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BY GEORGE HOWARD,

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ORATION,

Pronounced at Tarborough, N. C., the 22 May, 1850, on the occasion of laying the Corner Stone of the Monument to the memory of Louis D. WILSON.

By Wm. F. Dancy, Esq.

FELLOW CITIZENS: I have come forward on this occasion no less in obedience to your commands, than to the promptings of my own heart.

If any have been drawn hither to-day with the idle hope of hearing any attempt at oratorical display, or the no less ambitious language of unmeaning eulogy, then is the expectation vain. In the few simple and hurried observations I am about to make, I employ no eloquence but truth, no embellishment but fact. "I come to bury Caesar—not to praise him."

A wise, virtuous and patriotic public servant has been taken from us—struck down by the hand of death, in the midst of his usefulness and in the very harness of his public labor. When such a man dies, it is meet that those whom he has served should do honor to his memory. It is meet that those who have enjoyed the benefits of his councils, should record them for the benefit of the generation which succeeds. To unfold the examples and display the virtues of those who have acted well their part in the great drama of life, is a matter of solemn duty. It springs from a sentiment honorable to the human heart. It stimulates the young to acts of generous emulation and rivalry, and encourages them to the performance of similar deeds of usefulness and honor.

Louis Dicken Wilson was born in the county of Edgecombe, on the 12th May, 1789. The era of his birth was an eventful one in our history. The Articles of Confederation which had feebly banded the States together during the progress of a seven years war, had just given place to a more firm and compact union under the new Constitution. The new Government had just gone into operation. What is now a well developed practical reality, was then an untried and doubtful experiment. The country not yet recovered from the effects of an exhausting war, a war in which her energies had been taxed to the utmost, lay panting and prostrate. In the new and then unsettled condition of things, the means of a liberal education were within the reach of few. Private fortunes were rare, and the schoolmaster had not yet gone abroad upon his mission of benevolence and love. With such advantages however as that unlettered era afforded, we find young Wilson, at the age of eighteen, an occupant of a counting house in Washington, North Carolina. Habits of industry, perseverance and punctuality, in the discharge of his duties, here formed, early won the regard of his employer—habits which adhered to him in after life, and the constant exercise of which made him what he was in an eminent degree, a thoroughly practical and useful man. 'Twas here too he laid the foundation of that remarkable knowledge of accounts which he possessed, and which rendered his services invaluable in every public position he was afterwards called to fill.

His apprenticeship ended, he returns to Edgecombe and commences the business of a merchant in this place—which was successfully prosecuted for many years.

In 1815, he was elected to represent the people of Edgecombe in the lower house of the General Assembly. This was the commencement of his public career. The period of his entrance into public life was not well calculated to heighten his ideas of the profession in which he had embarked. It was an era of uncommon bitterness of feeling—a bitterness engendered by the then existing war, and which

invaded even the sanctuary of the social circle. As in the late war with Mexico, parties were fiercely arrayed against each other upon its general merits, policy and propriety. The conduct of the President was assailed, in no measured terms. Upon a resolution introduced into the House of Commons approving the war and pledging the co-operation of the State in its maintenance, an angry and protracted debate arose. His republican instincts naturally arrayed him on the side of the country, and to this resolution he gave a warm and decided support; and together with Bedford Brown and others, who have since become prominent in North Carolina politics, was mainly instrumental in securing its passage. From this period to the day of his death, with only an occasional interruption, he continued to represent the people of Edgecombe, either in the upper or lower House of the Legislature.

In 1824, he was for the first time elected a member of the Senate.

In 1835, he was chosen a member of the Convention called to amend the Constitution of the State.

In 1842, the only time his party had held the ascendancy since the amendment of the Constitution, he was elected Speaker of the Senate, and by virtue of his office Lieut. Governor of the State.

Enjoying as he did in a high degree the confidence of the party with which he acted, he was repeatedly placed upon its Electoral Ticket for President and Vice President.

