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No. V.

A SERMON:

OCCASIONED BY THE DEATH OF THE REV.
WILLIAM S. POTTS, D. D.

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“I would not live away.”—*Job vii. 16.*

LOVE of life is one of the strongest instincts of sentient beings. God has placed this strong desire of life in all living beings for the wisest and most benevolent purposes. If life, and the means of preserving it, were matters of total indifference—if death, and the avenues leading to it, were neither painful nor abhorrent, the most disastrous results might follow, not only to society, but to the world.

But, in addition to the instinctive love of life, common to brutes as well as men, there are other and strong cords which bind nearly all mankind to the present state of existence. The tender ties which grow out of the various relations of life, the objects which we desire to accomplish, and the duties which religion or humanity enjoin, together with a multitude of other motives which influence human beings, make us love life and seek for its preservation. In addition to the natural fear of the king of terrors, the mother dreads the fatal dart which would leave her helpless infant destitute of the tender care which a mother only can give. The man of ambition desires his delay until his schemes have been consummated, and the Christian may wish for his forbearance until some work of mercy or labor of love is accomplished.

Thus, both nature and the circumstances that surround us, make nearly all mankind willing, and the majority anxious to live.

True, when the dark clouds of adversity begin to gather thick around the path; when misfortune and sorrow and disappointment

bring despair into the soul, men may be found who, in their frenzy, desire death. An individual who is all alive to the opinions and feelings of his fellow men, and ignorant of what death is, and what sin is, and what God is, may, from a sense of wounded pride or lost reputation, not only desire death, but rush unbidden into his arms. And even a Christian man may be so far given over to the influence of the Tempter and the corruption of his nature, as in moments of deep depression and sinful anger, to say with Jonah—“It is better for me to die than to live.” But these are exceptions, not the rule. Love of life is instinctive and universal.

As far as this desire of life is a part of the original constitution implanted by God, it is certainly not wrong. On the contrary, whatever be the situation of an individual, or the distressing circumstances in which he is placed, an impatient desire for death is, in a greater or less degree, sinful. It becomes all to endure with patience and resignation the will of God, and to say with Job, “All the days of my appointed time will I wait until my change come.”

But though the love of life be so natural, and though there be so many ties binding to it, still the declaration of my text contains a truth, which every Christian who seriously and dispassionately looks at this life, and who has a well-grounded hope of acceptance with God, must feel. Whatever be the happiness granted us here, who, that has a comfortable assurance of a blessed immortality, could desire that this life should be made perpetual. Whatever be the Christian's comforts and blessings, whatever his attainments and mercies, there is always enough in him and around him to make him say, in the sincerity and deep earnestness of his soul—“I would not live away; I would not dwell forever here, nor have an immortality on earth.”

The Christian does not wish to live always, because our present state is a state of *imperfection*; sin has entered into this world, once pronounced good, and destroyed its harmony — its blight is felt in body, mind and soul. Since the sad hour when Eden was lost, the condition of man has been one of *imperfection*.

The body, curiously wrought and wonderful as it is, is still liable to a thousand accidents and diseases; it soon becomes weary and incapable of performing its functions. Every nerve may be made an inlet to suffering, every part an avenue through which pain may strike: every hour we are liable to diseases which, if they could not, as they now do, speedily destroy our frame, might entail upon us an immortality of physical suffering. If we were doomed to live always with this imperfect body, liable to all the calamities to which it is now exposed, and yet the soul compelled to cling to its clay tenement, what an object of solicitude would it become! How dreadful would our condition be.

