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A
FUNERAL DISCOURSE,

ON THE

DEATH OF WILLIAM H. WHITE,

OF

FREDERICKSBURG, VIRGINIA;

DELIVERED BY

REV. A. A. HODGE,

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Union Theological Seminary

RICHMOND, VA.

Funeral Sermon.

JOHN 12, 26.

“If any man serve me, him will my Father honor.”

The principles of our glorious Christianity are revealed in the Scriptures. The principles of our glorious Christianity are illustrated in the lives of its professors. In the Word, God teaches us in language the principles of his Providential administration. In Providence, God actually leads forth the grand processions of events, and illustrates before our very eyes those principles in the concrete form of facts. Just so in the written gospels, God teaches us what a Christian ought to be, and what principles enter into and constitute christian character. While in the dispensation of his grace he dispenses unto every man different gifts severally as he will, and illustrates the beauty and power of his spiritual handiwork in the holy lives of his people.

The Christian character is always one in principle, in all ages and among all people, since there is but one God and Father of us all who hath begotten us again into his own likeness; and yet within the circle of this unity there are infinite varieties of individual forms and traits. As all

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the children of one family, and in a wider sphere, all the members of the same tribe, bear the marks of a common origin, and of a near relationship, and yet each individual has his own especial marks and individual peculiarities which give him character, and whereby he is recognized by all his friends: so every child of God, while partaking of a nature common to the whole family, and while exhibiting traits of manifest community of spirit and feeling with all the brotherhood—nevertheless presents us the special beauties and individual traits of his personal christian character. The Holy Spirit like light which is its emblem, springing from one central fountain, and in its own essence simple and uncompound, lights up all the varying subjects upon which he descends and in whom he dwells with the various yet harmonious glories of ten thousand different colored rays. And the garden of the Lord's house, which is the christian church, presents the same beautiful variety in essential unity, and universal harmony, which characterizes the great Author and Finisher's work in his visible creation—where every plant elaborates the elements of the one soil into a form of grace or power peculiar to itself and where every flower distills from the same essences a soul of fragrance all its own.

As the conversion of every human soul is a new creation, so the whole growth and history of that soul forever after, is a scene of God's working, and

a school of God's teaching; presenting lessons and unfolding beauties peculiar to itself. There are always of course the same old lessons of repentance toward God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, of advances and backslidings, of alternate hopes and fears, of the hard and often tardy sacrifice of the contrite spirit and the broken heart. And yet each history teaches its own special lessons, and illustrates the grace of the great Father in new lights and shades. Stop then and think, when God finishes his perfected work in the life of any of his children, and takes it home to his own glory, what special lesson of his grace he has taught you therein. The lesson which I have chiefly drawn from the noble example of our departed brother and father, in Christ, is the same which is most prominently suggested by the words of our text. It may be summed up thus. The true christian, not the mere honest man, is the highest style of man, and therefore the noblest work of God. God—enthroned in heaven and in the human heart—and no earthly sovereign—neither popular opinion—is the true fount of honor. The faithful service of this God is the true way to attain this honor.

The christian is the noblest style of man. Let us lay open and consider a few of those main features of the christian which have found prominent illustration in that history whose termination we are now deploring:

And first—the grand root and stamina of every christian character is high, uncompromising principle. The earnest love of truth for its own sake. Truth of doctrine, truth of practice, truth of character, and the brave unflinching maintainance of all truth—through all the temptations of an earthly life, neither repelled by difficulty, nor appalled by fear, nor seduced by flattery; this is the essence and the strength and the true glory of genuine christian manhood. Without this, the lighter and lovelier graces of the soul have no certain strength on which to rely. This high-toned principle is not love, and yet no true love can exist without it, since love divorced from truth, corrupts into a vapid sentimentalism with neither purity of spirit nor energy of will. Like the vine which when it is divorced from the stalwart oak from which it had derived support, and to which it had contributed a robe of grace, and a crown of glory, falls upon the earth and soils its blossoms in the dust; so the beauties and graces of the christian character when divorced from that noble spirit of uncompromising truth which was their support, and strength, are infallibly broken from their roots and defiled. He who serves God in this world needs to have the weakening alloy burned out, and the metal of his purpose attempered well to high resolves, and unchangeable firmness.

Principle, not policy. God's simple word, not

the changeful opinion of the age or the community. Right, not advantage. Christ, not self.—The straight way direct to the purpose, not the easier path which hides its slow circuitous approaches under some plausible pretence. The truth, not bland politeness, is the one indispensable characteristic of the christian man—the one indispensable qualification for the service of God, in our day, when the world flatters and counterfeits the features of the church—and when the church, conforms to the world. When all permanent interests are sacrificed to immediate success—reality for appearance, solidity for surface. When prudence is worshipped in the name of truth, and every thing dear to God or men is compromised for the sake of a delusive peace, and when men, forsaking the eternal rock of God's word, build their habitations upon foundations of half-truths and half-errors, terrific aggregations of explosive elements, the sin and folly of man, and the wrath and fire of God.

