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MOSES ON NEBO:

OR

DEATH A DUTY:

A Sermon

OCCASIONED BY THE DEATH OF THE

REV. JOSEPH S. CHRISTMAS,

LATE PASTOR OF THE BOWERY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

AND

PREACHED IN THAT CHURCH

ON

THE EVENING OF THE SABBATH AFTER HIS INTERMENT.

BY GARDINER SPRING, D. D.

Pastor of the Brick Presbyterian Church.

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DISCOURSE.

DEUTERONOMY, xxxii. 48, 49, 50.

“And the Lord spake unto Moses that selfsame day, saying, Get thee up into this mountain Abarim, unto mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, that is over against Jericho; and behold the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel for a possession; and die in the mount whither thou goest up, and be gathered unto thy people.”

IT is with unfeigned diffidence and trembling, that I have consented to stand this evening, in this sanctuary, and utter a word of condolence to this afflicted community. In the loss of that beloved man whose ministry among us is now for ever closed, I can enter into your sorrows, my bereaved friends, and into the sorrows of his mourning people. There is a tenderness in this scene, of which I feel no temptation to divest myself, and which I should do violence to all the better feelings of your hearts not to indulge. I did not stand by his bed of death: I did not witness his faltering tongue, and see those arms extended toward heaven. Few of us enjoyed this privilege,

so suddenly was he called away. The Angel of mercy was there, to "wipe the tear that trembled in his eye," and fill his soul with joys unspeakable and full of glory. He died at the very "gate of heaven," and so near the land of promise, that its delectable mountains rose to his view. Like Moses, from the top of Nebo, he "beheld all the land unto the utmost sea, and *died there in the mount.*"

The short and impressive narrative, which is given of the death of Moses, well accords with so distinguished a life. I know of no instance of moral sublimity that surpasses the conduct of this great and good man, as he goes up from the plains of Moab to the top of Pisgah,—*on purpose to die!* He had forsaken the wealth and honours of Pharaoh's court, to suffer affliction with the people of God; he had encountered the wrath of the king, and rescued his enslaved countrymen from bondage; he had conducted the Israelites through the Red Sea, while the pursuing enemy sank beneath the flood; he had silenced the murmurs, and subdued the insurrection of his own followers, and calmly stood by while the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up; with incessant fatigue and undaunted heroism, he had led this fickle and inconstant people through embattled enemies and the trackless desert:—And now, just on the confines of the long-sought inheritance, God commands him *to go up to the*

top of Nebo and die. But a little while before, Aaron, his brother, had obeyed the same command, and “in the sight of all the congregation,” had gone up to *mount Hor*, and “died there, in the top of the mount.” And Moses did not complain, nor hesitate. God called him to a service, which he felt bound to perform. It was no invasion of disease to which he was called to submit. Care, and toil, and years, had made no inroads upon his manly vigour. From the vigour of manhood, while “his eye was not dim, nor was natural force abated,” he was required to go up to the mount, and be gathered to his people. God called, and he answered him. It was the *last act* in which he was required to engage on the earth. And with the same tranquillity and promptness which he had brought to the previous enterprises of his arduous career, did *he perform this last act of human life.*

Two very obvious thoughts, therefore, present themselves for our consideration, in the present discourse :—

THE COMMAND OF GOD TO HIS PEOPLE TO DIE ;
and

THEIR OBEDIENCE TO HIS COMMAND.

I. The command of God to his people to die.

Temporal death is one of the bitter consequences of the first apostacy. We have no reason to

believe the soul would ever have been separated from the body, had man never sinned. "In Adam all die." Every human being comes into the world under the condemnation of that penal sentence, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." "By one man, sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death hath passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." This is the tenure by which every son and daughter of Adam holds his earthly existence, and this the penalty, in the execution of which he descends to the tomb.

The God of providence is not more certainly and intimately connected with any event of human life, than its close. "In him we live, and move, and have our being." "In his hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind." "*Thou* turnest man to destruction, and sayest, Return, ye children of men." Death is God's messenger, and the faithful executioner of his will. Hence we see, that in all the arrangements of his providence, he challenges the most absolute control over human life. In the very constitution of the human frame, he has implanted the seeds of decay and dissolution. All the means and instruments of life and death are in his hands. The sources of exposure and accident, and the causes of disease, however remote or proximate their influence, are all under his direction. He presides in the heavens, and governs the earth. He directs the clouds, and commands the sun and

the rain. He changes the seasons, and enriches and impoverishes the earth. He bounds the ocean, and balances the atmosphere. He decides and governs all the laws of the animal economy. That little muscle, *the heart*, which dilates and contracts more than sixty times a minute, and that without any effort or choice of our own, and whether we sleep or wake, and on whose unconscious motions human life depends, he can derange and throw into disorder, by the slightest variation in the physical world. No precaution or prudence can pass the limits prescribed by him. Health cannot do it. Sickness cannot do it. Riches and honours cannot do it. Talent, and research, and usefulness, cannot do it. Neither piety nor impiety, strength nor weakness, hope nor fear, can stay the arm of the destroyer, nor lock the gates of the tomb. Death reigns over all classes, all characters, all men. He invades all nations and all ages of the world, and spreads his devastations over every part of the globe, and through every period of time. "There is an *appointed time* to man upon the earth." The unseen Deity, every where present, every where powerful, is every where deciding the destinies of men, from the infant that passes to the slumbers of the grave from its mother's bosom, to the youth whose vigorous frame and buoyant hopes wither in their bloom; from the man in the mid-day of human life whose sun goes down at noon, to the hoary

head where the almond tree flourishes and those that look out of the windows are darkened. No more can they protract their existence a breath beyond his unchanging counsel, than they can add a cubit to their stature. "Our days are determined; the number of our months is with him; he hath appointed the bounds we cannot pass." It is God who says to his people, *Go up to the mount and die.*