But not only our physical nature is now *imperfect* — so, also, is our *intellectual*. True, with all its imperfections, we see enough of the mind to convince us of its noble powers and amazing capabilities; but in this world its attainments must always be imperfect. The mysterious connection which it has with our present bodies must always insure this — the body, since the fall, has not been a fitting instrument for the mind. The mind is ever active, the body inert — the mind ethereal, the body gross — the capacities of the mind indefinite, the powers of the body limited. The mind and body act and react upon each other in such a way that the diseases of the one become the diseases of the other. Insanity, or even idiocy, may follow from mere physical causes. Who would live always with his nobler faculties thus linked to earth, and exposed to its disorders? And not only the distempers, but the necessities of the body operate to retard and hinder the mind. Nearly a third of all our time on earth is required to restore the wasted energies of the body by sleep, and the vast majority of our race are compelled to employ that which remains to supply it with food and clothing — so that man, with noble capacities, is in this life doomed like a galley slave to labor for the necessities of his grosser part.

But how great soever be the imperfections of our physical and intellectual parts, the im-

perfection of our moral is still greater. The heaviest part of the curse fell upon the soul. No mere man, since the fall, has been morally perfect. High attainments in the divine life have been made, but those who have made the highest have been most earnest in lamenting their sad failures.

Our present state, then, is emphatically a state of *imperfection*, and who would desire to live always in such a state to inherit an immortality of imperfection?

Closely connected with the reason just mentioned, and yet distinct enough to deserve a separate consideration, why a child of God cannot feel it desirable “to live always,” is the profound conviction he has that in this life there is no exemption from the effects and no perfect deliverance from the remains of sin.

We belong to an apostate race. The depravity of human nature is the plainest of all doctrines. God has said, “All have sinned;” and the history of the race, and of every individual heart, has confirmed the declaration. We need only to look to see it. Who that has one kindly emotion does not sometimes burn with indignation at the misery which men bring upon their fellow man. Neither the love of their species, nor the fear of their Maker, has ever been able to prevent men from seeking what they conceive to be their own interest at the expense of the comfort and happiness of others.

But much more than this view of the sinful world without, does the view which the Christian has of the sinful world within cause him who knows what an evil and bitter thing sin is, to say, “I would not live always.” It is the view which even the best men have of the remains of sin in their own hearts which, more than any thing else, makes them desire a day of deliverance. They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts. No man is born of God who does not desire to be conformed to the image of God; true grace must create a longing after holiness; yet perfect holiness is not attained here — an enlightened conscience sees much that is sinful in the heart when the world sees no blemish in the life. The best man is ready to say mournfully with Paul, that he has neither “already attained nor is already perfect” — yes, the holiest find the words of the same Apostle expressive of their own feelings when he declares: “I know

that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing—for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do.” And there is an uttering of the deep emotions of the inmost soul in the exclamation: “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death!” Jesus Christ at last will give him deliverance, but it will be in a better world than this. But to live forever here, would be to remain forever more or less under the power of sin.

This leads me to remark that the Christian would not live away, because this world is not his home. Every thing around and in him is saying in the language of the prophet: “Arise and depart hence, for this is not your rest, for it is polluted.” “Here he has no continuing city, but must seek one to come.” The Apostle tells us that the life of faith has in every age been a confession that the people of God “are strangers and pilgrims on earth.” The way in which God led Israel is the type of the way in which his people are yet led. In his infinite mercy and by his mighty arm, he has delivered the Christian from the Egyptian bondage in which Satan held him captive. The Red Sea has been divided for his passage, but his journey to the promised land still lies through a vast and howling wilderness. Marah’s bitter waters are yet to be tasted—the gleam of Sinai’s summit yet to be seen—the Amalekites are to be overcome in the journey. Sihon, king of the Ammonites, to be subdued, and Og, king of Bashan, to be conquered. And although the cloudy pillar of the Divine Presence leads and protects him from the burning heat of the day, and the pillar of fire send rays of light and joy in his heart when the wilderness is enveloped in gloom, yet these blessings are not designed to make him satisfied with a perpetual abode in the desert. True, he shall feed on manna which God will give him day by day; and the flinty rock, struck by Jehovah’s command, shall gush with living streams to slake his thirst; but these are only intended as a foretaste of that Canaan that flows with milk and honey. We know that it has sometimes happened, even to true Christians, that unbelief has caused them to stand trembling on the borders of the Jordan of death; and unworthy fear that they be not able to go over and take posses-

sion has made some, even in sight of their inheritance, turn an eye to the desert. But, surely, even they would feel that their unbelief was fearfully punished, if they were compelled to wander over it for ever—to live always in the wilderness—to be always a pilgrim whose journey should know no end—whose toil should find no rest.

