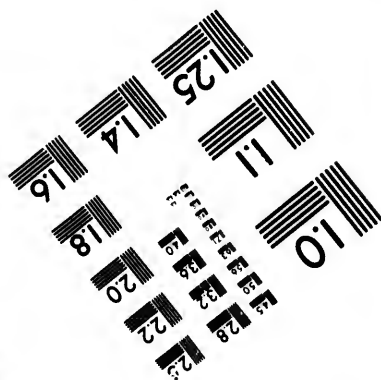
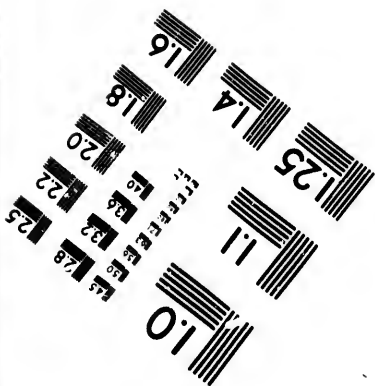
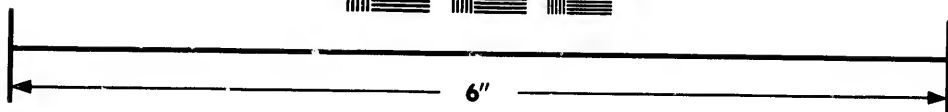
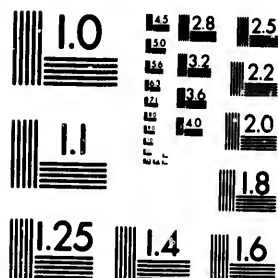


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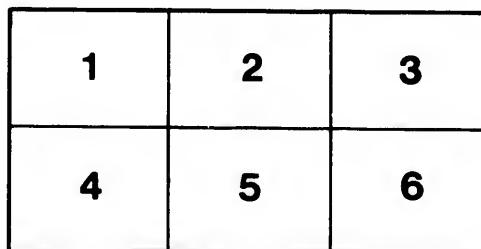
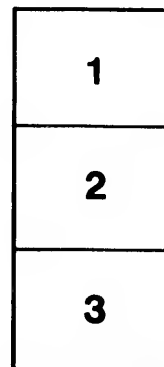
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*Honesty the best Policy in the worst of Times,*

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J O S E P H O F A R I M A T H E A,

AND ITS CONSEQUENT REWARDS;

WITH AN APPLICATION TO THE CASE OF  
SUFFERING LOYALISTS,

A S E R M O N,

intended to have been preached at *Newport, Rhode Island*, on the  
*Sunday* preceding the Evacuation of that Garrison by his  
MAJESTY'S TROOPS.

and afterwards preached at *St. Paul's* and *St. George's* Chapels,  
NEW YORK,

ON SUNDAY, *October 8th*, 1780,

BY GEORGE BISSET, M.A.

Late Rector of *Trinity Church, Newport, Rhode Island*, in *America*.

First Rector St John. *died at St John*  
L O N D O N: *March 3<sup>d</sup> 1788.*

Printed by W. RICHARDSON, N<sup>o</sup> 403, STRAND.

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ST. LUKE XXIII. 50, 51, 52.

*And behold! there was a man named Joseph, a counsellor,  
and he was a good man, and a just:*

*(The same had not consented to the counsel and deed of them)  
he was of Arimathea, a city of the Jews (who also  
himself waited for the kingdom of God)*

*This man went unto Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus.*

**T**HOUGH virtue be at all times lovely and respectable, yet it appears peculiarly charming and engaging, when it is contrasted with the overflowings of ungodliness; when amidst a crooked and perverse generation, it shines as a light in a dark place, and when it rises superior to the scorn and contempt of a multitude, prone to do evil.

IT is this circumstance that gives an extraordinary lustre to the character here presented to us, and which probably made the sacred historian introduce it to us with the emphatical note of attention *Behold!* We shall therefore attempt to place this distinguished character in a conspicuous point of view; knowing that bright examples warm and invigorate the well-disposed mind; and humbly hop-  
ing



ing that we do an acceptable service to our divine Master in endeavouring to honor those whom he hath been pleased to honor.

AND here following the order set us by the sacred historian, we shall begin with considering this man's rank and station in life.