Another—essential characteristic of the christian manhood is eminent spirituality. This is the true distinction between religion and morality—the child of God and the benevolent man of the world. This is the true fountain-spring from which all the other principles and graces which constitute the christian character flow forth. This is the true talisman of power by which the christian man witnesses for his Lord among men, and

accomplishes all his works of usefulness in the world. The teaching of the Bible, and the doctrine of the Church on this subject, is very clear. Christ is the vine, the believer is the branch. Christ is the head and heart, the believer is the limb. Christ is the bridegroom, the Church, the body of believers, is the bride. He was anointed above his fellows, but the holy chrism has flowed over his whole person, down to the very skirts of his garments. His Holy Spirit, which dwells in him beyond measure, passes over as the bond of life and communion into every believer. He and His Father come to them and take up their abode with them.—As he lives they shall live also; and the life which they now live in the flesh they live by the faith in the Son of God, and their life is hid with Christ in God. The scriptural examples also of this grand prerogative of the children of God, even in these days of their earthly life, are most clear and imposing. Enoch walked with God, and in his translation obtained a testimony that he pleased God. David was a man after God's own heart. Of Noah and Abraham, and Isaac and Jacob and Moses—of Gideon and Barak, of Sampson and of Jephthae, of David, and of Samuel and of all the prophets, it is declared that they confessed themselves to be strangers and pilgrims on the earth, desiring a better country—that is,

a heavenly, wherefore God was not ashamed to be called their God. The beloved apostle leaned upon Jesus' heart, and years afterwards bore this testimony in behalf of his brethren, "that our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. All these are detailed before us in the inspired record with a single archaic grandeur, each one in his countenance and mien resembling the children of a king. There they defile in long procession through the history, as we view it through the perspective of many centuries, their garments all preserved unspotted from the world, their countenances inspired with a heroic spirit, their limbs tense with high resolve, their eyes lifted and fixed high upon the crown of reward, and flashing back the heavenly light which they sought and loved. How strange and sad is it that with this lofty faith, and with these soul-inspiring examples of what it is at once the christian's duty and privilege to be, yet that it has become so much the fashion for church members to satisfy themselves with mere negative evidences of the power of their religion.—We busily pluck up the weeds, but we care little to sow the seeds of celestial plants. We strive to cease from sin, are careful to avoid doing wrong, but we bring forth no fruit unto holiness. Proper, regular, methodical, innocent lives are common among us, the negative side of the religion is pretty successfully attempted, but how few of us possess positive power as christians

either with God or man. How few in the wrestlings of the closet are mighty men with God, prevalent with weighty supplication. How few bear the glowing countenance and unmistakable carriage of those who are partakers of a hidden life and whose habitual fellowship is with God. How few are there whose life is a constant source of edification to christians, and of reproof to sinners of the world. What a change will it be when in the fullness of times every christian is thus transfigured and filled with prophetic power, when all disguises are withdrawn, and every member of the royal priesthood stands forth confessed a co-worker together with God. When this change is wrought in the church the conquest of the world will be near at hand.

Another essential element of the genuine christian character, and one which was prominently illustrated in the life of our departed Father, is the spirit of active, energetic usefulness. The spirituality of which I have been speaking lies at the foundation of all true usefulness. And yet in this life there are some truly meditative spiritual souls whose spiritual energies spend themselves inwardly, rather than outwardly—in personal private exercises, rather than upon the diligent use of all those means of grace wherewith the Lord accomplishes the salvation of souls. The highest type of christian character is the happy union of the meditative with the active. The closet is the

fountain from which issue all the springs of influence, which expand and radiate in ever widening circles through the family, the social circle, the church and the world. The movement must begin in the heart, and be first exercised in the closet, but it never must end there. By word and by action, by personal influence, and by the free use of all our pecuniary ability we must fill our stewardship, and save souls. The christian is a soldier. He must clothe himself with full armor, and nourish a valiant heart. The christian is appointed for a race, he must discipline his body and strengthen and train his muscles to full exercise and free play, and then run not uncertainly, since he cannot be crowned unless he run well. The christian is a purchased servant set apart by the Master to fulfill an ordained task in the vineyard. The task is large as well as difficult, and demands all his strength, and already the lengthening shadows prophecy of the night when no man can work. The christian is a steward to whom the Master has committed many and various talents, each of which must be managed separately according to its special nature, and improved, and developed, to the best advantage possible that at his expected coming the Master may receive his own with usury. The christian spirit too recognizes all men as brethren, and seeks to succor the suffering, to sympathise with the sorrowing, to deliver the tempted,

to restore the erring, and to save the lost. Its true impulse is ever to exercise itself in seeking to do good unto all men, especially to them who are of the household of faith. The world is loved that by any means we may save some. The church is loved because it is Christ's spouse.