But it is not only those rational and Scripture views which the Christian takes of earth, as a place both of imperfection and sin, that makes him say, “I would not live away.” Something more is necessary, namely: Some certain ground of expecting—some assured hope of gaining a better life. If the dark veil that hides the future had not been so far raised as to admit some light from beyond the tomb, sad as the alternative would be, perhaps true wisdom would accept, if offered, the immortality of earth. But life and immortality have been brought to light. The life hereafter is no longer an untold secret. Revelation has removed the veil, and the Sun of Righteousness has lighted its darkness with his beams; not only telling us that there is a life to come, but telling us, in terms distinct, how that life may become to us one of blessedness. Yes, the Gospel distinctly teaches that through the blood of the everlasting covenant, a way has been opened by which we may lay hold upon a happy immortality.

What the Scriptures say upon this subject it is not necessary now to repeat, but we love to mention its leading features; and, if no more, to sum all up in the faithful saying of the Apostle: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, even the chief;” and the doctrine flowing from it, that by a vital union with him, we become partakers of that Divine Spirit which renews and sanctifies the soul, and prepares it to dwell in the presence of God. The Gospel tells us, too, that these blessings, and all others, are offered to us as a free gift through Christ. Faith is the hand which lays hold of them and appropriates them. Hence, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, is the great command of the Gospel, and faith the great requisite for salvation. And resting with unwavering confidence upon the word and promise of God for salvation in Jesus Christ, the Christian lifts his eye above and says, “I would not live away.” I believe there is a rest that remains for the people of God; I believe, unworthy

as I am, he will give it to me, for He in whom I trust has said, "Come unto me all ye who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am there ye may be also."

Nor need the Christian be frightened by the dark clouds which hang over the valley of the shadow of death. His Redeemer has descended there before him, and extracted the sting from death and victory from the grave. He has made the once dark and repulsive tomb the vestibule and entrance into heaven—nay, he has not only divested death of his terrors, but left him as a servant to conduct his ransomed through.

Why, then, should the Christian desire to live always? What is there in this Golgotha—this Aceldama—this place of blood and skulls, for which he should be willing to barter heaven? Live here forever! "God says he has cursed the earth, and our experience proves it true; who, then, would be willing to identify himself and his fortunes with that which God has cursed and devoted to destruction?" No; let those who are wedded to the earth—those who are dead to all the charms of spiritual life and the glories of heaven; let them choose this land of the dying as their place of life—this region of sorrow as their scene of happiness—this abode of turmoil, change and disappointment, as their place of rest. Blessed be God, we shall not live away! Blessed be God—the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ—that He who is always heard, has prayed, "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory!" and blessed be God for the promise, that "when we see Him we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

But I must not pursue these general reflections further. They were suggested as appropriate to this occasion, because they embody the sentiments which our venerated and beloved brother expressed when informed that his end drew near. And now another duty lies before me—one from which I shrink, profoundly conscious of my inability to meet the expectations which this occasion creates. It must be left to some abler hand to prepare a worthy memorial of the life and character of Dr. Potts. I will not be so unjust to his memory as to attempt a portrait. But the occasion seems to demand a sketch. The extreme haste with which it has to be drawn,

will cause you to look upon its defects with forbearance.

