

X.

A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

VICKSBURG,

JANUARY 20th, 1856,

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE LIFE AND DEATH OF

REV. BENJ. H. WILLIAMS,

LATE PASTOR OF THAT CHURCH,

BY

REV. JOS. B. STRATTON,

OF

NATCHEZ.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

VICKSBURG:

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CORRESPONDENCE.

VICKSBURG, January, 21st, 1856.

REV. J. B. STRATTON:

Dear Sir—Many who heard you discourse yesterday, on the death of the late Rev. Benjamin H. Williams, are very anxious to have it published, as it affords not only a life-like picture of our late beloved Pastor, but a memoir of a life devoted to "the work" so "well finished" by him, and so aptly presented by you in your admirable Sermon.

We, therefore, ask the favor from you of a copy for publication.

Believe us very truly, yours &c.,

WM. H. STEVENS,
C. A. MANLOVE,
JOS. H. JOHNSTON,
DANIEL SWETT,
M. EMANUEL,
J. J. COWAN.

VICKSBURG, January 22nd, 1856.

TO MESSRS. WM. H. STEVENS, C. A. MANLOVE, AND OTHERS:

Gentlemen—I leave with you the Sermon preached on last Sabbath morning, an imperfect but honest tribute of respect and love for your departed Pastor, to be published, if you think the publication of it will subserve the objects for which it was preached.

With kind regard, believe me yours,

JOS. B. STRATTON.

A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, VICKSBURG,

January 20th, 1856,

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE LIFE AND DEATH OF

REV. BENJAMIN H. WILLIAMS,

LATE PASTOR OF THAT CHURCH.

JOHN, 17: 4. I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.

On the twenty-seventh day of last September, when the gloom of the epidemic was hanging darkest over your sister city where I dwell, I went in the afternoon to a prayer-meeting, where a few of God's people were accustomed to seek solace and succour amidst the perils and sorrows which were surrounding them. And I went with a heavy heart. For those swift vehicles of communication which now bind our places of residence together, had brought to us the tidings, that the beloved Pastor of this Church was very ill, and was not expected to survive the day. All day long, my spirit had been present with the weeping group who were standing at his bed-side, and the vision of my dying brother had occupied my mind. I went to the prayer-meeting, to ask my fellow-christians to join with me in entreating God to spare his life, to interpose his Almighty arm and stay the sword of the destroyer. I knew my request would be responded to, heartily; for his name and his person, his character and his worth, were familiar to us all. He had often met with us in the house of God, and broken to us the bread of life. On my way to the place of worship I called at the Telegraph Office to learn the latest intelligence. The operator understood my errand; and before I had uttered a word, met my inquiring glance with the reply "Mr. Williams is dead!" My mind reeled almost under the shock of this painful announcement. It was like the bursting of a thunder-cloud over my head; and it fell with the keenness of the lightning's bolt upon my heart. Oh could it be? If it had been possible to doubt the message, I should have refused to believe it. But it was authentic,—positive. It was a fact, which I was forced to receive,—*Mr. Williams was dead!*

The mercy-seat whither I was going, had shrouded itself in clouds and darkness, and the prayer I had intended to present at it, was taken from my lips—God had forbidden it; and my brother did not need it. I could only go to my congregation with the mournful tidings of the event; and as the words smote their ears, “Mr. Williams is dead,” there was many a head that drooped, and many an eye that overflowed with tears, and many a heart that sank with sorrow, in that little assembly. A solemnity and a sadness, such as the contemplation of death does not often produce, pervaded the exercises of that memorable hour. God in his awful sovereignty, seemed to be standing in our midst. The hopes of man lay in scattered ruins around us. The grave yawned by our firesides, the world robed itself in sackcloth, the air was filled with wailing. With subdued and chastened spirits, we closed our devotions, and then went from the place of prayer, trying to say,—with a faith which was willing to assent to what it could not understand,—“even so Father, for so it hath seemed good in thy sight;” and feeling as we had never felt before, the truth of the Apostle’s declaration, “we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us.”

