

A D D R E S S

AT THE

O B S E Q U I E S

OF

MR. SINGLETON A. MERCER:

DELIVERED IN THE

Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia,

NOVEMBER 13, 1867,

BY HENRY A. BOARDMAN, D.D.



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A MEMORIAL.

ADDRESS.

THIS is one of those rare instances in which the death of a private citizen assumes the proportions of a public bereavement. On every side the announcement has elicited tokens of sympathy and sorrow, which attest the high place MR. MERCER held in the respect and confidence of our community. And now that we are met to pay this last tribute of affection to his remains, if the occasion called for an appropriate Scripture text, there is one which could not fail to rise spontaneously to the lips of many present, —“MARK THE PERFECT MAN, AND BEHOLD THE UPRIGHT; FOR THE END OF THAT MAN IS PEACE.” Anywhere within the wide circle of his influence, the first thought suggested by a reference to SINGLETON A. MERCER, is that of “uprightness.” That name is, in Philadelphia, a synonyme for integrity of the very purest and loftiest type. It was the integrity which rests upon the immutable foundation, is guarded by the sanctions, and informed by the spirit, of the Gospel of

Christ. Inflexible in its principle, pure in its inspiration, comprehensive in its domain, it pervaded his whole character; it moulded his words and actions; it impressed itself upon the very lineaments of his noble visage. No one could spend a half hour in his company, without feeling that he was a man to be implicitly trusted in his every act and utterance. It was not the mere honesty we prize in the business of buying and selling—a sterling virtue, though a homely one. It was the rectitude which scorns all finesse, equivocation, and concealment; which will take no advantage of people's ignorance or inexperience; which swears to its own hurt, and changes not; which aims at carrying into every transaction, the spirit of that Divine maxim, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."

With this prime endowment were associated kindred qualities, intellectual and moral, which gave a remarkable symmetry to his character.

Men of such robust integrity are sometimes stoical in temperament and stern in manner. Those who were admitted to his confidence, know that his sensibilities exceeded a woman's in tenderness, and that the gentleness of a child was diffused through all his nature. Such benignity, again, frequently degenerates into a

capricious imprudence or an amiable instability. He was eminently cautious and provident; and firm as a rock. It was at once the law of his mental structure and the prompting of his intelligent conviction, to proceed with deliberation. The grave questions that came before him, were carefully examined and weighed before he decided them. In the opinion of some of his commercial friends, his caution was extreme; he would throw the lead where, as they saw things, there were no soundings within many leagues. But the result often reproved their incredulity, and vindicated his sagacity.

In this rare combination of opposite, though not incompatible, virtues, we find the key to his success as a Financier. Here was his chosen field. Trained as a Merchant under the best auspices our city supplied,* he early developed a taste for this, the most abstruse department of commerce. With most business men, Finance is simply an art. With him it was a science. He

* We must all feel it to be cause for thankfulness that the venerable head of that ancient and honorable House, is still spared to go in and out among us. Nor is it the least of the many claims which MR. JOHN A. BROWN has upon the gratitude of this community, that SINGLETON A. MERCER should have received his early mercantile training in his counting-room.

studied it in its principles and in its history. He made himself familiar with the fiscal systems of Europe. He dissected our own heterogeneous Banking schemes, and separated in his own mind the precious elements from the vile. He traced with a calm, philosophic eye the rise, progress, and final catastrophe of our successive mercantile crises. Few men saw more clearly the perils which environ our commercial affairs, or better understood those national traits in which they have their rooting, and the ever-recurring causes which foster and multiply them. As the natural consequence, when he took his seat at the head of the largest Banking-house of our State, he grasped its helm with a firm hand. He knew the craft he was to guide, and the untoward sea he was to navigate. And sustained by a skilful crew, who shared in his intelligence and were in sympathy with his policy, he kept steadily on his way without serious disaster or detention, and after the lapse of a score of years, resigned his cherished charge sound and intact into other hands.

In these facts, MR. MERCER'S administration has its best eulogy. And a very emphatic eulogy it is. I speak to some who know the surroundings of such a position much better than I can describe them. But even to the eye of a super-

ficial observer, a Bank-parlor must appear a severe crucible to character. Not to go into details, there are two classes of experiences incident to a sphere like this, each of which spreads its dangerous toils around the feet. One is the familiar scene incident to a state of prosperity, wherein the officers of these Institutions are daily solicited to employ their corporate funds in illicit or at least irregular speculations. The other is the sorrowful importunity of embarrassed men imploring, it may be with tears, the succor to which they have no valid claim, but which alone can avert an impending bankruptcy. To repel these temptations—steadfastly to resist the syren voice of unrighteous speculation, and so to decline the plaintive cry for relief, as to betray no trust, and yet rather soothe than lacerate sensibilities already quivering with pain,—here, surely, is the function of a truly great financier. And there is no man amongst us who has passed through this ordeal more frequently or with larger success, than SINGLETON MERCER.