Dr. William S. Potts was born near Berwick, Pennsylvania, in the year 1802; but his family removed, in 1810, to Trenton, New Jersey. His parents, who belonged to the Society of Friends, designed having him brought up a printer. But God, who had other designs concerning him, so ordered it in his providence that his attention was turned in another direction. As I learned from himself, his own purpose was to devote himself to the legal profession, and he had made some progress in qualifying himself for the bar, when the same providence that defeated the plans of his parents now defeated his own. His work in life was not to plead the law, but to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Called of God to enter the ministry of reconciliation, he began in 1825 the study of divinity in the Theological Seminary of Princeton. In the winter of 1827, while a licentiate under the care of the Presbytery of Philadelphia, being in a delicate state of health, he accepted an agency offered him by the Board of Education, and traveled through the Southern Atlantic States.

Under an appointment of the Board of Missions, he resigned his agency, and came to this city in May, 1828, to supply the pulpit of the First Presbyterian Church, to the pastoral charge of which he was soon called, and in the autumn following was, by the Presbytery of Missouri, ordained and installed Pastor. In June, 1825, at the earnest solicitation of the friends of religious education, he asked for a dissolution of the pastoral relation, and was inaugurated President of Marion College, over which he presided until this church (a colony from the First) was organized, and called him to be spiritual shepherd. I need not, however, dwell upon the facts which are familiar to you all.

With what success his labors have been crowned, this large and flourishing church, and the colonies which have from time to time gone out from it, and the many souls which God has given him as seals of his ministry in all the region of country of which this city is the centre, abundantly attest.

The high order of talents possessed by Dr. Potts would have commanded a prominent position in any community. But coming to this city when it was comparatively small, and identifying himself with its interests, he has

exerted a wider spread influence than any other man will, perhaps, ever have, and has emphatically left the impress of his mind and piety not only on this city but this State.

It would be pleasant to dwell upon the social character of our departed brother. Naturally grave and thoughtful, and often laboring under the effects of bodily infirmities, those who only saw him occasionally may have construed his constitutional reserve into coldness and indifference. But those who knew him best — who saw the sunshine of the smile that lighted up his face around the social circle — those who have experienced the kindness and tenderness with which he administered the consolations of religion to the sick and afflicted — those who have gone to him for counsel in times of perplexity, know that there was beneath that quiet and calm exterior a generous and noble heart, which not only sympathized with, but felt for others.

But the great character in which Dr. Potts appeared, was as a minister of the Gospel. It was as a minister that he especially desired to appear; and it was in that character that he appeared the best. Blessed by God with a mind capacious, clear and eminently logical, and by a life of laborious study storing it not only with theological but various learning, as a preacher his great characteristics were strength and clearness; and the great end at which he aimed was the instruction of his hearers. Familiar with the highest walks of mental science, and fond of investigating these difficult subjects in the study. In the pulpit, his themes were not the philosophy of the mind, nor even of religion, but the great vital doctrines of the Cross. Those who went to hear him, attracted by his wide-spread reputation — expecting to hear the great preaching that consists in great words, in airy flights, in novel and striking expressions, and in vehement declamation, always went away disappointed. But seldom did they go away disappointed, and never uninstructed, who went to hear the great truths of our holy religion presented with clearness, with sincerity, and with a desire to glorify God and save men. And while, perhaps, Dr. Potts never electrified an audience with a burst of passionate oratory, he often held every eye fixed, and every heart subdued and melted, by the noble eloquence which is the result of great thoughts poured out from the

depths of a soul intensely alive to their importance and magnitude.

In the work of the ministry he was *earnest* — not the earnestness that has its source in mere physical constitution, nor the earnestness that is the result of zeal without knowledge, but that earnestness that comes from a deep and soul-controlling conviction *that the religion of Jesus Christ is true; that a future life is a verity, and that man's eternal interests are his great interests*; an earnestness, that had its source in the consciousness that the Gospel which he recommended to others was to himself “the wisdom of God and the power of God for salvation.”