The scene which I have described to you, I have introduced as an example of what occurred substantially, in almost every other community in our section of country. The same intense solicitude attended the intelligence of your Pastor’s sickness; the same deep and absorbing sorrow followed the announcement of his death. Friends spoke of it with moistened eyes when they met upon the street. Families talked of it, in hushed tones as they sat together in the seclusion of their homes. Ministers discoursed of it in words that sobbed with emotion and trembled with awe, as they addressed their congregations in the sanctuary. Everywhere you might have found mourners, uttering their grief for the dead;—and everywhere, amongst these mourners, you might have found those who with tender sympathy, were pitying and praying for the bereaved ones, who stood at the dark centre of this circle of grief,—the wife,—the children,—the church,—left in a moment, and in a moment too of peculiar dependence, without husband, father and pastor.

Four months nearly, have passed since the event which caused this wide-spread sensation,—a period long enough to place many of the dead of the past summer in the ranks of the forgotten. But time, my brethren, as your presence here to-day indicates, has had no effect to abate the sense of bereavement, nor assuage the fond regrets with which you reflect upon the

death of your pastor. Your tears are as warm, and your sensibilities as lively, this morning, as they were on the day he was taken from you. You have not forgotten him. You will not let him be forgotten. And we, your friends from other places, as we wept with you in the first hour that we heard of your sorrow, are ready to weep with you still. I come, in part to tell you, as the messenger of the churches, how truly the other members of Christ's body, are suffering with you in your heavy affliction. I bring with me to this house of mourning, the hearts of your mourning brethren, and I ask for them the privilege, of mingling their grief with yours in this sad ceremonial, and of leaving their tribute of love, entwined with your own, upon the tomb of him, whose memory, they, like you, delight to honor.

I have chosen as my text, words that fell from the lips of the adorable Saviour in one of the most solemn and sacred moments of his life, and words which have an allusion to acts which no other being who ever trod on earth, could claim to have performed. I have felt almost afraid to use them, in any connection except that in which they were uttered, lest I should seem to be trespassing upon holy ground ; but two considerations have led me to think I may properly and profitably adopt them, as a guide to my reflections to-day. One of these is, that in the life of our Lord, the character of the Saint, and that of the Redeemer are so commingled, that there is hardly anything that he did or said as Redeemer, that does not develope in some way, the spirit and conduct of the Saint ; so that much that is said of him as Redeemer, may be applied, without disparagement to him in this respect, to the humble follower who has attained a likeness to him as a Saint, and the other is, that these words of the Saviour from a special cause, have become associated in my mind so intimately with our departed friend, that I can scarcely think of him without being reminded of them and rarely hear them repeated without being reminded of him—some of you will doubtless recall the frequency with which he was accustomed to introduce them into his public prayers—placing himself and his fellow-worshippers as it were, in the position of Jesus in that trying juncture when he so triumphantly declared, “I have glorified thee on the earth. I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do,” he was wont to pour forth the fervent petition, that they, the suppliants whom he represented, might be enabled thro' grace, to end their lives so as to leave behind them their testimony, that they too, had glorified their Father in Heaven upon the earth, and finished the work he had given

them to do. Often, and often, I have followed him through that prayer: and marked the solemn form in which he would amplify and emphasize his thought,—“and *then*, when it is done,—*all* done, and *well* done,—then Lord, let thy servants depart in peace, and their eyes behold thy salvation.” Public prayer, my hearers, when it is a sincere spiritual act, takes its tone and character very much from private prayer. And private prayer, with a pious soul, will be the most truthful expression which can be found of the real exercises and sentiments of that soul. That petition to which I have referred, came so readily to the lip in public, because it was a familiar utterance of the speaker in his closet; and it was so commonly breathed out in the closet, because it expressed one of the strongest convictions and one of the warmest desires of the speaker’s soul. Perhaps I shall hardly use the language of exaggeration, if I say—that his conviction of his obligation to glorify God upon the earth and finish the work he had given him to do, dwelt like an intuition in his mind, and the desire to discharge that obligation wrought like an *instinct* in his heart. Dear brother! we little dreamed as we listened to thy pleading voice, that the text which was so often made the theme of thy devout intercessions for us—was to be made so soon the theme of our sorrowful meditations at thy funeral! We shall hear thy voice no more! But we remember with gratitude the prayer it loved to utter for us. May God remember it too,—and help each one of us to leave as good evidence behind us, at our death that it was answered in our history and experience, as we have to-day to assure us, that it was answered, in thine!