During the whole period of thirty years, in which he was engaged in the public service, no man exercised a larger or more extended influence in the county of Edgecombe, none shared so largely in the popular confidence and regard—and to the day of his death so potent was the sway he wielded, so strong was his hold upon the affections of those he served, that no amount of talent or worth however great, it is believed, could have availed against him. The uniform and ardent support he received, was the grateful return of a confiding constituency for services faithfully and efficiently rendered. The history of public men affords few examples of devotion more true, of popularity more lasting—a popularity not run after, but that which followed his good deeds—a popularity, the result of noble ends by noble means attained."

His career as a representative of the people was rather distinguished by high and inflexible devotion to principle, than any dazzling display of intellectual power. Principle—eternal principle was the polar star of his political guidance. With the ever-varying and ever-veering opinions of men, he held no faith. While men change, principles are immutable. A constant recognition of this truth influenced his opinions, controlled his judgment and gave tone to his political conduct. Truth, in the investigation of public measures, was the object of his anxious search and diligent inquiry. This attained, from it there was neither "variableness nor shadow of turning." Accordingly few public men in North Carolina were more consistent in their course—few could look back upon a long public career with more pride and self-satisfaction.

It was the saying of Sir Robert Walpole, a distinguished politician in the reign of Queen Anne, that "every man has his price." This remark, based upon a profound knowledge of the human heart, has lost none of its force by time; and the history of our own day affords many melancholy examples of its truth. In the ever-occurring conflicts of interest and ambition, the immutable principles of truth and justice are overlooked and disregarded when they stand in the way of selfish aims and personal aggrandizement. The people are lost sight of in the struggle for power and place, and their interests instead of being paramount become subordinate to the end in view. Politics becomes a trade, and the most vital public concerns are articles of traffic among contending factions. Politicians are the managers behind the curtain, and the people are the puppets who dance for the amusement of the crowd. *Not so however with Louis D. Wilson.* Confidence in man was with him a matter of faith—a living principle, a passion which took possession of his

soul, controlled his opinions and influenced his political action. Occasional departures from the line of rectitude did not shake his faith. After the tempest of passion had spent its force, a season of calm and sober reflection would come, when whatever irregularities had been committed, would be rectified. Accordingly at no period of his career, whether at the flood-tide of his unbounded popularity, or falling beneath the censure of his constituents, no prize however alluring, no honor however dazzling, could shake his purpose, or swerve him from the path of duty.

*Justum tenacem propositi virum,
Non civium ardor prava jubentium,
Non vultus instantis tyranni,
Mente quatit solida.*

'Twas this which gave him such unbounded popularity with the masses—a popularity which remained unimpaired in life—a popularity so solid and enduring that nothing could shake.

But if a rigid and inflexible adherence to principle constituted a prominent trait of his representative character, his laborious business habits made his services invaluable as a legislator. While his efforts in debate always commanded attention by his pleasing and persuasive style of elocution, and the sincerity of manner with which his convictions were uttered, it was in the *Committee Room*, that work shop in the legislative laboratory, that his services were acknowledged and appreciated. Here his large experience and business capacity found a proper theatre for their exercise, and here too the mature fruits of an active intellect, and the rich treasures of a sound and discriminating judgment were brought to bear. In this connection it may not be improper to add, that though he had never made the science of Law a study, yet he was, in the Legislature, uniformly assigned a prominent position on the Judiciary Committee—a committee most usually composed of the ablest lawyers of the body.

But if his public services were valuable, his civil ones were no less so. In the various civil employments in which he was called to act—from the highest to the lowest, whether exercising the functions of *Chief Officer* of the Court, or participating in the concerns of every day life, he was the same sagacious, practical, useful citizen. The arrogant and the self sufficient, the imperious and the proud, may scoff at employments so unpretending, as unworthy the aspirations of commanding intellect; but it should be remembered, that in the sober realities of life, it is the useful and not the ornamental, the solid rather than the showy, that gives to character its highest value. The able Editor of the *Wilmington Commercial*, who in consideration of his long and valuable public services is justly entitled to the appellation of "Father of the N. Carolina Press"—paid the following well merited tribute to the character of Col. Wilson upon the occasion of his death. Differing, as they did radically upon the political measures of the day, I have selected this from a number of newspaper notices, as not liable to the imputation of having been penned under the influence of party bias.