The value of such an example among a commercial people, cannot easily be exaggerated. The characteristic tendencies incorporated with our great national interests—our trafficking, our internal improvements, our journalism, our politics, our religion even—are towards excess, per-

haps towards recklessness. All our enginery, intellectual and social no less than material, is of the high-pressure order. Everything moves to the pulsations of the locomotive and the telegraph. The beneficial results are manifold and stupendous. They amaze the older nations. But the hazards are immense. When this colossal mechanism gives way in any radical part, or escapes control, it pours over the land a mighty tide of ruin, like the devastation which follows the vast freshets of our Western rivers. To neutralize this danger, it is of prime importance that our great moneyed institutions be in the hands of wise, well-poised, upright men; men of progress, but conservative men; not sciolists and pretenders, still less mercenary adventurers; but financiers elevated above the din and dust of the trading-marts, and capable of taking a calm survey of the horizon, and reading the signs as a clever seaman reads the clouds. For the last quarter of a century it has been the good fortune of our city to have its financial affairs largely in the custody of men of this character. They will be the first to concede the rare merit of their lamented associate, and to recognize his potential influence in nourishing and perpetuating that healthful system of finance which, by God's blessing, has contributed so much to the

prosperity of our ancient commonwealth. In this view, our whole population are debtors to himself and his brethren of kindred views and in kindred institutions: for there can be no family amongst us which has not profited, directly or indirectly, by the wisdom and fidelity they have brought to the discharge of their high trusts.

There is another interesting aspect in which our friend may be contemplated in his official position. It gave him opportunities of testifying his devoted love of country. In the course of our late terrible war, there was a crisis at which the government was brought face to face with the appalling catastrophe of national bankruptcy. The Banks of our three great Atlantic cities met in convention at New York, to deliberate upon the subject. All who were present felt it to be a question of life or death to the Banks, and probably to the country also. Conflicting opinions agitated the body. The perturbations of the hour were strong and deep. The issue hung in suspense. MR. MERCER felt that the pregnant moment had come, and he *must* speak. Not without a severe inward struggle, he arose, and addressed his brethren in a speech displaying such a mastery of the complex problems involved in the case, and marked by such candor, such cogency of argument, and such un-

faltering patriotism, that it told with irresistible effect upon the whole Conference. His two able and accomplished associates from our city followed in a similar strain—and the crisis passed by. The Banks resolved to stand by the government in its time of peril. We are all reaping the fruits of that decision to-day.

As in his official acts, so in his personal bearing, our friend identified himself with his country. To her service he not only gave his money with an exuberant hand, but what in his precarious health was more than money, his time and counsel and exhausting labors. His whole heart was bound up in the pending issues. It was the patriotism, not of passion, but of principle. Tenacious of his own convictions, he was free from all taint of malignity or bitterness. As calm and just in war as in peace, he conceded to others that liberty of opinion which he claimed for himself. Among his friends and neighbors there were many who differed with him, not as to the merits of the contest, not as to the paramount necessity of preserving the Constitution and the Union; but as to matters of detail. He recognized their patriotism; and rebuked the intolerance which could brook no dissent from its own arbitrary standard of men and methods. He saw and frankly acknowledged, that such

men might favor a different policy, simply *because* they loved their whole country with a devotion as pure and ardent as his own. And he deplored the needless and hurtful estrangements which occurred among those who were aiming at the same results, and daily offering the same prayers for God's blessing upon the national cause. Let us hope that as the war recedes from our view, this spirit of truth and tolerance may resume its sway over men of all sects and parties.

You will expect me to speak of MR. MERCER'S Christian character. Have I not been speaking of it? We may no more eliminate his Christianity from the traits and the example we have been contemplating, than we can sever it from the man himself. This *was* his religion. Accepting with an intelligent faith the entire body of Scripture truth, renouncing all personal merit, and trusting solely to the blood and righteousness of CHRIST for pardon and salvation, he carried his unaffected piety not into his devotional hours and Sunday services merely, but into every sphere and every relation. By nature and training a singularly pure-minded man, the religious element blended itself with all his powers, invigorating every honorable sentiment, embellishing every inherited grace, and spreading over his whole character and demeanor that nameless air

and tone which no set phrase can define, but which every one who approached him, felt as the infallible savor of real goodness. But it must not be inferred from this, that his Christianity revealed itself only in the integrity, candor, and kindness of his daily life. His paramount concern was with the cause of Christ. He loved the Church above his chief joy. He could say without a figure:

“For her my tears shall fall,
For her my prayers ascend;
To her my cares and toils be given
'Till toils and cares shall end.”