The text opens to us, as I conceive, several important topics of instruction and consolation, to which it will be reasonable for us to glance. First, it presents us with this thought,—that every man has a work to do upon the earth, and that this work consists, in a general sense, in the glorifying of God. The universe was made for this object,—the glory of its maker. In this point, all its manifold and diversified parts and members and objects harmonize. God is its end—as he was its beginning—“For of Him and through Him and to Him,” says an Apostle—“are all things: to whom be glory forever.” God is before all things, not only in the order of time, but in the order of rank and office. That is, any other being is secondary to him—subordinate to him—tributary to him. For his sake everything exists—for his sake everything is bound to use its existence. “The Lord hath made all things for himself, yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.” “I have glorified thee upon the earth. I have finished

the work which thou gavest me to do," was what the perfect man, the second Adam, testified, as he closed his mission in our world. It is what the first Adam, and every successive child descending from him, would have testified, had they remained perfect men, as their mission closed. This doctrine meets us everywhere in Scripture. It is demanded by the facts which meet us everywhere in nature and life. It is one of those points, in which the disclosing of revelation appears coinciding with the wants and necessities which reason feels to exist in the actual world,—in which the theory of the Bible meets and satisfies the known conditions of Creation, which furnish such demonstration to many minds that Revelation is truth and the Bible the word of God. Take it away, and you make an inexplicable labyrinth of the universe, you leave the soul to be mocked at by its own existence—you consign man to a destiny no better than that of the drift-weed whirling in the eddies of the ocean, or the thistle-down driven aimlessly, by the summer-breeze. From results so lamentable we are delivered, by the simple and sublime doctrine indicated by the text,—that every man has a work, a something to do, involved in his grant of life; and that that work carries with it the dignity of a particular Ministry, in the grand universal enterprise of glorifying God.

We are taught, again, in the text, that every man has allotted to him his own special sphere and form of labor in this general work. "I have finished the work thou gavest *me* to do," said the Saviour. Every man, like him may speak of *his own* work, as distinguished from that of all others. God may be glorified in every position and by every calling which he has made lawful or obligatory, and it is his pleasure to be glorified thus, in a countless variety of positions and callings. The dew-drop has its use, as well as the planet, the serf as well as the monarch. He places the minister in the sacred desk, and the merchant at his counter, and the ploughman in his field, and the smith at his anvil, and he says to each: "here you may find the work I have given you to do. Here you may glorify me." This is the merciful and beautiful light, which the religion of heaven throws upon the otherwise dark destiny of man. This is the link of brotherhood, which it establishes between the lowliest mortal who is living unto God in his hovel on earth and the loftiest angel who is singing doxologies in the palace of the Great King above. Every species of work which God is pleased to allot to the creature, may be performed by the creature for God, and may be classified under the honorable distinction of God's work. The *nature* of it stamps it with its true character—the *form* of

it is a matter of indifference. Man's business, in the application of life, is to look directly at the intimations of God's will concerning him, and not to look *beyond* these to find the work which God has given him to do;—and then, and not till then, will he have placed life upon its right basis, and pointed towards its true end. He, whose life is applied to the doing of God's work, can never be living at a hazard, and can never live in vain: he, whose life is applied to the doing of any other work, can reach no other issue than bankruptcy and ruin.