THOUGH wealth and external grandeur are by no means essential ingredients in a truly worthy character, yet they must be owned to add considerably to its dignity and lustre in the eyes of men. They afford it a noble opportunity of displaying all its excellent qualities to the best advantage, and place it in the eligible situation of *a city on a hill which cannot be hid*. Now these external ornaments, which so evidently adorn and embellish virtue, were happily possessed by this man in a considerable degree. He was of high rank and authority amongst his countrymen, being a counsellor, a member of the grand council of the Jewish nation, to which the Roman policy thought fit to leave a considerable weight and influence in regulating and determining the internal affairs of that province.

IN our Saviour's time, the Jewish council was extremely corrupt both in principles and morals. It was composed chiefly of *Pharisees*, men of four tempers and  
gloomy

gloomy aspects; men who had unhappily disjoined religion from morality, laying a great stress upon the scrupulous observance of forms and traditions, whilst they neglected justice, mercy, and the love of God; men who made long prayers, that under a disguise of outward sanctity they might have a better opportunity to devour widows houses. According to the testimony of the Jewish historian, who knew them well, being one of their number, they were *a cunning sect and extremely prone to mischief and rebellion.*

NEXT to them both in point of number and influence in that council were the *Sadducees*, men of an entirely different, though not more virtuous character. The Sadducees believed that there was no resurrection, neither angels nor spirits. Far from embracing the traditions of the elders, they rejected the authority of all the prophets, except Moses. They were generally men of rank and fortune, who, discarding all the hopes and fears of futurity, placed their chief happiness in the ease and splendor, in the luxuries, and sensual gratifications of the present life.

SUCH was the general character and complexion of the Jewish council. And to those who attentively consider the contagious nature of vice, and the pernicious influence of bad example, it will appear a no small recommendation

commendation of this man's integrity, that it received no taint nor infection from the principles and manners of those with whom he was associated in office, and with whom he was obliged to have frequent intercourse—*He was a good man and a just.*

JUSTICE is that virtue, which restrains us from hurting or injuring our neighbor in any respect.

GOODNESS is that virtue, which disposes us to promote his welfare and advantage, as much as we possibly can. The former tends to prevent disorder and misery; the latter to produce the greatest possible sum of positive happiness; and both together comprehend under them every branch of social duty: as from his character of justice therefore we may infer that he was peculiarly careful not to hurt any of his fellow creatures, in person, property, or reputation, that he violated no just right, refused no equitable claim, gave no cause to others to complain of unkind or injurious treatment on his part, or that their peace and happiness was disturbed by his peevish humor, or selfish views; so from his character of goodness we may infer something far more excellent; that he was active and solicitous to make all around him good and happy; that he was eyes to the blind, feet to the lame, a father to the poor, a friend to the friendless, a patron to the distressed, and that it was his constant study

study and delight to wipe away tears from the eye of misery, and to make the bones which Providence had broken to rejoice.

SUCH virtues in a high station are to a community, what the sun is to this lower world, they diffuse light, health, vigor, gladness; *neither is there any thing hid from the heat thereof.*

To enhance the value of these private virtues so transcendently excellent, we are authorized farther to observe, that they were not built upon the sandy foundation of a happy natural temper, or a desire of fame; but upon the firm and solid basis of true religion—*Himself also waited for the kingdom of God.* Religion is a *tried foundation* whereon to erect the beautiful superstructure of moral excellence; and *other foundation can no man lay.* Many excellent things have indeed been spoken of the innate dignity and beauty of virtue, and of its tendency to produce its own reward. These speculations it must be owned are extremely fine, and may be highly useful in the still tranquil scenes of life, but the *storm arises and they are scattered.* Virtue does not always bring in her right hand length of days, and in her left riches and honors; she sometimes brings in her right hand the cruel instruments of death, and in her left a blasted reputation and a ruined fortune—In such circumstances what can

possibly keep the mind steady and immoveable in its regard for a form so devoid of external comeliness, but the divine and noble motives which religion offers. An almighty God, the friend of virtue, and absolutely engaged to make it finally happy—Immortal life to those who patiently continue in well doing. An exceeding great and eternal weight of glory in recompence of bearing well the present light affliction, which is but for a moment. Animated and incited by these glorious prospects, what heroic acts of virtue have not mortal men performed! They have thereby not only been enabled to reject with disdain the most enchanting cup of sinful pleasure, but also to encounter adversity and danger in their most dreadful forms. They have been stoned, they have been sawn afunder, they have been exposed to the rage of wild beasts and the violence of fire, they have wandered about in mountains, in deserts, and in dens, hungry, destitute, afflicted, tormented, men of whom the world was not worthy.