Not only was he prompt in responding to the ordinary objects of Christian benevolence, but he testified his deep sympathy with the advancement of religion and the well-being of his kind in a form not to be misunderstood. He has his fitting memorial in the “WEST SPRUCE STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.” I do not mean that it is his memorial exclusively; this would be very unjust to the noble Christian men associated with him in that enterprise. But I wish to say that but for SINGLETON MERCER, that church would not have been built. It was to him I went first of all with the proposition to send out a colony from my congregation to establish a new church.

With him I consulted week by week through anxious months. The suggestion was distasteful to him—that is, in all its personal aspects. He was happy in his existing relations. He could not bear the thought of leaving a church where he had been worshipping for a quarter of a century, and where his children had been born and brought up. He foresaw the difficulties which might be anticipated in venturing upon an undertaking of such magnitude. These questions were long and frequently canvassed by himself and the few Christian men enlisted with him. And when at length they were led to believe that the voice which summoned them to the task was the voice of God, they embarked in it with an energy and a liberality above all praise. Of the invaluable services rendered by his coadjutors, this is not the time to speak. They will bear witness to the accuracy of the statement when I say that, from the inception of this enterprise to the day of his death, he bestowed upon it his time and thought and care without stint. To it he dedicated the fruits of his ripe financial experience. His funds he lavished upon it with a munificent generosity. And whatever beneficent results it may please God, in the course of successive generations, to achieve through the instrumentality of that church, will be traceable,

in some essential measure, to the piety and zeal of SINGLETON A. MERCER.

I have alluded to his precarious health. Several years have elapsed since it began to fail. Some insidious maladies intrenched themselves in his system. While these were often checked and moderated, his life became thenceforward a constant struggle with death. His friends saw with concern that the conflict was proving too much for him. Possibly it might have been wise to divest himself sooner of the weighty responsibilities of his position. But the Board over which he presided, proposed such arrangements as might mitigate his burdens; and he felt a natural and laudable ambition not to retire from his post, should Providence so permit, until his Presidency had completed its term of twenty years. The last few months of this period were probably the most trying of his life. Repeated illnesses had brought him to the verge of the grave. And then there came that crushing affliction, which the literature and the piety of all nations conspire with the Bible itself in signalizing as one of the crowning sorrows of humanity, the sudden death of an only son. To such a father, it could not be otherwise than an overwhelming blow. He clung to the Rock of Ages for support; and if he did not sink in the

great billows, it was because an Almighty arm sustained him. But it was like the ordeal of fire both to his natural affections and to his Christian faith. And he came out of it purified indeed and brought "nearer to God," but with a constitution riven and shattered beyond the reach of earthly skill to mend. The sole prospect of relief lay in a protracted foreign tour. And with a heavy heart he settled his affairs, and went abroad.

Among the various testimonials of respect and sympathy which the occasion elicited, was one from the "Clearing House Association," which deeply affected him. It was in the following terms, and bore the personal signature of every Bank President of our city:

PHILADELPHIA CLEARING HOUSE ASSOCIATION, }
January 7th, 1867. }

WHEREAS, we learn that Mr. S. A. MERCER has, in consequence of ill health, relinquished the Presidency of the Farmers' and Mechanics' National Bank, over which he has presided during a period of financial interest and responsibility rarely, if ever, equalled:

Resolved, That a committee be appointed to communicate to MR. MERCER an expression of the high regard and esteem in which his character is held by this Association, and that we feel that we have lost the benefit and pleasure of intercourse with a gentleman whom we have recognized as ever faithful to the large trusts reposed in him, earnest and efficient in the support of all public interests, courteous and kind in official and personal action, and that we are

not only deprived of an agreeable associate and able counsellor, but also of a highly esteemed personal friend.

Resolved, That we tender to MR. MERCER our heartiest wishes for his return to his home and friends with restored health.

This paper reached him in New York on the eve of his sailing. And he replied to it in a letter expressive of his very grateful appreciation of the fraternal kindness of his brethren, and heartily reciprocating their generous wishes. It would be superfluous to state, that he carried with him the affectionate regrets of his own Board of Directors, and of the entire staff of officers and clerks belonging to his Bank. The happiest relations had subsisted between them and himself; and they justly recognized in him, not simply the official head of their institution, but their faithful friend.