I remark, in the third place, that it follows from this idea, that it is the *nature* of any man's work, as God's work, which gives it its proper grade and value, while the *form*, the *outward circumstances* of it, are matters of insignificance—that the *time* and the *manner of the termination of it*, are phenomena which, however differently from our anticipations they may occur, should be suffered to affect but lightly the decisions of our judgment, or the feelings of our hearts. God's work is just that *measure* of work, as well as just that *kind* of work, which he is pleased to assign to any man. When our Lord uttered those words, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do,"—he recognized a feature in his mission—which required him to close his work just then and there. The work which had been committed to his hands had a period, a point of termination, annexed to it, in the plan of its author, and that point he had now reached. His friends in their weakness and fondness, could not see that point. They would have protracted his work; they would have kept him longer amongst them. Their vision being their guide, they could not believe that his ministry was done. Its close, at that moment, seemed to them premature and abrupt. But we, my hearers, looking from our place of observation, can see clearly, that God's work was then finished; and it was God's work only that the Saviour came to do. A day more added to his time of service, or an act more added to the sum of his labors, would have been a departure from the work which had been given him to do. Now, applying this reasoning to the case of men generally, I argue, that as every man has a work assigned to him by God, and as each man has his own particular sphere and form in which to work determined by God, so it devolves upon God to fix the measure of each man's work. It is implied in the nature of it—as God's work—that it should terminate just when, and where, and how, God is pleased to ordain;—and terminating thus—it terminates in every instance seasonably and fitly. A change in any of these circumstances, would involve a violation of the nature of the work. He who

is living to do God's work, can do nothing out of the line which is prescribed to him by God, and has nothing more to do after God's work is done. Human friends may be loth to believe that the Minister, (to take the case which the occasion naturally brings before our minds,) whom they have loved, in whose counsels they have learned to confide, ought to be taken away from them at the moment when the stroke of Providence threatens to remove him. They may call his departure an untimely one. They may say, he falls in the midst of the field;—at the noon-tide of the day,—when the harvest is just bending to his successful sickle, and they may feel disappointed, and almost offended, at the anomalous decree that summons him from his work. Nay, he himself, in his yearning solicitude for the souls of his flock, may long to stay and labor amongst them—and feel that with so many weak ones to be cherished, and so many wanderers to be gathered into the fold—his work cannot be done. But whose work, we may ask, is he doing? And who shall say when his work is done, but he who gave him his work to do? Ah, short-sighted murmurers, you had forgotten, that it is God's workman of whom you are reasoning! You had forgotten that when God's work is done—his work is done! You had forgotten, that every day you would have added to his time of service, and every act you would have added to the sum of his labors, after the moment when God ceased to require him to work, would have been time and labor spent in man's work! No—let him go—though it is but the noon-tide hour with him, and there is strength enough in his arm and love enough in his heart, for many earnest efforts yet, for the salvation of perishing men. Let him go! He came into the world, and he came to you, that he might do God's work. He has no errand beyond that, and that is done, when God says it is done,—at thirty, as truly as at three-score and ten. His fall is no defeat—his early death is no disastrous accident. His brief residence amongst you was no abortive mission. He has finished the work which had been given him to do on the earth, and the Master has need of him now in a more exalted sphere.

And one more remark which I would make upon the text is this, that the great concern with every man should be, to be prepared to say of his work when it comes to a close, it is truly *finished*. By this I mean, (to use the expressive terms with which your Pastor was wont to explain my idea;) that it is *all* done and *well* done. There can be no doubt that our Saviour's words have this signification, as well as that, of the closing of his earthly mission. And there can be no doubt that this is the

only signification, under which they can be used by any man, at a dying hour, with anything like the confidence and sincerity which characterized his declaration. The end of your work, my hearers, is always impending. The day is gliding swiftly by, and the night cometh in which no man can work. It becomes us to stand prepared every hour, to resign our stewardship, and to say of our work, we have done all which was given us to do, and we have done it with all the fidelity and ability which we could command. A formal piety, a sentimental love to Christ, a constrained service, a fitful devotion, a spasmodic zeal, a life of drowsy efforts and half performed duties, of idle regrets and barren repentings—such things as too often make up all the showing of a work for God which we can produce, will leave us inevitably to the shame and the *terror* of seeing our work terminating, when it is all *unfinished*: and they will deny, too, to the hearts that mourn for us when we are gone, that sweetest consolation that the mourning heart can know—the assurance that the loved one, with his talents all ready for his Lord's inspection;—with his work all done and well done, has entered into his reward.