FROM private virtues so eminent and so firmly established upon religious principles, it is natural to expect a corresponding public conduct; and in this man our expectations are not disappointed; as justice and goodness distinguished the *man*, so integrity and honor on a most trying public occasion distinguished the *counsellor*. *He consented not to the counsel and deed of them.*

WHAT that counsel and deed was, we learn from the sixth chapter of St. John's gospel at the 47th verse, *Then gathered the chief priests and Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doth many miracles; if we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him, and the Romans will come, and take away both our place and nation.* Through real motives of envy and hatred, but under a specious pretence of public good, they determined to destroy Jesus, whose humble appearance defeated their ambitious views of a temporal deliverer, and whose encreasing reputation eclipsed theirs; and this nefarious counsel they soon after put in execution, with every circumstance of violence and cruelty. But Joseph consented not to this counsel and deed; he could not conceive, that a person so holy and harmless, so meek, compassionate, and beneficent, who did not strive or cry aloud, who disclaimed all temporal authority, who was attended by no daring or desperate followers, and who had retired into a desert, when the multitude proposed to make him a king, could ever give any umbrage to the Roman power; or if unjust suspicions and jealousies should arise, he thought it better to leave the national safety in the hands of Providence, than to endeavour to secure it by a cruel and atrocious crime; such were his sentiments, and he had the manly firmness openly to avow these sentiments. Had he on this occasion attended to the dictates of worldly wisdom it would have pointed

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out a very different conduct, "What," would it have said, "will your feeble voice avail against the rage of the chief priests and the clamors of the people? The only fruits of your ill-timed opposition will be, that reproach, scorn, and abuse will be liberally poured upon you from every quarter. Will they who are now shewing such a tyrannous hatred against the master, spare the servant? The powerful enemies whom by your imprudent zeal you will raise up against you, will openly hate and persecute you, and depend upon it, you can expect but little countenance or support from the weak and timid policy of your friends." But Joseph consulted not with flesh and blood, he had regard to justice more than to expediency, and had happily laid down to himself one fixed and infallible rule of right conduct, *to do his duty regardless of consequences.* In what manner his opposition was conducted we are not told, but this we know that it was prudent, firm, manly, because the sacred historian leaves us no room to doubt that it was highly acceptable to that great Being who judgeth righteously.

NOR was his constancy and perseverance in maintaining the cause of truth and innocence less remarkable than the fortitude with which he at first openly espoused it. As on the fullest conviction he had formed a good opinion of Jesus of Nazareth, so his opinion of him did not

not vary with varying circumstances, nor was his adherence to him in the least shaken by the terrible things that he had seen befall him—When Jesus was brought low even to the dust of death, when his visage was marred more than any other man's, when his enemies raged and were multiplied, when his friends were all disconcerted and dismayed, when his chosen disciples had forsaken him and fled, when those tongues which had been just loosed by him were silent in his cause, and when of all the people there was none with him; in this most gloomy hour of the powers of darkness, in this lowest stage of the deep humiliation of the Son of God, this man was neither afraid nor ashamed to own his attachment to him and his warm zeal for his honour. *He went boldly unto Pilate and begged the body of Jesus.* His love to his friend, his gratitude to his benefactor, his respect for injured innocence could not be quenched by the deep waters of violence and wrong; and every narrow, every selfish consideration was swallowed up in the generous aim, that he who had been unjustly numbered with the transgressors, should be distinguished from them in his death, and should make his grave with the rich because he had done no violence.

THERE is a maxim favorably entertained by all the friends of virtue, that *honesty is the best policy*, and we shall be peculiarly happy in being able to prove that this



good man's case is not an exception, and this we must do by restricting ourselves to such rewards, as naturally flowed from his singular integrity, and such as his ungenerous countrymen could not withhold from him.