And not only was he earnest, but he was faithful. I speak to those who sat under his ministry, and I know that there will go up a unanimous affirmation, when I say it was eminently true of your pastor that he did not shun to declare to you the whole counsel of God, whether you would hear or whether you would forbear. You know that when he stood in this desk, he appeared not as the minister of man but of Jesus Christ. You know that his preaching was not modified to suit men, or to gain applause. That while he loved the sinner, he lifted up his voice like a trumpet against sin. You all know that no sin was so entrenched by fashion, so fortified by the countenance of public opinion, that he did not dare to attack it and expose it. And as he was faithful in the pulpit, so he was in the pastorate; as he warned you from the sacred desk, so, as occasion offered, he warned from house to house.

The calmness and clearness of his judgment made Dr. Potts a peculiarly valuable member of the ecclesiastical courts, from the Church Session up to the General Assembly; and I hazard nothing in saying, that there is not a place in which he sat in council where his counsel will not be missed, and where his labors will not be remembered.

But prominently was our brother *a man of prayer*. None but the Father, who seeth in secret, knows the history of his closet; but none who saw the uniform tenor of his life; none who listened to him, as, in his public ministrations, with simplicity and earnestness he poured out his supplications to God, in language so plain, and yet so appropriate — with feelings so reverential, and yet so child-like — with petitions so impressive, and yet so direct — could doubt that he habitually

"walked with God," and in secret places held much and holy communion with the Father of Spirits.

The influence of such a man upon society it is difficult rightly to estimate. No one will ever be able to tell, until the Great Day, what is the power for good exerted by an individual who for so many years has been, from Sabbath to Sabbath, faithfully and powerfully preaching the great truths of the Gospel, and whose private life and daily walk has exemplified the truths which he preached. No one can tell the mighty influence which is exerted by the life of one who is great and good, to restrain error, to encourage virtue, and to recommend the truths of the Gospel to others. And while we do not intend to stand in this sanctuary with this Bible open before us, and say that he of whom we speak had neither imperfection nor sin — while we know that to any such assertion or even intimation, his rebuke, if he were alive, would be the sternest and most indignant, yet we do not hesitate to point to him as one, the general tenor of whose life we all should imitate, because he imitated Christ.

The end of such a life, as might be expected, was peace. "There is often an undue value placed upon the closing scenes of life. If men depart in peace, and, still more, if they avow distinctly their faith and confidence, it is considered enough to outweigh the oppressing evidence of a mis-spent life." We do not wish to encourage any such dangerous error. God will judge men by their lives, not by words spoken in the article of death.

Still, there is a value to be placed upon the views which one who knew so well what he said, took of this life and the next, when he found himself standing so near the eternal world.

The hope that perfect quiet might, if any thing would, tend to the recovery, or at any rate the partial restoration of one whose life was held so dear, excluded from the sick chamber of the deceased all but his physicians and nurses. There is a propriety, therefore, in giving some account, in this public place, of his last hours.

On Saturday morning last, it was first announced to Dr. Potts, by his physicians, that his end was not only certain but near. He received the intelligence with the utmost composure, and immediately commenced his preparation for his departure. With character-

istic thoughtfulness, he sent for a legal friend to arrange the worldly affairs which demanded attention. As this friend, accompanied by another, entered his room, after the customary salutations, he remarked to them, "The physicians have announced to me this morning that there is no hope of my recovery;" and with his face lighting up, he soon added, "*This is the most joyful intelligence I ever received. Soon to be with God — to dwell in his holy and blissful presence — this is truly joyful.*" And while those around stood deeply moved, he only was calm. Anxious that all should know the ground of this hope — this confident expectation — he added, "*My only hope of salvation is in Christ. I am a poor sinner — his grace alone is my reliance.*"

After a little while, he said this — which would to God all would lay to heart: — "*What would now be my condition without a hope in Christ?*" With calmness he then adjusted some matters of business, and asked one of his elders to join him in prayer. During the day he received such of his friends as called. Most of the night was a time of suffering, yet he bore it, as he did his whole long and protracted sickness, with composure and resignation. As the hallowed light of the Sabbath dawned, it was evident that his end was fast approaching; and just before the peal of the morning bells announced the time of worship on earth, his freed spirit hastened to join the great congregation of the redeemed, and to unite in the anthem "To Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father: to Him be glory and dominion, now, and forever. Amen."