And now, my Christian friends, let me say to you, that it is to lead you to this precious source of consolation, that I have carried your minds through the series of remarks I have laid before you. Of your departed Pastor it could be said, I think, as truly as of any man whom I ever knew, that in life he made it his supreme and constant endeavor to glorify God on the earth, and that in death, he was prepared to affirm, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." He regarded himself with a distinctness which is not always to be found even in men of the same holy calling with himself, as a worker for God,—this, and nothing else; and he acted faithfully upon the principle, that the work which had been given him to do, had been given him to finish—that is, to do *all*, and to do *well*. The work to which he was appointed of God, was beyond all doubt, that to which he had devoted himself; the Christian Ministry. This work he undertook, not as a profession, or ecclesiastical office, but as God's work, to be made his life's work. In him the Minister became visibly, the "man of God." To do the work committed to him, he came amongst you. Nothing else brought him here—nothing else could have brought him here—for whatever attractions of a worldly sort this field might have presented, in his case, they would have been overbalanced by those which bound him to his previous home. We have no reason to doubt that his coming here, was in strict accordance with the plan of

that work which had been given him to do. And I may go further and add, that now with his brief stay and his early death full in view, we have no reason to doubt that here he *finished* the work which had been given him to do. The act of Providence which terminated his work was a proclamation to him and to us, that God's work in his hands, as to the measure of it at least, was done. That it was *all* done and *well* done, our knowledge of the spirit and manner in which it was done, enables us with almost equal confidence, to conclude. To our eyes, apart from the event, it did not seem finished; and we ask with desponding—perhaps chafed and rebellious hearts—why was he taken away at the threshold of his usefulness? Why with so much good to be done, with such advantages for doing good as he had acquired, with such cheering prospects of doing good, opening before him, why was he called away? Still I answer, with a sorrow that mourns for him and a sense of want that pines for his presence, as tenderly, as those of any of you, his work was done;—done, because his work was God's work, and God's work for him, ceased just then and there. The work to which we refer, as that which he might have done,—the work in the family, which the heart-broken wife and her dependent little ones, feel that they needed him to do,—the work in this community, which his devoted people and admiring townsmen feel that they needed him to do,—the work in this destitute South-Western field, which the friends of Christ and his fellow-laborers in the Ministry, feel that they needed him to do, all this, it was not given him to do. It is work which has a place in man's plan, it had none in God's. As God's worker he had nothing to do with it, and though he may have left it all undone, he finished his work, fully and triumphantly. He was about his Father's business while he lived, and about it just as truly when he died; "for whether we live," says the Apostle, "we live unto the Lord, and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether therefore, we live or die, we are the Lord's." Wherefore, my brethren, comfort one another with these words:

"Life's duty done,—as sinks the clay,
Light from its load, the spirit flies;
While heaven and earth combine to say
How bless'd the righteous when he dies."

The high position which I have all along, in my remarks, assigned to Mr. Williams, as a Christian and a Minister, would be amply sustained by a narrative of his life, and an inspection of his character. This evidence the occasion will allow me only

in an imperfect form to present. It is unnecessary I know, amongst those who knew him and loved him as you did, but it is a gratification to the bereaved, to dwell upon the history and excellence of their departed friends, and a gratification which he who comes to them as a comforter, should seek to impart. This gratification, as far as I can, I will endeavor, my hearers, in the remainder of my remarks to afford you.

The Rev. Benjamin H. Williams, your late Pastor, was a native of Elizabethtown, in the State of New Jersey. He came from a State which has been a nursing mother of Ministers, and which has furnished an unusually large proportion of those who have labored in this Southern country. His birth-place too, was a spot where the Presbyterian Church in America, planted one of its earliest roots, and where it has always blessed the community with its wholesome purity. Under the influences of that Church, and under the training of pious parents, both of whom are still living, in advanced age, Mr. Williams passed his childhood and youth. The nurture and admonition of the Lord, in his case, were followed by their promised results, and before he was sixteen years of age, he gave such proofs of being a Christian as led to his admission to the second Presbyterian Church, of Elizabethtown. Prior to this, however, he was on one occasion, the subject of an apparent religious change, which he has described to me, as an illustration of the extremely uncertain character of what is called death-bed conversion. During a protracted illness, which for a long time threatened to terminate fatally, he was led by the counsels and prayers of his friends to give up his mind to the work of seeking the Saviour, with such seeming earnestness and success, that the impression was received by all about him, that he had been truly born of the spirit of God, and made an heir of heaven. For days, he spoke the language, he expressed the hope, he enjoyed the peace of the Christian, and had he died then, his friends would have been confident of the blessedness of his change. At length convalescence began, and with it came the too certain evidence that all this exhibition of piety had to be classed with the hallucinations of a distempered brain. He awoke to reason, as one awakes from a dream; and upon his awaking, his religion vanished, even more completely than the images of a dream, for he knew nothing of it, and it was only from the report of others, that he learned the fallacious conversion that had so deluded his friends. It was not until some time after this occurrence that he supposed himself to have undergone that radical change which made him a new creature in Christ.