God by the mouth of his holy prophet had long before promised to his righteous servants, who suffered reproach for his name's sake, that *instead of shame they should have double*. Relying upon this promise, and upon a consciousness of his own integrity, we may conceive that this good man, maligned, traduced, and vilified by his contemporaries, was obliged to appeal to impartial posterity, and posterity has not failed to do him the most ample justice. His distinguished zeal for the honor of his divine master has procured him the lasting honor of having his virtues recorded in a register that shall not be cancelled; the name of Joseph of Arimathea, a name once held in reproach, has now for ages stood foremost in the list of those who have dared to be honest in the worst of times. His name is as the ointment poured forth, sweet and fragrant in all the churches of Jesus Christ. Whilst the most polished and most enlightened nations of the world execrate and abhor the counsel and deed of them, they unanimously concur in admiring and applauding this man's conduct. Wherever the everlasting gospel has been preached, wherever it shall be preached from the rising to the setting sun, there this  
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man's integrity and fortitude shall be recorded for a memorial of him.

BUT if there are who affect to despise a posthumous reputation, and who deny that even the sweet voice of fame can in the least charm the dark insensibility of the grave, to these it will be easy to prove, that verily there were to this righteous man more solid and more substantial rewards. And in order to this, we will, if you please, first suppose that a good and gracious God removed him from the *strivings of the people*, and from *the evil to come*, by an immature and an early death. At that awful period when all the glories of this world faded and disappeared from his closing eyes, when neither the reproaches nor applauses of the people could in the least affect him; sure we are, that he did not repent, that he had *kept innocency and done the thing that was right*, by not consenting to the counsel and deed of them. Whilst men of doubtful and imperfect virtues stand trembling on the brink of eternity, not knowing whither they are going, mark in this perfect man the fair fruits of a confirmed integrity, *peace, hope, and a full assurance of an abundant entrance into the habitations of the just*. Who can conceive or express the exquisite joy, which must have filled his departing soul, when he reflected that the same Jesus whom he had so cordially befriended in the lowest ebb of fortune, was now exalted at the right hand

of

of God to be a Prince and a Saviour, that all power and all judgment were committed into his hands, and that he had the keys of hell and of death? If Jesus had laid down his life for his enemies, and in his bitterest agonies had prayed for his murderers, what expectations might not be justly formed of his indulgence and favor for such a chosen and approved friend. If by the gracious declaration of the gospel, a cup of cold water given to a disciple in the name of Christ was not to lose its reward, what *an exceeding great reward* might he not humbly hope for, who had performed such signal services to the master himself. What a cordial reception might he not promise himself into the invisible kingdom of *his Saviour, his Redeemer, his Friend.*

NEED we labor to prove this important truth, the first principle of all religion, that death to an honest man must in all possible circumstances be great gain. The voice of nature distinctly whispers it, the voice of revelation loudly proclaims it, some of the most vicious and abandoned have in a cool moment been ready to acknowledge it, *Let me, says Balaam, die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.*

BUT let us suppose the worst that could possibly happen to this good man, let us suppose that Providence, inscrutable in its ways, protracted his life to an  
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extreme old age, *even in troublous times*, and that he lived to see that fatal period, when the just judgment of heaven began dreadfully to counterwork the policy of the Jewish council, and to make that expedient which they had pronounced to be *the political Salvation* turn out to the *intire. ruin and subversion* of that state, by bringing upon them the arms of the Romans, to take away both their place and nation; then, when that devoted city was encompassed with armies, when war in its extremity of horror began to rage, when blood was shed like water round about Jerusalem, and there was no man to bury them, and when within was as death; famine, faction, and the voice of lamentation and woe; in that dark and tempestuous evening of the Jewish state, when those who had pierced the Son of God had great occasion to wail because of him, what a cordial balsam must it have been to the tender and sympathizing heart of this good man, to have the testimony of his own conscience that he was *clear, absolutely clear* from the great transgression, which had involved his country in such inextricable calamities; that he had neither through fear nor complaisance deserted her dearest interests, in the critical moment upon which depended her fate; but that if his honest advice had been followed, Judea would have flourished to latest ages, the pride and glory of all lands.

IN our age and country a counsel and deed has been contrived and executed, in its leading features too nearly resembling the counsel and deed of the Jewish rulers. A counsel and deed which has perverted the sacred name of liberty to the vilest purposes of ambition and rebellion, which has turned a land pleasant as the garden of Eden into a field of blood, which has torn the ungrateful offspring of Britain, from the embraces of a fond and indulgent parent, the protector and guide of their youth; and has thrown them into the hands of *strange children, whose mouth talketh vanity, and whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood*, who have long been the bitter and avowed enemies of the protestant religion, and of the liberties of mankind.