"*Death of Col. Wilson.*—In our Mexican news the reader will find an account of the death of Col. Louis D. Wilson. It comes in so authentic a shape that we have no reason for hope that it may turn out otherwise. He is dead—a gallant son of North Carolina, who abandoned the sweets of domestic life, and the enjoyment of an ample estate, to perform that which he conceived to be his duty to his country.

"Col. Wilson was not a man of brilliant talents, but he was much above mediocrity, and his assiduity and integrity in the various important stations which he filled commended him to the high esteem of his fellow citizens. He had a reliable judgment, a conscientious perception of right, and much firmness of purpose. His manners were peculiarly agreeable—equally devoid of haughtiness and the Frenchified frippery so popular with many.

"If he was somewhat of a warm politician, it is to be attributed to the ardor of his feelings and not to the corruption of his principles. We have been with and against him in the political arena and never found that he permitted political hostility to encroach upon the boundaries of social kindness or personal amenity.

"We join with those who most deeply regret the death of Col. Louis D. Wilson, and sincerely sympathize with his afflicted family. To the people of his own county Edgecombe, the loss will be severe, for there his usefulness was appreciated and his worth acknowledged by those who knew him intimately in all his social as well as political relations."

A distinguishing trait in the domestic character of Col. Wilson was his deep devotion to the county of Edgecombe. The history of public men affords nothing like it. It was sincere, solemn and abiding. It was prominently displayed in every act of his life and most touchingly exemplified in the hour of death. In the prosecution of schemes of ambition, public men are too prone to forget the steps by which they ascended to power and to turn with ingratitude from those who have elevated them. *Not so however with Louis D. Wilson.* Ingratitude had no place in his bosom. Loyalty to Edgecombe was the ruling impulse of his heart. Born and reared upon her soil, possessing for more than a quarter of a century the almost unbounded confidence of her people, representing her interests in the public councils abroad and participating actively in all public matters at home, the feeling which had grown up in his bosom was deep, affectionate and parental—the love of a parent for his child. He was indeed the father of this people, and loved them with all the devotion which pertains to that most cherished relation. Public men may learn from his life a lesson to cheer them amid the many trials to which it is incident, and strengthen them for the performance of its duties. They may learn that a long life of honest and devoted public service is followed by the most substantial rewards. They may learn also, that gratitude is a cardinal virtue of the popular heart. The people reward with confidence and kindness those who uphold and maintain their cherished opinions.

Another marked and prominent trait in the character of Col. Wilson was his *charity*—charity of thought, word and deed—charity in all things—a charity which displayed itself, not in mere empty profession and unmeaning parade, but in the exercise, of a liberal and enlarged benevolence. It pervaded his thoughts, influenced his sentiments and was deeply interwoven with every fibre of his heart. It was the cap-stone on the solid column of his moral worth, which gave beauty and finish to his character. The faults and frailties of his fellow men found in him, one ever ready to forgive, palliate and excuse. The destitute and down-hearted sons of misfortune never turned unheeded from his door, and to the tale of sorrow and distress he listened with all the artless simplicity of a child. Numerous instances, coming within the personal knowledge of the speaker, might be here detailed, but that which surpasses them all and adds the crowning glory to his many acts of beneficence and love, was his munificent bequest to the poor of Edgecombe, in the last hour of existence. The simple statement of this fact speaks its own praise and constitutes his claim to the proud title of *benefactor of Edgecombe*.