After enjoying the advantages of an excellent preparatory School, he entered the College of New Jersey and was graduated with honorable testimonials as to his scholarship, at that institution, in the fall of 1837. The next two years he spent as a private tutor in a family in Virginia, and contracted there perhaps that friendly feeling towards the South which determined in later life, the scene of his Ministerial labors. At what time, his mind became directed to the work of the sacred office, I cannot tell: but it is probable the conviction of his duty to adopt it, had begun with his call into the Saviour's kingdom,—for *that* evidently was the work which God had assigned to him, and through which he purposed that he should glorify him on the earth. In 1839, we find him a student in the Theological Seminary at Princeton, N. J., and a candidate for the Ministry. It was there my acquaintance with him began, for we were fellow-students, though he was one year my Senior in the Theological course. The recollection of him at that period, which I carry with me, represents him as the resolute and diligent scholar, the cordial and courteous companion, and the deep-toned and heavenly minded Christian. After finishing his studies at the Seminary, and receiving license to preach from the Presbytery of Elizabethtown, he resolved to visit the South-West, though without any very definite plans as to a settlement. This region of country thenceforward became his home. He spent a portion of the first two years at St. Francisville, Louisiana, and then in the spring of 1844, removed to Pine Ridge, in Adams County, Mississippi, having accepted a call from the Church in that neighborhood. Here he was ordained and installed by the Presbytery of Mississippi,—here he was married to his estimable lady,—a daughter of the late William Bisland, Esq., whose worth as a Pastor's wife, it was your privilege to learn and enjoy, and here, for ten years he maintained with exemplary fidelity the oversight of his flock, blest eminently of God himself, and made of God, a rich blessing to every portion of the community in which he labored. A narrative of that portion of his Ministry, would represent to us probably, the brightest period in the history of the Pine Ridge Church, and would show how the young Pastor, by an unremitting application of his talents to the duties of his office, by a diligent improvement and constant use of his gifts, by study in the closet, and labor in the pulpit, and by the firesides of his parishoners, by a watchful attention to his own growth in grace, and by habitual and intimate communion with his God, grew into that robust maturity of piety, wisdom and intellectual strength, with which you found him furnished, when

he came to undertake the charge of this Church. With the reminiscences of that period before me, a period in which we were always neighbors and often co-laborers, I may here attempt some sketch of Mr. Williams, as a Minister, and of the peculiar incidents which characterized and attended his work.

And at the outset, I may say, that the predominating spirit of his life, was that of *consecration* to the service of Christ. Redeemed by the blood of Christ, he felt that he belonged to Christ, and to no one else. Separated by the calling of Christ, to the work of revealing him in the Gospel of his grace, he felt that his business on earth was to preach and illustrate that Gospel, and nothing else. I never knew a person who more signally exemplified that crucifixion with Christ and deadness to the world of which the Apostle speaks,—who had more truly achieved that triumph of faith, the subordination of all human affections and human interests, to the love of God and zeal for his glory. Human affections he had. Go ask that mother, that wife, that prattling babe, how his gentle heart could love. But he loved God more than he loved mother, or wife, or babe. Human interests he had. He had the comforts of a family to care for. He was warmly alive to everything that concerned the good of society. He was a lover of his country, ever ready to rejoice in her prosperity, or blush at her dishonor. But he placed the kingdom of God before family, or society, or country. Consecration to Christ was literally the law of his being. Honestly, he sought to be and to do, in every particular, what that law indicated, and his success in the difficult work was more nearly complete, than is often the case in the experience of fallible man. I do not wish to say anything extravagant of our friend, and in what I have now said, I have only meant to affirm of him what ought to be affirmed of every Christian, that he was a man of thorough, consistent and practical piety. Carrying this kind of piety into the exercise of his office, he became what he was, as a Minister. In his preaching, he sought to preach only what God had revealed, and to preach it only in the manner which became the oracles of God. He never preached himself. He never preached a party or a sect. He never preached to please men, or glorify the wisdom of this world. Every one must have noticed how eminently scriptural his discourses and exhortations were. God's word was the mine from which he brought all his treasures, and it might be said, to have been the mint too, in which they were coined,—for the very mould and configuration of his thoughts, seemed to have been caught from the sacred writers. And God's word was never deceitfully used in his