"And if any man serve me, him will my Father honor." This, like all the other promises of the gospel, is true both for the world that now is, and that which is to come. The larger measure and complete fulfillment is consummated in heaven.—The dealings of God with his servant whose decease we now lament, establishes the truth of this promise by the witness of our own observation.—All men have honored and trusted his love of truth, and robust manliness of character. All sympathizing christians have felt the elevated spirituality and fervency of his spirit. All have witnessed his self-sacrificing and energetic services for the good of souls and for Christ. Through his whole life, wherever known, all the good have honored him, and the wicked have stood in awe. With our deep sense of the loss which we personally, and the entire community, and the Christian church have sustained, we too to-day, in this whole assembly honor him in our hearts. Then remember that for two days he has been in heaven.—Christ has recognized him, and given him his new name, and made a king and a priest, and taken him to sit on his throne, even as Christ has sat

down with the Father on his throne. We cannot now follow him farther. Vision and language alike fail us in the radiant glory in which he fades from our sight.

WILLIAM H. WHITE was born in Fredericksburg, December 19th, in the year 1796. At an early age he removed to Philadelphia to prepare himself for the business which he had chosen as his pursuit for life. After accomplishing that end he returned to his native place and immediately entered into trade. Early in the fall of 1818 he married in Philadelphia. During all this period he was an active, useful and upright citizen, highly esteemed by all, and always the more so by those who knew him best. These were the days when as a moral man, he attempted the impossible task of discharging his obligations under the covenant of works. Until in the year 1830 when during the ministry of your first beloved and venerable Pastor, the spirit of God was so copiously poured down upon this church and entire community, he was graciously arrested, and stripped of all his self-righteousness, and led to the cross of that Saviour on whose throne he to-day rejoices. Then together with a large company, many of whom sleep, but the greater part of

whom remain until the present, he made his first public confession of Christ by entering into the communion of this church, and almost immediately he was, together with several others who follow him to his grave to-day, elected and ordained a Ruling Elder. Mr. White then began to live in earnest, his heart was filled with love to Christ and his Church, and with his characteristic directness of purpose, and energy of action did he devote himself to the work. He was for a long period superintendent of our Sabbath School, and in connection with one of his fellow elders, he established one also in the county of Spotsylvania, which he attended through all weathers every Sabbath afternoon, for many years, and where their labors were signally blessed. In the fall of 1834, he was induced to remove hence to Philadelphia where he entered largely into trade. But neither change of scene, nor the cares of business were allowed to dampen his ardor in his Maker's cause. He united himself with the sixth Presbyterian Church of that city, was elected a Ruling Elder and continued active in every good word and work, both in the Church and Sabbath School, during his entire residence there. In the Spring of 1838 Mr. White removed back to Fredericksburg, to the great pleasure of his friends, and being re-elected to office in the church, which he had for-

merly held, he continued until the last a support and an honor to the cause of Christ in our midst. He was an elector of our Theological Seminary, and an active attendant upon all of our Presbyterial and Synodical assemblies. He was widely known and highly appreciated throughout our State, and in some directions far beyond it, as an intelligent and eminently useful church officer, wise in council and prompt in action.

As a Husband and Father his love was too priceless, and his memory too sacred to be unfolded here. God only has witnessed and heaven only can disclose the depths, and the strength of that faithful heart. For more than a year his strength has been failing rapidly, and under the pressure of incurable disease his active spirit has been restrained from its natural service. Yet as he had long glorified his master in action, he now glorified him in suffering. Even in his long retirement he never lost his interest in all that concerned the welfare of the church, and he never ceased to pray for her prosperity. Neither dazzled with raptures, nor depressed with fears, he calmly awaited his end in perfect confidence, for he had long known in whom he had believed, and now at the last could not doubt that he was able to keep all that had been intrusted to him against that day.

His last and eminently characteristic words with respect to the souls of his children, were "I trust for all of them a covenant God." His last word with respect to his own person was "No doubts, perfect confidence."

O! COULD I speak the matchless worth,
 O! could I sound the glories forth,
 Which in my Saviour shine:
 I'd soar, and touch the heavenly strings,
 And vie with Gabriel, while he sings,
 In notes almost divine.

I'd sing the precious blood he spilt,
 My ransom from the dreadful guilt
 Of sin and wrath divine:
 I'd sing his glorious righteousness,
 In which all-perfect, heavenly dress
 My soul shall ever shine.

I'd sing the characters he bears,
 And all the forms of love he wears,
 Exalted on his throne:
 In loftiest songs of sweetest praise,
 I would to everlasting days
 Make all his glories known.

Soon the delightful day will come,
 When my dear Lord will call me home,
 And I shall see his face:
 Then, with my Saviour, Brother, Friend,
 A blest eternity I'll spend,
 Triumphant in his grace.