We proceed,

II. To consider their obedience to this command.

Death is not simply an evil to which a good man is called to submit; it is an *act* which he is bound to perform. It is not an event in which he has no voluntary concern; but one, which, when performed as God requires it and in deliberate obedience to his command, rouses and engages all the strength and ardor of his affections. It is not a privilege merely to die, as Moses did, but a duty which God requires: and that man neglects his own mercies and dishonours God, who is not comforted with Pisgah views in a dying hour. We say, the death of a good man is an *act of obedience*. In dying, such a man feels and acts, as God requires him to feel and act. Particularly,

Does he go to his dying bed with a *submissive spirit*. Pious men, in the active and vigorous

exercise of grace, have always held themselves ready to die, whenever God requires it. They esteem themselves no more at liberty to disregard the great command which extends itself to the struggles of their dying hour, than to disregard any other divine precept. Do we err, when we say, that the people of God are not *rebels* against the righteous sentence which consigns their bodies to the grave? Have they not learned to yield their will to God's? Is it not a sentence they *deserve*? And is it not characteristic of piety to submit to this decree of heaven, as "holy, just, and good?" Have they not ceased to contend with their Maker? We cling to life most dearly; and many a pang is often endured before the strong bond is sundered. There is something fearfully dismaying in the thoughts of dissolution, and in the prospect of becoming a loathsome and putrid carcass, and the food of worms. The "pains, and groans, and dying strife," alarm and fill us with terror. It is hard to die. Great and formidable difficulties are to be encountered. We cannot bear to think of leaving all behind us. We cannot bear to look round for the last time upon the light of heaven, and upon this beautiful earth, and go from all we have acquired, or received, and lie down in the grave. It costs us many a struggle to bid adieu to all our comforts, and draw our hearts away from all that is tender and endeared, and take the last look, and speak the

last farewell. But, at God's command, the good man bows. In the meekness and humility of his soul, he can say,

"Sweetly as babes sleep, will I give my life up

"When called to yield it."

It is an interesting spectacle, to see a pious man intelligently and submissively bowing to the stroke of death. "The cup which my Father giveth me, shall I not drink it?" Where is there a sweeter act of holy obedience, than such a spirit, on a dying bed?

A good man dies, also, in *the exercise of confidence in God*. Death is an hour of danger. It is an hour when all earthly helpers fail. And then the soul feels *alone* with God, and "God is its refuge and strength." Death is an hour when the Christian feels his own weakness; and then he casts himself into "the everlasting arms." He is acquainted with God; he loves him, and his love is pure and holy; and he is assured of safety, strength, and help, even "though the earth be removed, and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea." It is enough for him that he dies under the appointment of an infinitely wise and righteous providence.

No good man would assume the responsibility of deciding the time of his own dissolution. He does not know what important issues may result from such a decision. The event is too momentous, and he casts it upon God. There, he has unwaver-

ing confidence. Well he knows *God cannot give* an unrighteous, or an unwise command. He is satisfied that God would not suffer him to die, were he not about to overrule the dark and trying event for his own glory and the good of his great kingdom. Moses was called up to Nebo, at a time when the safety and prosperity of the Israelitish nation seemed to depend on him. Every eye was turned to him for direction and assistance. And nothing but unlimited confidence in God could have supported him in that dark and critical hour. But he could cast himself and his people on God, and without one distrustful feeling, go up and die. And in this, Moses stands not alone. Good men, in their approach to the dark valley, are often afflicted with the thought, that they are about to be called away from interesting and important spheres of usefulness. How many a pious father has wept on a dying bed, because his paternal counsels were about to be withdrawn from some heedless and froward son! How many a Christian mother has sunk in agony on her pillow, because some helpless babe, or affectionate group of children, were about to be abandoned to the cold charities of this heartless world! And how many a faithful minister, as he sees the tide of life ebbing away, has been distressed and overwhelmed at the prospects and wants of his bereaved people! To leave the world, at such a time, often appears

a dark and mysterious dispensation. But, my brethren, faith in God, though it sometimes staggers, does not stagger long. No matter what the time, or circumstances, in which the unexpected command is given, a devout man will ultimately become composed, submissive, and happy. For the moment, it may seem to him that God is coming in darkness; but his piety will, at length, shine with increased loveliness through the cloud. It would not be surprising, if even the best of men should be, for a little while, disconcerted at the intelligence that they *must die*; though, when the shock is over, their solicitude and anxiety all subside, and they feel raised above every fear. Come what will, they are safe. They lean on the arm of an omnipotent God. And all their way through the dark valley, they can sing, "The Lord God omnipotent reigneth, and let the earth rejoice!"

In the hour of death, too, the Christian's confidence sustains a still severer trial. Every thing is at stake for his entire existence. He is going——*where*? Into a vast eternity! He is to exist for ever. There is an immeasurable immortality beyond. He will survive the grave, and live as long as God shall live and reign. And *into what eternity*, is death the pathway? What new scenes are to open upon the astonished vision of the immortal spirit, as she takes her flight? Is the grave the dismal passage through which

she is to pass to the regions of darkness and despair, or the bright and luminous way to the regions of purity and peace? These inquiries vibrate on the heart of a dying man. Death awakens all the tender sensibilities of his soul. "The sting of death is *sin*." The inward consciousness of his great transgressions now threatens to harrow up his mind. Soon he is to be ushered into the presence of "that Holy Lord God." And it were enough to appal the courage and prostrate the confidence of the holiest man, were they not fixed on the Rock of Ages, and were he not called "to die where Moses did." But his mountain stands strong. His confidence in God is unshaken. Because God is on the throne, he can launch into eternity and feel safe. With his guilt and ill-desert he has been familiar before. Many a time has he had such a sense of them, as to have sunk him to the earth. Many a time has he justified God in condemning him, while humbly and thankfully he threw his guilty soul at the feet of Jesus for mercy. And now, his whole confidence is in his atoning blood. Though "sin abounds, grace doth much more abound." However cautious and dismayed he may be in other matters, here, he has no distrust, no suspicion. He *can* venture his everlasting all with Christ.