The sequel is soon told. The change of country and climate brought no material amelioration of his health. A fresh bereavement, the loss of a beloved brother, followed swiftly upon his steps, and renewed the pressure upon his spirits. New and threatening symptoms revealed themselves during his sojourn in Switzerland. And early in October, after nine weary months of travel, he was removed to Paris, to receive (as it proved) a fortnight later, his summons home. His con-

flicts, his wanderings, and his sufferings are at an end. He has gone up to join the blood-washed company around the throne. "MARK THE PERFECT MAN, AND BEHOLD THE UPRIGHT; FOR THE END OF THAT MAN IS PEACE."

To his bereaved family we tender the tribute of our respectful sympathy. It was not given him to "die among his kindred;" but it was the privilege of the afflicted partner of his life and his youthful daughter, to solace his pains, and minister to him throughout his illness. To them and to his children at home, to those upon whom the loss of another brother must fall with unwonted severity, and to this entire circle of mourners, it may well be a comfort to reflect that few families have such a husband, father, and brother to lose. In his character and life you have a priceless legacy. By how much his manifold graces have ever shed their grateful radiance over all your domestic relations, by so much have you the more reason to praise Him who made him what he was, and to endeavor to exercise a feeling of resignation to the dispensation which has taken him to his reward. May the Divine Spirit, the only effectual Comforter, help you to appropriate the precious consolations which are mingled with your bereavement.

It were quite pertinent to this occasion to com-

mend the character and career of MR. MERCER to the careful study of the merchants and financiers of our city; and especially to dwell upon the rare value of such an example to our young men. But it is time to bring these services to a close.

One privilege only I must crave. This comes home to me as a personal sorrow. Most of those who are present were linked with MR. MERCER by some interesting relation. To me he was a FRIEND. Nearly thirty-four years have elapsed since he identified himself with my pastoral charge. During all that period he has had my respect, my esteem, my confidence. With the lapse of time esteem ripened into love, and confidence into intimacy. He did not leave me to question whether the affection I cherished for him was fully reciprocated. I have been instructed by him on subjects proper to his studies and alien from mine. I have sought his advice in doubt and perplexity, and found him one of the safest and wisest of counsellors. He has given me his generous sympathy in my troubles; we have wept together over his own. No civil convulsions, no ecclesiastical changes, no private affinities or antipathies ever disturbed the perfect harmony of our intercourse. Nor was this the result of a covenanted silence on contro-

verted topics. However diverse our views, there was no subject upon which we could not converse freely together, without the slightest abatement of mutual respect and affection. In so far as I know, there was never one dissonant word between us, nor even the transient breath of a single discordant feeling. I loved and honored him as one of the purest and noblest of men. And I mourn him as one of the TRUEST AND BEST FRIENDS a gracious Providence ever gave me.

Perhaps I err in permitting these private feelings to find expression here. But there are those who can appreciate every word that has been uttered. For how many others can look upon that bier and say, "I have lost a friend!" It is well that we unite in doing honor to his remains. But the best tribute we can pay his memory is to emulate his virtues, and follow him as he followed CHRIST. Here was the sure foundation upon which his character reposed; the source of his strength; the spring of his serenity; the secret of his power. He was "A SERVANT OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST." With Him it was his cherished aim to walk. From Him he received "grace for grace" as his daily avocations or trials required. In Him he found his "wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption." And to Him, as we doubt not, he has now gone

—another victor over death and the grave, to join the immortal song of the Church triumphant. May we all experience the same mercy, and through “the unsearchable riches of Christ,” attain at length to “the inheritance of the saints in light.”

“ Who was He, for whom our tears
 Flowed, and will not cease to flow?
 Full of honors and of years,
 In the dust his head lies low.

He was One, whose open face
 Did his inmost heart reveal;
 One, who wore with meekest grace,
 On his forehead, Heaven’s broad seal.

Kindness all his looks expressed,
 Charity was every word;
 Him the eye beheld, and bless’d,
 And the ear rejoiced that heard.

Like a patriarchal sage,
 Holy, humble, courteous, mild,
 He could blend the awe of age
 With the sweetness of a child.

Wealth, which prodigals had deem’d
 Worth the soul’s uncounted cost;
 Wealth, which misers had esteemed
 Cheap, though heaven itself were lost:

This, with free unsparing hand
To the poorest child of need,
This he threw around the land,
Like the sower's precious seed.

In the world's great harvest-day,
Every grain on every ground,
Stony, thorny, by the way,
Shall an hundred-fold be found.

Help to all he did dispense,
Gold, instruction, raiment, food,
Like the gifts of Providence,
To the evil and the good.

Deeds of mercy, deeds unknown,
Shall eternity record,
Which he durst not call his own,
For he did them to the Lord.

Full of faith, at length he died,
And, victorious in the race,
Won the crown for which he vied—
Not of merit, but of grace."