hands. He preached it plainly, fairly, fully, perverting nothing and concealing nothing. He loved the Gospel and believed in it, as that which had been the wisdom and power of God unto salvation to his own soul, and which could be as much to all other souls; and he would have said with Paul, "if an angel from heaven preach any other Gospel unto you than that we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." He was a careful and instructive preacher. He always brought well-digested matter into the pulpit, and his teachings always bore, with all the force which sound logic, enlightened exposition, and pungent application could give them, upon some point which all his hearers could comprehend. He was a practical preacher, who drew his rules of practice from the circle of revealed doctrine,—and a doctrinal preacher, who always made his points of doctrine terminate upon the conduct and the life.

In his style of preaching, he was remarkably simple, without ambition, pretension or affectation. His mind was only upon the truth he was uttering, and he chose his words only for the sake of the truth. And this habit had the effect it may always be expected to have, of giving his words, generally, a peculiar aptness and power. There was a point and a pithiness in his expressions often, which I have thought not unworthy the pen of Matthew Henry. He was a solemn preacher, whose manner seemed always to indicate the impression which was upon his own heart, of the grave and awful import of the message he was delivering. He was at the same time, a peculiarly tender preacher. He made you feel, that love for Christ and love for his fellow-men, were the inspiring motives that impelled him to speak, and that he was pitying always the miserable condition in which he painted the sinner, and rejoicing always in the glorious relief to which he pointed the returning penitent. I will not say he was an eloquent preacher, for of eloquence, beyond that which the simple truth of God carries in its own tones, he never thought; but he was a preacher whom no one heard without wishing to hear again, and one who left upon the minds of his audience, deep thoughts of Christ and his salvation, even when but faint ones were retained of himself.

It was, however, as a Pastor—in those ministrations which lie outside of the pulpit—that Mr. Williams manifested his greatest excellence. His fidelity and devotedness in this character, gave him his strongest hold upon the affections of his people, and enabled him to acquire much of that marked influence which he undoubtedly possessed in his congregation. He was deeply impressed with the conviction, that the family is the nursery of the

Church; and that the effort to promote piety in any community, has a large part of its work to do there. Accordingly, he was a frequent visitor amongst the families of his charge, and in all his visits he sought to leave a religious impression. He could drop a word of counsel or warning with singular skill. He was faithful when occasion called for it, in administering rebuke, and rarely failed at the same time, to make the offender feel the kindness with which he had been reproved. He was a ready comforter in the house of sorrow, and the watchful friend at the bed-side of the sick and dying. He had a large place in his heart for children, he loved them with something of the interest of his Master; and in return they loved him, and remembered his words, because he had made them love him. In his journeys it was his custom to go provided with a stock of children's tracts, his "seed-corn to be scattered by the way," as he called them, and I have seen the face of many a little one brighten as he opened his store and selected for it, a suitable gift. He set a high value upon catechetical instruction, and endeavored to have this imparted to the youth, in all the families of his charge. One of the most important results of his influence in the Pine Ridge congregation, was the interest which he awakened in the missionary and benevolent enterprises of the Church, and the introduction of a habit of systematic contributions to these objects. The effect of his labors in this respect continues to this day, and doubtless will long continue, in the distinction which that congregation enjoys, of being one of the most liberal supporters of efforts for the promotion of the cause of Christ, in our whole country. But perhaps his exertions in behalf of the colored race, constitute the feature of his Ministry during his residence at Pine Ridge, which reflects the most praise upon his memory. He cared for their souls, as his Master would have done, had he been in his place. He opened the way for the preaching of the Gospel to them, preached to them himself, and brought other preachers into the field; and succeeded thus in bringing a large portion of this population under the means of grace. Many of this class of persons became members of his Church, and many, doubtless, will bless him for his labors of love in the world of glory. To these notices of the peculiarities of his more public character, I ought perhaps, to add an allusion or two to those private traits which distinguished him as an individual, and which helped not a little to make his public character so attractive. I regret that an allusion or two, is all that time will allow me to make. Benevolence was the crowning grace of his nature—wishing good to all, he never seemed to be conscious that any-