In thus submitting to death, too, the believer *glorifies God*. The maxim of every good man is, "None of us liveth to himself, and none of us *dieth*

to himself." The paramount desire of every good man is, "whether he lives, to live unto the Lord; whether he dies, *to die unto the Lord.*" He would die, because God requires it, and it is a part of the homage he owes to him as his Sovereign Lord. He would die, to meet the divine approbation in this trying and critical moment of his existence. And he would die, making the divine glory his end in this last act of his life. He would die, that "Christ should be magnified in his body, whether it be by life, or by death." And is not his heavenly Father glorified by such a death? "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." *There*, on the top of Pisgah, where every cloud vanishes and the sky is clear, the Christian can look down upon the world, and all its treasures and crosses, and feel that they are not worth an anxious thought. *There*, he has no despondency. *There*, he can stand in all the transports of faith and holy desire. He thinks of God, and is happy. The divine presence, no longer his terror, is now his joy; and he desires "rather to depart, and be with Christ." From Pisgah, too, he sees the heavenly land. Its delectable vales and mountains, its fields of beauty and fertile plains, its trees of life, and heavenly fragrance rise up to his admiring senses, and he longs to be away. *There*, beyond the utmost stretch of human sight, his undimmed vision discovers the magnificent inheritance, and "beholds

all the land unto the utmost sea." And as from this mount of vision, he talks of heaven, you may hear him say, "I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in thy likeness." *There*, he sees "a great multitude which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes and palms in their hands, and crying with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God that sitteth on the throne and unto the Lamb!" Toward that heavenly society, he sends forth his soul in ecstasies of joy. *There*, he sees Patriarchs, and Prophets, and Apostles. *There*, perhaps, a long line of pious ancestry. *There*, too, it may be, the wife of his bosom and the children of his love. The righteous, there,

"Embrace and weep; they weep the tears of joy.
 "The sainted mother wakes, and in her lap,
 "Clasps her dear babe, the partner of her grave,
 "And heritor, with her, of heaven,—a flower
 "Wash'd by the blood of Jesus from the stain
 "Of native guilt, even in its early bud."

And, above all, there he descries, "in the midst of the throne," ONE sweeter and more lovely than the rest, and around whom the redeemed assemble with familiar, yet adoring, love and praise! And there, he *can die*! He has nothing to lose, but every thing to gain. To be translated into the immediate and beatific presence of Christ; to be holy there, as he is holy; to "see as he is seen,

and know as he is known;" such are the prospects, bright and glorious, which confirm his faith, dissipate the gloom of the grave, and gazing on which, he can die to the honour of God his Redeemer.

How abundantly is the God of heaven honoured by the death of his people! When in this dark and gloomy hour, perfect weakness triumphs in the omnipotence it leans on; when the helplessness of a poor worm loses itself in the mightiness of the Deity; when ill-desert thus throws away its fears, and confides in illimitable mercy; when pollution and shame thus confidently repair to atoning blood; when a guilty sinner thus wins the crown, and through the agonies of death, the gloom of the grave, the sentence of the law, and the hostile forces of sin and hell, presses his way to the resurrection of the just, and the glories of God's right hand; how abundantly is the God of heaven exalted in all the plenitude of his wisdom, grace, and power! Need I affirm, he is *pleased* with such a death? From the height of his holiness and the habitation of his glory, he looks down upon the tranquil, triumphant believer and smiles.

Such a death is most truly an act of obedience. The motives which govern it are holy; the desires and affections engaged in it are holy, and eminently the fruit of the Spirit. More of the *very spirit and soul of piety* may be thus breathed into the struggles and triumphs of a dying hour,

than into any one effort of the christian career. It was thus that *Moses died*. It was thus that *David died*, with the language on his lips, "Although my house be not so with God, yet hath he made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure." It was thus that *Simeon died*, exclaiming, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." It was thus *Stephen died*, calling upon God, saying, "Lord Jesus! receive my spirit." And it was thus *Paul died*, shouting, as he ascended the mount, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me in that day; and not to me only, but to all them that love his appearing!"

We may now advert to a few suggestions addressed more immediately to ourselves, in view of what has been said.

I. Who will not acknowledge *the triumphant influence of the gospel*? And do we not see and feel this, when we stand by the bedside of the dying believer? It is one of the chief glories of the gospel, that it imparts a "peace that passeth

all understanding," in that solemn hour in which "flesh and heart fail." In that awful moment, when "the soul is floating on the confines of two worlds," there is a power in the religion of Jesus, that supports and comforts it in a near view of eternity. How glorious the power of gospel grace! How decisive its conquests over sin and death! All that infidelity can say to a dying man, is, "*There is no hereafter.*" Its strongest and sweetest consolations are, that "*Death is an eternal sleep.*" And these she offers with a hesitating, distrustful hand, as though she herself were tossing on the billows of anxiety, and all around and beyond her were doubt and darkness, apprehension and despair. In vain shall we look for some "cloud of witnesses" to the consolations of infidelity, in a dying hour. What a cold and comfortless system is it, in the near view of the eternal world! Infidelity can disclose to the dying sinner, his guilt and ill-desert. It can plant a sting in the conscience, and fill the heart with anguish and despair. It can drink up the spirit, and destroy the hopes of man. It can spread before his eye the long catalogue of his offences, and unfold before him the roll of mourning, lamentation, and wo. It can show him the world, where all his treasures and all his expectations must perish. And then, it can introduce him into His presence, the light of whose countenance destroys its every gleam of hope, and whose

eye he cannot escape, and whose wrath he cannot endure. This it can do. It can plunge its deluded followers into the pit, and ingulph them in the lake of fire. But where are its tidings of pardon and peace? Where is the burden it takes from the conscience? What avenue does it open to the world of light? Of what holy heaven does it speak? What holy employments does it describe? What pure society does it pant after? Where are the raptures of its anticipated joy? Where does it show the path of life? Where does it speak of the beatific visions of Nebo, and of the fulness of joy at God's right hand? Here its voice is dumb, and its light vanishes for ever. It has no refuge from the grave; no perpetual sabbath in the kingdom of God; no deliverance from the curse. These are the hopes of the people of God. This is the boon of christianity. These are the bright prospects of the gospel. It is the Christian only who can say, "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

"I saw a mourner standing at eventide over the grave of one dearest to him on earth. The memory of joys that were past came crowding on his soul.—And is this, said he, all that remains