THIS counsel and deed, so unjustifiable in its principles, and so pregnant with public ruin, you, *my brethren*, have had the *virtue* to oppose; many of you with the loss of all that is dear in this world. Whilst humanity prompts me to condole with you on such unmerited misfortunes, the respect I owe to the moral perfections of that great Being, in whose presence I now stand, more loudly calls upon me to congratulate you upon your happy choice, as from his faithfulness and truth I dare pronounce, that you, like the good man recorded in the text, will at last find that you have acted the most *prudent* as well as the most *honorable* part. Surely it may  
be

be hoped that this wise but deluded people will sooner or later open their eyes to the things so evidently belonging to their peace and interest: when the mists of prejudice vanish, and when passion subsides, they will naturally be disposed, from the fearful pit, from the mire and clay, to look up to the rock whence they were hewn. They will compare their former prosperous days, with the present day of gloominess and thick darkness; and, like the prodigal in the gospel, when wasted with misery and mortified with the insults of strangers, they will arise and go to their Father; they will turn their just indignation against those ambitious and dangerous leaders, who have conducted them into such a maze of guilt and sorrow, and will venerate and respect those injured characters, who have hitherto unsuccessfully endeavoured to keep them in *the way, the good old way*, in which their fathers walked with songs of triumph: Should a merciful God grant to them such a salutary but painful return of cool reflection, so that even the obdurate would weep over the effects of their own folly, for what would you exchange the heart-felt satisfaction? for what would you have your glorying made void? that you have not been necessary to the ruin of your country; that your integrity has preserved you from blood-guiltiness; that no bereaved widow, or famished orphan in the frantic rage of grief can call upon you, to restore a father or a husband who has thrown away his *life*, and all their *happiness*

in

in the most dishonorable and most unrighteous of all causes, in lifting up his hand against the *authority* of the *mildest* of constitutions, and the *just rights* of the *best* of sovereigns?

BUT should such a fair prospect of peace and reconciliation retire far from us, should the foundations of this our earth be so far gone out of course, as not to be re-established within the period that Providence has assigned to human life; yet still I protest by all the *divine honors* that are paid to him, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession; by all the *bright beams of fame* which incircle so great a cloud of witnesses; I protest by all the *precious promises* that are made to the faithful and the persevering, and by all the *horrid woes* that are denounced against the fearful and the unbelieving, *you have not erred*. The man who hath resisted even unto blood in striving against this unnatural conspiracy, hath not *died as a fool doeth*, nor hath he who hath patiently suffered the spoiling of his goods, for the testimony of a good conscience, in the least deviated from his true interest.

As long as there is a God that judgeth in the earth, as long as there is an everlasting kingdom prepared for the just, so long will it be the interest of every good man to hold fast his integrity and not to let it go, though he should be obliged to part with every thing  
else;

else ; and so long will even the unsuccessful struggles of virtue be *more excellent than the mountains of robbers.*

WHEN the storms of adversity arise, the good man can bid defiance to their rudest blasts, wrapped up and incircled in his own integrity. When outward springs of comfort are dried up, he can be satisfied from himself, from a consciousness of his own uprightness, and from a sense of the favor and approbation of the Supreme Being.

A GOOD christian engaged in a good cause can upon better principles adopt the language of a gallant Roman, *If I succeed, my friends, we shall all have occasion to rejoice ; if not, yet Brutus shall rejoice.*

WHEN called to suffer according to the will of God, the true christian will reflect that he is only called to tread in the steps of the great captain of his salvation, who was made perfect through suffering ; who when surrounded by a sea of trouble, yet did not let go *the cause that he had in hand*, but set his face forward like the flint, and did not fail, neither was discouraged, until he had brought forth judgment unto victory.

AMIDST the most insolent triumphs of successful wickedness, he will not fret himself because of evil doers, for *he hath seen that their day is coming*, he is assured by



God that cannot lie, that *the wicked shall soon be cut down as the grass, and wither as the green herb.* By faith he anticipates the glorious and terrible day, when the Son of God shall visibly descend to bring the wickedness of the wicked to a fearful and a perpetual end, and to establish the just in the abundance of peace; then shall that soul which hath long been filled with the scorn of those who are at ease, and with the despitifulness of the proud, be made to hear the *joyful sound, infinitely sweeter than the harps of angels, well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joys of thy Lord.*

Now to God, &c.

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