Men and brethren, — a great and good man has fallen in Israel — one whose labors the Great Head of the Church was pleased to own and bless — one whose memory will long be dear to the people of God.

And what shall we say in closing, by way of comfort to the household, and especially the heart that has been desolated by this providence? We will not intrude upon the sacredness of such sorrow — for as there is a joy, so there is a sorrow with which the stranger intermeddleth not. Like the friends of Job, we feel disposed to sit with them in silence and weep — commending them to the consolations of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, the unfailing resource of the Christian, "who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we

may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we are comforted of God." To you, fathers and brethren in the ministry, among whom I see representatives of all Christian denominations, it is not necessary that one so young and unqualified should say anything on this solemn occasion. God himself is here, speaking by his providence, reminding us that "the time is short," "that the night cometh when no man can work," and calling upon us to "take heed to ourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost has made us overseers." Let us, then, hear his voice; and relying upon his grace, engage in our high and holy work with renewed diligence; "and when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, we shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."

In the solemn, tearful stillness of this great congregation, we see evidence not only that a church has been bereaved of a beloved pastor, but that the community has lost a man in whom it had confidence.

Your loss, my dear Christian friends, is great—greater than, perhaps, you now realize—for you have lost one who gave evidence how much he had your interest at heart, not only by his labors and prayers, but by the faithfulness of his reproof and the earnestness with which he called upon you to discharge your duties. Like Paul, the great desire of his heart was, "that ye might be blameless and harmless the sons of God, without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, shining as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life, that he might rejoice in the day of Christ that he had not run in vain nor labored in vain."

It was the intense desire he felt to see the cause of God revived, that induced him, feeble in health as he was, to make exertions under which his frame gave way. He literally fell, calling upon sinners to "flee the wrath to come," and urging Christians to come up to the help of the Lord against the mighty. It is a solemn thing to have sat under the teachings of so able and devoted a minister; and solemn will be the day when pastor and people shall meet before the great white throne—one to give an account for the manner in which he preached, and the other for the manner in which they heard and heeded his teaching.

The faithful pastor is gone, and the sum-

mons that called him was to him "joyful tidings." Will the summons that is coming for his charge be "joyful tidings" to them? God grant that it may be. But if any feel or fear that it will not be so to them, let such even now "remember the words which he spoke to them while he was yet with them," and take a warning from his death which they did not take from his life. And let us all, ministers and people, remember that the day is drawing near when a more solemn peal than that which has assembled us, will bring together a greater congregation than this—a time when "the multitude of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt—then they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."

For The Casket.

LETTERS FROM A FATHER TO HIS SON.

LETTER III. — RELIGION: CONTINUED.

My Dear Son,—In my last, I endeavored to explain what is meant by religion, and to show how it may be obtained. I shall now answer some objections, and use some arguments to persuade you to *embrace* it. It is not enough for us to *know* that there is such a thing as religion—that it is something *excellent*, and that it is in the power of all to obtain it; nor is it enough that we *approve* of it—we must *possess* it—we must be the *subjects* of its renewing and sanctifying influences, or we never can be saved.

I take it for granted that you are a believer in the Christian religion. Indeed, I would be very sorry to think otherwise, considering the manner in which you have been raised, and the instructions you have received from the lips of your parents; and I hope you will ever view with abhorrence, the doctrine that the Bible is nothing but a cunningly-devised fable. No sentiment is fraught with more dangerous consequences. Believing then, as you do, in the truth of Revelation, and in the necessity of Religion, as the only qualification for future happiness, you must at once see the propriety of embracing it. Indeed, it would be very foolish and inconsistent to believe in the truth of religion, and yet reject it. This