“ of one so loved and so lovely ? Is this lowly
 “ hillock, and the corruption and worms beneath
 “ it, all that is left of one whose smile was the
 “ light of this world’s darkness, whose tender
 “ voice waked in every hour of trial ?—I call, but
 “ no voice answers.—O death ! inexorable death !
 “ what hast thou done ?—Let me die too. I would
 “ not live always. Let me lie down’ and forget
 “ my sorrows in the slumber of the grave.—While
 “ thus he thought in agony, the gentle form of
 “ Christianity came by. She bade him look up-
 “ wards, and to the eye of faith all heaven stood
 “ disclosed. He saw the invisible glory of God.
 “ He heard songs and the transport of the great
 “ multitude which no man can number, around
 “ the throne. There were the spirits of the just
 “ made perfect. There the spirit of her for whom
 “ he mourned. Their happiness was pure, per-
 “ manent, perfect. The mourner then wiped the
 “ tears from his eyes. *All the days of my appointed*
 “ *time*, said he, *will I wait till my change come.*
 “ Christianity did not stop here. She assured him
 “ in the name of him who is the resurrection and
 “ the life, of him who was dead and is alive for-
 “ evermore, that death was but a sleep, and the
 “ grave but a temporary resting place to the be-
 “ liever ; that Jesus from his throne watches that
 “ sacred dust ; and when the long expected morn
 “ shall come, that corruptible shall put on incor-

“ ruption, and that mortal shall put on immortality. To him already, by rapid anticipation,

“ On the cold cheek of death smiles and roses are blending,
 “ And beauty immortal awakes from the tomb.”*

2. In view of this subject, can we fail to say, *How wide is the difference between the righteous and the wicked, at death !* The difference is real and radical in the midst of life and health ; but then it is not so strongly marked and prominent. Wicked men often *appear* like good men in the seasons of health and mercy ; but when they come to a dying bed, the mask is apt to be torn off, and the deception vanishes. Whenever the great truths and realities that cluster around the couch of a dying man are seen and felt, and are unembarrassed in their influence, they draw forth the real feelings of the heart, and show it to be either holy or unholy, submissive or rebellious, peaceful and happy, or restless and miserable. “ The wicked is driven away in his wickedness ; but the righteous hath hope in his death.” The wicked is surprised, as by the toils and artifice of an enemy ; the righteous is calm and quiet. All his plans are formed and digested with a view to dying. The wicked die unwillingly ; they cannot bear to think of death ; and they complain and

* The preceding paragraph is from one of the last sermons of Mr. Christmass. Its characteristic beauty, and its peculiar adaptation to himself will, I have no doubt, commend it to those especially acquainted with his history.

contend with God, because they see they must die : the righteous quietly submit to the sentence, and yield their will to God's. The wicked, in spite of all their complaints, and entreaties, and tears, are forced into eternity, and torn away ; the righteous go willingly, and choose to go, and often " desire rather to depart." The wicked dies unreformed, and impenitent, without one sinful desire mortified, or one sin repented of ; the righteous dies, reformed, renewed, and with the spirit and character of heaven already begun in his soul. The wicked dies unsanctified, and without one holy affection, and instead of being a vessel of mercy, is only a vessel of wrath fitted to destruction ; the righteous dies with the spirit of grace already dwelling in his bosom, and his heart the residence of Jesus's love, and meet already to be a partaker of the inheritance with the saints in light. The wicked dies unpardoned, with nothing to relieve his excited sense of ill-desert, and nothing to alleviate his " certain fearful looking for of judgment ;" the righteous dies, under the sweet consciousness of pardoning mercy, with sweet confidence in the blood of sprinkling, and though his lips are pale and cold, yet do they glow with the praises of the great redemption. The wicked dies in all the indulgence of his enmity to God, in all his contempt of the divine Saviour, in all his preference of earth to heaven, in all his hostility to holiness, and in the full pos-

session of that spirit, by which he is so soon to be allied to the devil and his angels; while the righteous die, in all the blessedness of love to God, in all the ardours of heavenly desire, in all that hungering and thirsting after righteousness which are so soon to be gratified to the full, and in which, when gratified, he will become assimilated to the church of the first-born, and become holy as God is holy. The wicked sinks into his grave in all the darkness and horrors of despair; while the righteous greets it as the place where "the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest." The wicked sends his thoughts into futurity, but sees no light to cheer its immeasurable prospects, no limits to its infinite and awful expansion, no bottom to its dread and fathomless abyss; while the righteous, from the top of Nebo, look across to the heavenly land, where there is nothing to obscure their prospects, or limit their joys, where there is no night and no sun, for the Lord God is the light of it, and the Lamb its glory.

3. In view of this subject, how *unspeakably important is it to bring our hopes to the test of a dying hour*. No man in this assembly deliberately expects to die in his sins, and sink into the grave in despair. We all have hopes; but what are they—on what do they rest? Are they the fruit of the Spirit? Are they built upon the Rock, or upon the sand? Is it, that you are naturally so

amiable and lovely?—is it, that you have lived so honest and regular a life?—is it, that you have been awakened to a view of your lost condition as a sinner?—is it, that you have begun to seek and strive for salvation?—is it, that you mean to continue seeking and striving, till you find mercy?—are these, or any of these, the foundation on which you build? Ah! they are refuges of lies, and the hail shall sweep them away. Is it that you name the name of Christ before men, and put on the external form of godliness?—is it, that you think God is too merciful and kind to punish, and that none of his creatures will finally perish?—or is it, that you hope and intend to become pious at some future and more convenient season? These, too, are all refuges of lies. I have seen hopes like these wither at the approach of death, like the leaves of the forest, when they wither and fall before the frosts of autumn. Bring your hopes, dear hearers, to the test of a dying hour. It is an honest, a heart-searching hour. Have you expectations so pure, so enduring, that when this world passes away, they will not all be defeated, and your hearts wrung with disappointment? Have you hopes, which one view of your guilt and ill-desert in the sight of God, such as will force itself upon you in a dying hour, will not prostrate and destroy? Have you hopes, which, when God presents himself before you, and you see his amiable and awful glory fill your dying

chamber, will not shun his presence, and shrink away and die? Have you hopes, which will support you when the light of eternity flashes the conviction on your mind, that you must live for ever? Have you hopes that will be confirmed and strengthened, rather than disturbed and destroyed by the prospect of that everlasting separation between the righteous and the wicked, of which the bible speaks? Have you hopes that can flourish under the holy light and pure atmosphere of heaven, and that cannot be disturbed or irritated by all the rectitude and justice of your Maker, as they are expressed toward his enemies in the world of eternal despair? Death will scrutinize the sweetest hope that ever comforted the heart of man. His cold hand will handle it. He will turn it over, and see what materials it is made of. And if it is not immortal, if it bears not the superscription of the Redeemer and the very image of the skies; it will perish, when God shall take away the soul.

