and adding annually hundreds of thousands of dollars to the industrial products of the country.

Such a man may emphatically be styled a great public benefactor. Richly did Mr. Skinner earn the distinction. Deep should be the gratitude of the public; and ever should his tomb be encircled by a garland of merit, more precious than the warrior's laurel.

A firm and generous friend, liberal without ostentation, mild and amiable in his disposition, he endeared himself to all who knew him well, and enjoyed the devoted love of his family. He married in early life Miss Lowther, the great-granddaughter of Governor Gabriel Johnston, so distinguished in our colonial annals. By her, who died many years since, he left an only son and a daughter of a deceased daughter.

January, 1852.