I come now to the closing scenes in the drama of his not uneventful life. Having served his people for thirty years with fidelity and zeal, in every position in which he was called to act, an occasion arose which demanded a yet greater sacrifice. *The war with Mexico ensues.* An arrogant and vain-glorious power, in the imbecility of its rage and blindness of its passions, invades our country, and sheds the blood of American citizens on American soil. The Republic calls her sons to arms. A requisition is made upon our own State. The incidents connected with that call are too familiar to be here repeated. The delay in answering it, produced the most gloomy forebodings for the result. All felt that our honor was at stake, and upon the issue depended the continuance of our title to that patriotic renown won by so many glorious revolutionary achievements. Amid the hopes, the doubts, the anxieties, the fears that pervaded the public mind, one who stood conspicuous in the eyes of the State and high in the confidence of his fellow citizens—a man holding an elevated public position—a man of delicate frame and feeble constitutional vigor—one whose head was bleached by the frosts of near sixty winters—"an old man broken by the storms of State"—this man, (shall I name him?) this man threw himself in the breach. The influence of his example is magical. It stimulated the wavering and encouraged the irresolute. His own county is the first in the field—the Regiment is

raised and the honor of the State is saved. Among the countless deeds of patriotic devotion to which the war gave birth, we may safely challenge a comparison with this. It stands out marked, prominent, and almost without a parallel. Individual examples of heroism and personal prowess on the field of battle were numerous; but here all the usual incentives which stimulate the young to a love of glory—honor, fame, applause in the world's eye—were wanting. It was a generous offering up of life, a heroic self-sacrifice on the altar of duty and devotion. In the humble capacity of a captain, he marches to Mexico and reaches the head quarters of the army. Here, while at the post of duty, the President, in consideration of his advanced age and high character, tenders him the appointment of Colonel of the 12th Infantry. After much hesitation, springing from a disinclination to leave those with whom he had marched to the tented field, he accepts—repairs to Vera Cruz, and while laborously engaged in preparing his command for a forward movement to the Capital, is seized with the prevailing fever and expired on the 12th of Aug. 1847. He died not as the brave love to die, amid the din of battle and beneath the folds of his country's flag—but by the slow hand of disease—in a distant land—far from home, its kindred and its comforts—with no familiar face or cheering voice to soothe the parting hour of existence.

"By foreign hands his dying eyes were closed,

"By strangers honor'd and by strangers mourn'd."

'Could it have been permitted us to unveil the secret sentiments of that dying hour—to know the last pulsations of that patriotic heart—when the shores of time were fast receding in the distance, and the uncertain future came looming into view—what a world of thought, what an intensity of feeling was crowded into that brief moment of life! His far distant home, his beloved Edgecombe, and the thousand endearing associations connected with her—this people whom he had served from boyhood to old age, with a fidelity which knew no change—were the last sad images which flitted before his dying gaze—the last throbbings of his honest heart.

Citizens of Edgecombe! Inheritors of his name—his character and his fame! If you value private virtue and public worth—if you would set before the rising generation examples of principle, patriotism and unwavering devotion to duty—point them to Louis D. Wilson. Edgecombe had no worthier son than he—none more deeply devoted to her interests. A long life of usefulness and honor was given to her service. For her he lived and for her he died.

Masons! His whole life was the constant practice of the cardinal virtues of your creed, exemplified in a most touching manner, in the hour of death.

Gentlemen of the Monumental Committee! A deed of duty is done, a work of gratitude is accomplished! and we have gathered together for the last time, to rekindle the holy fires of affection, to commemorate the virtue of departed worth, and to offer upon the altar of devotion our last oblations of loyalty and love. The majestic column which will crown the base—the corner stone of which we this day erect—while it records the simple tale of his virtue and his worth, does honor to the zeal and industry you have brought to the discharge of your duty; and long after the animated forms of those who are assembled here to day shall be numbered among the "sheeted dead," his noble example of patriotism will speak to your children from the sculptured marble, animating them to deeds of usefulness and honor!

Dreadful Steamboat Accident.—The steamboat Griffith, from Buffalo, bound up Lake Erie, took fire on the 17th inst., when about twenty miles from port, and burned to the water's edge. About two hundred and fifty persons perished either by fire or water. On the succeeding day two hundred and twenty victims of all ages and both sexes were buried in one trench dug in the high bluff, nearly opposite the scene of the tragedy. The sight must have been melancholy in the extreme.