4. In view of our subject, *let us be admonished to bring death and eternity near.* We know, "it is appointed unto men once *to die.*" "What is your life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." "As for man, his days are as grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth; for the wind passeth over it, and it is gone, and the place thereof shall

know it no more." Death is styled the "King of terrors." Of all terrible things, is he the most terrible. And yet must we look the Monster in the face. He is the king against whom there is no rising up. Millions upon millions has he destroyed; and yet he is insatiable. He still cries, It is not enough! Give! Give.

Look not away from the thought, beloved hearers, that you must die. You know not who may stand at your bed of death; whether friends or strangers. You know not where you may die; at home or abroad, on the land or on the ocean. You know not how you may die; whether it shall be by some slow and tardy approach to the dark valley, or by some unexpected and sudden visitation; whether the summons shall come in the gentle accents of a premonishing providence, or whether it shall be like the thief in the night, or the voice of God speaking out of the fire. But it is of little consequence how, or where, or when death invades these frail bodies, if we are fitted for heaven. The more familiar we become with this dread Destroyer, the more his terrors are laid aside, and we shall see that even this grim messenger can put on a placid countenance. Which of you is prepared, my christian brethren, to obey the mandate, and go up to Pisgah *and die*? Even now, you are encompassing the mountain, and must soon bend your course toward its lofty summit. O, beware! lest that last command

should overtake you in some inauspicious hour ! It is easy for the soul to be so surcharged with the spirit and cares of this world, and wander so far from God, as not to welcome the clearest and brightest view of heaven. " Watch ye therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord may come."

I only add,

5. In view of the thoughts that have been suggested in this discourse, *let the righteous thank God and take courage.* My beloved brethren, God will soon call us to *go up to the mountain and die.* It is to you the Redeemer says, " Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go, and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." Christ's presence makes death easy.

" Why should we start and fear to die ?

" What timorous worms we mortals are !

" Death is the gate of endless joy,

" And yet we dread to enter there."

Death cannot touch the immortal *spirit*. It is the breathless body only, that it consigns to the damp, dark sepulchre. The soul lies not beneath the clods of the valley; becomes not the food of worms, nor moulders to the dust. No: its im-

mortal career is just begun; its native activity is just restored; its immortal vision is just enlarged; its strong and restless desires are just about to be gratified. From the top of Nebo, it beholds a scene, beautiful and unbounded, beyond all that is visible to the eye of sense. There are the "new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." There, there is a radiance and grandeur, worthy of God's spiritual kingdom. There is the "pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, from the throne of God and the Lamb." There is the tree of life, "bearing twelve manner of fruits, and yielding his fruit every month." There is the verdure of perpetual spring, and the harmony of everlasting praise. And why, then,

"———start and shrink,
"To cross this narrow sea?"

Why not rather spread your pinions, and long to be away? Courage, Christians! death cannot hurt you. This "last enemy" shall be destroyed. O that we lived more with an eye on heaven! O that our hearts more habitually and more intensely rested on this heavenly inheritance! Did our souls loathe all other food and crave this heavenly manna; did we turn away from earthly fountains, and drink deeper at this fountain of living waters; did we pant after the full vision of God and the Lamb, till with the unrestrained emotions of an almost impatient affection, we

could say, "O that I had wings like a dove, for then would I fly away and be at rest;" were this the heavenly spirit within us, death would be disarmed of his sting. Endeavour then to realize that heaven is near. This heart will throb, and this pulse will beat but a few pulsations more, before your bodies sleep in the dust, and your active spirits made perfectly blessed in the full enjoyment of God and heaven. Often then, climb the mount, and take some cheering view of the heavenly land. And then, *thank God and take courage*. And when you become faint and weary, go up again, and open your eyes upon your immortal destiny. And if you linger still, climb the mount again, and shut out all your thoughts and view the blood-bought inheritance. O sleep no longer just on the verge of heaven! Rather than do this, go and *die* in the mount whither thou goest up, and be gathered unto thy people.

Yes, my friends, we may thank God and take courage, though we have met on a most mournful occasion. There is much in the death of our beloved *Christmas* that should fix our eye on heaven.

He was not called away under a cloud, but in the clear light of God's countenance. It was not in that darkness, that deprived his soul of peace and hope, but in that sweet and humble confidence in God, which nothing could shake or destroy. The command was sudden and unexpected;

but he *obeyed*. His "honours were fresh upon him." The charms of youth and beauty with him had scarcely passed away. The rose was again on his cheek, and the lustre had returned to his eye. He had just entered upon an enterprise deeply interesting to the welfare of thousands. Hopes were centered in him that are rarely blasted, when *God called*, and he *answered him*; when the Sovereign Arbiter of life and death distinctly told him to go up to the mount and die!

The family of *Christmas*, as the name might lead one to suppose, have been from time immemorial, both English and Papal. They were a wealthy family, residing in the North of England. The grandfather of the Rev. *Joseph Stibbs Christmas* lived in London; had an uncle who studied in France, became a Roman Catholic priest, and was chaplain to the Duke of Grafton. His grandfather's family were educated in the most rigid observance of Roman Catholic peculiarities. Upon his death, the father of Mr. Christmas, who by the time he reached manhood was the sole survivor of his family, completely threw aside the religion of his ancestors, probably having never cordially conformed to it, and now finding it but ill suiting the inclinations of a gay and volatile young man. Gathering up his patrimony, which had been decreasing from generation to generation, he set sail for the *New World*, and landed

in the city of New-York, in the month of April, 1784. He shortly after repaired to Philadelphia, where some of his early friends then resided. There he continued for one or two years, and then, as was customary with young men of enterprise, went west of the Alleghany mountains, where the tide of emigration was then setting. He established himself at *Fort Red-Stone*, since called *Brownsville*, in Fayette County, Pennsylvania, on the banks of the Monongahela river, where he married *Elizabeth Stibbs*, the mother of our departed friend.

