

**THE ETERNITY OF GOD CONSIDERED
IN RELATION TO THE COURSE OF
CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE AND
VIRTUE: A SERMON, PREACHED AT
EXETER, JULY 20TH, 1842**

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The Eternity of God Considered in Relation to the Course of Christian Knowledge and Virtue: A Sermon, preached at exeter, July 20th, 1842 by John Kentish

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JOHN KENTISH

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*The Eternity of God considered in relation
to the course of Christian Knowledge and
Virtue.*

A

S E R M O N,

PREACHED AT EXETER, JULY 20th, 1842,

ON OCCASION OF

THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY MEETING

OF THE

SOCIETY OF UNITARIAN CHRISTIANS,

ESTABLISHED IN THE WEST OF ENGLAND,

FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE AND THE PRACTICE
OF VIRTUE BY THE DISTRIBUTION OF BOOKS.

BY JOHN KENTISH.

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Ms. A. 1. 1. 1.
1797
Smithson Institution
(Class of 1797)

" Prime, self-existing cause, and end of all
That in the scale of being fill their place ;
Above our human region, or below,
Set and sustained ;—Thou, Thou alone
Art everlasting ! "

WORDSWORTH.

TO THE
REVEREND JOHN KENRICK, M.A.,
HIS FRIEND THROUGH FOR THE GREATER PART OF THE
LAST FIFTY YEARS,
WHO, EVEN MORE THAN THE PREACHER,
COMBINES DEEPLY-INTERESTING RECOLLECTIONS
WITH THE ORIGIN AND PROGRESS
OF THE
WESTERN UNITARIAN SOCIETY,
THESE PAGES ARE AFFECTIONATELY
INSCRIBED.

This Sermon is printed at the request of those who appointed me to the honourable office of Preacher before the Western Unitarian Society, on its fiftieth Anniversary Meeting. At their desire, too, I have subjoined an *Appendix*, containing a sketch of the History of the Society.

J. K.

October, 1842.

A SERMON,

8c.

2 PETER, III. 8, 9.

BE NOT IGNORANT OF THIS ONE THING,
THAT ONE DAY IS WITH THE LORD AS A THOUSAND
YEARS, AND A THOUSAND YEARS AS ONE DAY.
THE LORD IS NOT SLACK CONCERNING HIS PROMISE,
AS SOME MEN COUNT SLACKNESS.

THE very interesting circumstances in which I now appear before you, fix my thoughts upon, "the Eternity of God, with relation to the course of Christian knowledge and virtue." Amidst the flight of years, and the changes attending it, and on this spot of hallowed recollections,* we have once more joined to-

* George's Meeting-house.

gether in adoring Him, whose existence Time cannot measure, or its vicissitudes affect. No truth can be more certain than that He liveth for ever: none, when duly considered, is more valuable; while few things are so difficult as to form any just notions of this attribute.

Yet Apostles and "Prophet-bards" are here our teachers; and our views of the Divine Eternity may be assisted by the text, which gives a reason for the seeming delay of the Lord in fulfilling his promise. In language borrowed substantially from the Jewish Scriptures,* Peter not only holds out encouragement to the believer and warning to the sinner, but conveys an enlightened, impressive and practical description of God's everlasting being. The sense of his words is, that both the scantiest and the largest portions of Time subsist only as to mortals; inasmuch as they cannot be applicable to the Creator, who, though he fully sees the difference of them in respect of his creatures, has Himself neither beginning of days nor end of years.

When I have endeavoured to show the correctness of this statement, I will speak of the influence which such a contemplation of the Eternity of God should exercise over our judgments, feelings and actions generally. I will speak not least of its bearings upon the object and the rise, the labours and the hopes, of the

Society whose fiftieth anniversary-meeting we celebrate to-day.

I. In the life of Man, as we usually behold him, half a century is a very considerable period : a long term in prospect, brief as it seems on the review. Say, nevertheless, that, under favourable circumstances, "the days of our years are threescore years and ten ;" say that, "by reason of strength, they are fourscore years." Even add to them at your pleasure ; still, what are thousands, millions, nay, myriads and myriads of ages, when you meditate on "The Everlasting God" ? In the contrast, they vanish to a point. Exhaust the computations of Science, give the utmost range to the powers of Imagination, and you will yet fail of knowing in what ETERNITY consists. Would you but approach to a right estimate of it ? Your minds must pass through a very different process from this. You must look upon "Eternity" as a mode of being, which has nothing in common with Time ; of being so perfect that it can belong only unto God.

While dependent creatures find it hard to conceive of the essentially independent Creator, those who live within the limits of Time are, for the same reason, almost overwhelmed when they think on "The King Eternal." Time is nothing separately from ourselves, or beings like ourselves ; no more than an effect and token of derived existence. We acquire the notion of it from our consciousness of a succession of ideas. If this consciousness is interrupted, we are no longer