Mr. Christmas's maternal grandfather was descended from a long line of ancestors, who had been steadily attached to nonconformist principles, and were generally members of the Baptist denomination. His grandfather Joseph Stibbs, received his education at one of the Universities, and afterwards became a stationer in Monument yard, London. To escape the solicitations of his friends, who urged him to marry in opposition to his own inclinations, he came to the British colony in Virginia, and there entered into mercantile transactions. While in Virginia, he became acquainted with *Maria Henrietta Dito*, an orphan young lady, whose father was a Spaniard, and steward to the wealthy and popular family of the Duke of Chandois. This lady accompanied Lady Dunmore to Virginia, and was married to Mr. Stibbs a few years previous to

the revolutionary war. Mr. Stibbs died before the conclusion of the contest, leaving Mr. Christmas's grandmother with four children to struggle for her livelihood on the frontiers of the western wilderness. She was a woman of great fortitude, and raised her family amid all the embarrassments of widowhood in respectability and competency. In some brief family "reminiscences," from which the preceding notices have been extracted, apparently written at a very late period, Mr. Christmas says, "she is yet living in the 86th year of her age, still having the satisfaction of dwelling in the midst of her four children, and numbering nearly forty grand-children, and about twenty-five great grand-children."

Mr. Christmas's parents had thirteen children, of which Joseph was the *eighth*, and was born April 10th, 1803, at *Georgetown*, in Beaver county, Pennsylvania—a romantic village on the banks of the Ohio, about a mile distant from the Virginia boundary. His father was in easy circumstances, and spared no pains in the education of his children. This son, at the age of thirteen, entered Washington College, in Pennsylvania, and notwithstanding his youth, received the first honours of his class. It was in college, when about fourteen or fifteen years old, that his mind first became interested in the subject of religion. He was called to many a season of darkness and painful conviction of his guilt and ruin as a sinner; nor

was it until long after others saw that he gave decisive evidence of that moral transformation, which fits the soul for heaven, that he himself ventured to indulge a peaceful hope.

For some time after he left college, he devoted himself to the study of Medicine; and it was in these pursuits, that he acquired that taste for Natural Science, which so often tinctured his subsequent investigations. But his heart was set on the *ministry of reconciliation*. This was the high vocation in which he desired to live and die, and for which God had prepared him. With this view, in the year 1821, he entered the Theological Seminary at Princeton, where he remained till 1824. While at Princeton, he kept a diary, parts of which I have perused with great interest, and found it abounding with records of sweet devotional sentiment; of self-examination and dedication to God; of meditations and prayers, and purposes and plans of enlarged future usefulness. At the Spring session of the Presbytery of Philadelphia in 1824, he was licensed to preach the gospel, and entered upon his work with a measure of public favour, of faithfulness and zeal that were highly indicative of eminence.

Soon after his licensure, his mind was turned toward a mission among the scattered and destitute Protestant churches of France, for which his learning and piety and uncommon suavity of manners peculiarly qualified him. But the Lord of

the harvest had prepared for this youthful labourer another and less inviting field. In the course of the subsequent summer, he was ordained as a minister of the gospel, and installed pastor of the American Presbyterian church in Montreal, in Lower Canada. There, he was destined to stand alone, amid a wide empire of the Prince of darkness, fortified as it was by all that is intolerant in civil and ecclesiastical law, and guarded by all the rigor of Papal superstition. And with what moral heroism he withstood the shock, and with what boldness he made inroads upon this kingdom of the Prince of darkness, his public controversies with the leaders of the Romish church, and his successes in winning souls to the simplicity and faith of the gospel, can best testify. Probably no minister in the land occupied such a post of danger and responsibility. This was the scene of his labours, his trials and his triumphs. It was here, that his piety, and talent, and time, and strength, were tasked with such exemplary severity. Alone, in a foreign country, away from ministerial assistance and fraternal counsel and encouragement, in labours abundant, no wonder that even his buoyant mind and body sunk under the burden. As well might the lily bloom amid the northern blasts, as a minister whose habits were as studious and laborious as his, sustain such responsibility. There, amid the rigor of an unfriendly clime, he continued his

labours, when unembarrassed by sickness, till the Summer of 1828, when he was so completely prostrated, that he was advised by a council of physicians, to remove to a milder climate and intermit his labours, as the only probable means of preserving his life.

During his pastoral relation with the congregation at Montreal, Mr. Christmas, on a visit to this city, became acquainted with, and subsequently married, Miss *Louisa Jones*, a lady well known to us, and a member of one of our own churches. It gives me pleasure to turn aside from my course a moment, and visit the grave of this beloved woman.

"No marble marks her couch of lowly sleep,
 "But living statues there are seen to weep;
 "Affliction's semblance bends not o'er her tomb,
 "Affliction's self deplores her youthful doom."

Mrs. Christmas was a woman of extraordinary intelligence and piety. Few of her sex were so well qualified to share the labours and trials of ministerial life. As a scholar, she was not only the first in standing among those of her age, but in every instance, was she at the head of the school where she was instructed. For a succession of years, she was under my own particular teaching; and neither in the catechetical nor bible class, had she her equal. She was one of those who relied on her own unassisted efforts, and acquired more information from her own desire

of knowledge and patient research, than from all the instruction of her teachers. Her private and social character was of the sweetest kind. With sensibilities that were naturally tender and humane, strong and permanent in her attachments, delicately cautious of offending, with a benevolence that was alike ardent and expansive, she was valued by all who knew her, and will long be remembered with affection by an extensive circle of friends and acquaintance. But it was the sweetness and purity of her christian character that constituted her adornment and glory. It was about the twentieth year of her age, and during one of those seasons, when it pleased God to visit the congregation with which she worshipped, with the special influences of his Holy Spirit, that she found joy and peace. Her spiritual joys were often many and precious, and her conflicts also were sometimes uncommonly severe. But her piety was matured and improved by the discipline. After her removal to Montreal, few females exerted a more powerful or salutary influence. During the religious revivals with which the ministrations of her husband were twice accompanied, her spiritual enjoyment and usefulness were such as few can call their own. But her work was soon done. And while all who knew her, bitterly lamented the bereavement of so much that was excellent and lovely, they were still consoled by the truth, that while for her to live, was Christ, to die was gain.

When Mr. and Mrs. Christmas returned from Montreal to New-York, they had two daughters; the eldest two and a half years old, the other an infant of a few weeks. Such was the state of his health, that during the illness of the youngest child, he was under the necessity of taking a voyage to one of our southern cities, and was induced to visit New-Orleans on the behalf of the American Bible Society. In his absence, he wrote the best account of that city that has ever appeared. Shortly after his return, his child died; and in three weeks, the only surviving child also died; and in the course of the same season, exhausted by anxiety and worn out by ceaseless care, Mrs. Christmas also slumbered with the dead. Shortly after the death of his children, Mr. Christmas spent a few weeks in a retired village in Worcester county, Massachusetts. Here he preached with great acceptance, and received a call to become the pastor of the congregation, which he felt it his duty to decline accepting. But wherever he went, God gave him some seals of his ministry. During the few weeks he spent at Bolton, a revival of religion commenced under his preaching, which issued in the hopeful conversion of twelve or fifteen souls. On his return to this city, he once more resumed the active duties of the pulpit. With this prospect and promise, in October last he received a call from the *Bowery Church*, in this city, and settled

among them as their minister. There he laboured faithfully, and to the universal acceptance of a people, whose attachment to him grew with his increasing usefulness, and their increasing knowledge of his worth. But his career was short. In less than five months, after his installation, he was numbered with the dead.

Happy family! thus early to be translated to a purer world! Lovely were they in their lives, and in their deaths they were not long divided.

Mr. Christmas, from his early childhood, was subject to attacks of asthma. On the Wednesday previous to his death, he was seized with symptoms of approaching fever, together with difficult and laborious respiration. It was hoped, that by the use of the means which had ordinarily given him relief, his symptoms would be subdued; but the disease was rapid and violent, and his debilitated frame sunk under it at half-past five o'clock on Sabbath morning. He appeared somewhat alarmed at the severity of the attack; but it was not until the night on which he died, that his symptoms became so severe, that it was thought best to inform him, he would not probably recover. He received the intelligence with some surprise, but with humble meekness and resignation. He heard his Master's voice, "*Go up to Nebo and die.*" And he prepared to ascend the mount. During the whole night, he was inclined to talk incessantly on religious

topics. He inquired with much interest about a supply for his pulpit. He hoped he should be remembered in the prayers of his people on that day. He said he had not that assured hope that he could wish; but he remarked that he had often examined himself by the writings of the Apostle John, and always, adding with a pleasant smile upon his countenance, with the same satisfactory results. He observed that the ways of God had been very mysterious towards his family. And when asked whether he felt perfectly resigned to God's will, he *lifted up his hands and eyes*, and answered, "the Lord God omnipotent reigneth, and *let the whole earth rejoice!*" His mind was apparently never more active than during the last hours of his life. He surveyed the whole course of his ministry; he appeared to reflect with very grateful feelings upon the manifest fruits of his labours at Montreal and St. Andrews; and on the other hand, when he thought of the individuals to whom he had had access, who were without God and without hope, he felt as if he had cause to bewail his unfaithfulness. The last hour of his life, he was most of the time in prayer. It was with extreme difficulty he could speak, but seeing the anxiety of those around him to listen to his dying counsels and become acquainted with the feelings of his soul, he said to them, "You will find my feelings *as they now are*, in the 'Prayer of an Aged Min-

ister,' in the *Theological Magazine*." We have referred to that prayer; and one more full of piety and heaven, we never read. It is a prayer written by the late Reverend *Dr. Samuel Hopkins* of Newport, Rhode-Island, a short time before he died. The fondest friend of Mr. Christmas could not have wished a sweeter expression of christian feeling. As the time of his departure drew near, he seemed to stretch his eye toward the heavenly land. And there, what visions of joy rushed upon his view, it is not for us to tell. It was natural he should think of his beloved wife and children, and speak of meeting them in heaven. He spoke of the "sainted mother" and her babes with inexpressible interest. In slow and broken monosyllables he said, "I commend my body to God, and my soul to the Lord Jesus Christ; who has redeemed, sanctified, and saved my dear wife, as I trust; and as I believe, though not from any express declarations of scripture, but from a general view of the benevolence of God through *Jesus Christ*, has also received to himself my two dear children, whom *I now expect soon to meet in heaven!*" He continued a little while after this in prayer and praise, with his eyes lifted to God and his hands stretched towards heaven, till his voice faltered, his vision failed, and "his hands fell and moved no more!"

The person of Mr. Christmas was uncommon-

ly agreeable and interesting, and his manners engaging and distinguished for christian simplicity. He possessed a lucid mind, a vivid fancy, and a most ingenuous heart. The natural con-texture of his soul seemed to resemble that of *Henry Martyn*, and perhaps still more that of *Henry Kirke White*. His memory was retentive, and his recollection accurate, beyond those of almost any man I ever knew. In his youth, there seemed a precociousness of intellect ; but it gave no pledges of eminence which his subsequent life did not fully redeem. I have found among his private papers, some very commendable specimens of English composition, written at the early age of fifteen and sixteen, which indicated, not less the solidity of his judgment, than that delicacy and vivacity of thought for which he was peculiarly distinguished. Among these are, "*Essays on public preaching*," which originally appeared in the *Ohio Spectator*, and of which the editor remarks, "If this is the production of a youthful, and yet unexpanded mind, what may we not expect from longer practice, and more mature years?"

As a scholar, Mr. Christmas was much more liberally furnished than most of his brethren, of equal years, and indeed behind few of them who are much his seniors. He had been largely supplied with opportunities for the prosecution of scholastic pursuits. Though unusually diligent and successful in his official character, he devoted

much time to the acquisition of literary information. His public performances were rarely deficient in accuracy, and frequently specimens of finished elegance. He had a taste for learning, science, and the fine arts, that were not often combined. His historical reading was very extensive. He was familiar with the Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and French languages. Mathematics, Natural and Mental Philosophy, Logic, Rhetoric, and the various departments of natural science, were subjects to which he had devoted much time and thought, and in which he had made, and was making sensible attainments. To Polite Literature and Poetry, I need not say, he was no stranger. He possessed a fancy that could dwell with exquisite delight on the serenity of a moonlight evening, the majesty of the howling storm, the winding of a river, or the beauty of a landscape. His leisure hours were often "beguiled by the pencil," and his languid intervals of labour "charmed by the simple tones of his lyre." He was emphatically an industrious man, as his life, and attainments, and diary, show. It has been remarked concerning him in his boyhood, that he never indulged in *play*. His relaxations were always of a different kind, and tending to his improvement. The diary he commenced since his residence in New-York, contains very many valuable hints to the christian minister and the christian student. In one part of it you may read the

events of every day ; in another, his consultations with his ministerial brethren, and their united plans of usefulness ; in another, a compressed view of the sciences ; in another, an outline of projected sermons ; in another, facts and observations concerning some portion of the pagan world ; in another, Latin and Greek sayings and sentences ; in another, similes and illustrations ; in another, apt and forcible quotations ; in another, etymologies ; and in all, *piety* and prayer.

One might suppose that with such a multitude of concerns on his hands, he was tempted to neglect the great business of the ministry. But it was not so. He knew well how to gather up the scraps and fragments of time ; and these he devoted to his lighter attainments. Theology was his study ; preaching the gospel to lost sinners his business. In his theological sentiments, he had "sincerely received and adopted the Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the holy scriptures." His sermons were rich, varied in matter, impressive, and often solemn and forcible. In his pastoral labours, he was kind, courteous, devout, and faithful. He had the happy faculty of gaining the confidence of children, and of those in the humble walks of life. He was remarkably successful in winning over the opposers of religion, and in bringing them from rancorous opposition to temperate and calm inquiry.

In all his intercourse with the world, he exhibited great purity of character. His judgment was excellent; and his discernment in all the lesser proprieties of human society, peculiarly correct. In the domestic and social relations, and in all the virtues that belonged to private friendship, he disarmed suspicion, and commanded affection and confidence. He had some melancholy hours, but it was that

“—————kindly mood of melancholy,
“That wings the soul and points her to the skies.”

You might sometimes discover an abstraction of thought, from which he seemed to derive the sweetest pleasure. And now and then, you might look upon a “sombre cast of countenance, where tears often gushed, and gave such exquisite interest to the man.”

His piety was sweet and humble. Though not diffident, he possessed a large share of unaffected modesty when speaking of his own spiritual attainments. In his early history he had struggled with difficulties, and during his last few years, it was evident God “had chosen him in the furnace of affliction.” Many a rude storm of adversity did he encounter, while his patience and submission in suffering afforded the sweetest proof of the reality and force of his religious character. He was not a “flower of the sun,” but was “nursed in storms,” and “cradled in the tempest.”

And there *he grew*. He grew *strong and high*,
and shot his branches toward heaven.

"So virtue blooms, brought forth amid the storms
"Of chill adversity ; in some lone walk
"Of life, she rears her head
"Obscure and unobserved ;—
"While every breathing breeze that on her blows,
"Chastens her spotless purity of breast,
"And teaches her to bear
"Serene the ills of life."

We fondly hoped he was preparing for great and eminent usefulness. But "God's way is in the sea, and his path in the mighty waters." "As the heavens are high above the earth, so are his ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts." Mr. Christmas was among the brightest ornaments that adorned the church below, and we trust eminently fitted for the church above. Through much tribulation he has entered the kingdom of heaven, and through faith and patience, we trust, has inherited the promises.

And now, what shall we say ? "The memory of the just is blessed." Let us embalm it in our hearts, and let it the better prepare us to "go up to Nebo and die."

My afflicted friends, God has again made you mourners. These bereaved families, he has visited with breach upon breach. But, unutterably tender and precious consolation ! in all the long series of bereavements with which he has visited you, he

has taken none from your circle, concerning whom you have not hope in their death. This mournful event I know tears open all your wounds afresh. May the Mighty Healer bind up these lacerated bosoms! May the God of Abraham and Moses fit you to die the death of the righteous, and make your last end like his!

To the people of this infant church and congregation also, this providence is full of instruction. The relation between a people and their Pastor is most interesting and solemn. Your beloved minister has gone to give up his account. You know the responsibilities he felt for the people of his charge—for the lambs of his flock. Few could appreciate the bitterness of his heart, when he feared he might be left to labour in vain, for any of those who heard him; and few could appreciate his joys, when he saw, as he did see, that through his instrumentality, the gospel had become the power of God to salvation. He carried his solicitude for you up to his dying chamber. He bore you on his heart when he struggled with the king of terrors. His career was short, but not in vain. He has left impressions on your consciences, that will be renewed when you meet him at the bar of God, and that will be felt through interminable ages. And though now dead, "he yet speaketh." Yes, he speaks as he never spoke before. Could he bend from those courts of love, this evening, O how

would he expostulate with you ! What new encouragement and watchfulness would he infuse into the bosoms of the people of God ! And in what accents of tenderness would he once more speak to the thoughtless sinner. There, heaven, with all its immeasurable glories stretches itself before his eye. And there, he has already looked down upon that bottomless gulf, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. What interesting realities are these now to him ! Tell me, is it not high time to awake out of sleep ? As you draw aside the veil, and see your departed minister, let the realities with which he is encompassed sink into your soul. And as you behold him crowned with life and righteousness, so now resolve, so to live and die, as to be crowned and reign with him for ever !