thing but good will towards himself could lodge in the hearts of others. He was free from suspiciousness, ignorant of malice and incapable of resentment. Faith in God was another eminent trait in his constitution. Few enjoy so peaceful a conviction of their own acceptance by their Heavenly Father, and few repose with such strong confidence and unswerving composure in the rectitude and goodness of the Almighty King. "The Lord reigneth," was a text which may be said to have been one of his "songs in the night." It is the last sentence of the last letter I ever received from him, and was written in view of the impending dangers of the past summer, and it tells us where he was wont to go for a refuge in the time of trouble. Another quality, which was the proper sequel of those I have mentioned, was his cheerfulness. This gave a charm to his eye, his countenance and his lip. It made his presence always welcome. It sparkled in his smile, and uttered itself in his conversation like the musical flow of a pebbly brook. The peace of a pure heart, of a conscience void of offence, of a "single eye" that made "the body full of light," of an assured hope in Christ, doubtless was the inward spring of this cheerfulness. And it pleased God to send upon him few of those outward trials which might have disturbed it. The afflictions which men ordinarily need for their sanctification, perhaps he did not need, at least, he was not called to any great extent, to suffer them. For as was remarked to me by one who knew him best, he seemed to have been sanctified by mercies, with the sunshine never clouded on his heart, and brightening indeed more and more till the last. God let him pursue his cheerful way through life, and took his spirit, almost untouched by sorrow, to the eternal rest of Heaven.

Returning to his history, I must now briefly refer to his connection with this Church. In the fall of 1854, he closed his Ministry at Pine Ridge, and removed to your City. He came under a conscientious conviction that it was his duty to do so. Had he consulted only the promptings of nature, or the dictates of worldly interest, he would not have come. He came, believing that such was the will of God, but I may add, he came with much fear and self-distrust. You and he were yet to become acquainted; and the acquaintance might end in a disappointment on one side or the other. The result, as I know, was such as soon to allay all his disquietude. You met him in a way which at once won his heart. I need not say he appeared amongst you in a character which at once won yours. Bringing the experience of the previous ten years, and the vigorous powers of mature manhood to aid him, he entered with zeal and delight

upon his labors. With wonderful rapidity, he seems to have become a friend at your firesides, and to have identified himself with your whole community. The desert under his culture began to blossom as the rose, and the wilderness to look glad. Zion lifted herself from the dust—her breaches seemed about to be healed, and her waste places repaired. This beautiful house of worship was completed—your new Pastor had the pleasure of officiating at the dedication of it, and at that auspicious hour saw, doubtless with you, a long vista of blessings for his Church opening before it, in the future. Alas! why was that happy vision not permitted to be realized? My friends, God has forbidden it, and that must satisfy those who have professed to have no will but his. Your Pastor's work did not lie where you and he thought it did. It was more nearly done than you or he supposed it to be. But as I have tried to show you, it *was done*,—completely and gloriously finished, just when it closed. That storm that came rolling its dark shade over your city,—those labors of his amongst the victims of it, by which he exposed himself to his fate,—that midnight attack of fever,—those long days of patient suffering in him, and trembling solicitude with you, the end, the closing of the eye, and the flight of the spirit; these, were all, but the circumstances, the drapery which God threw around its close. *They did not cut short his work.* It was done; and they came to him only because it was done. He died amongst you; he died at his post; he died as his Master thought it best he should die! Cease, fond mourners, to wish that anything about his death had been different from what it was,—that the wandering reason could have been arrested,—that the suffering body could have been relieved,—that the silent tongue could have spoken more words of comfort and of love! You have the record of a life spent in doing God's work, to assure you that he was ready to go; you have some precious glimmerings of the light that cheered his heart within him, to recall with gratitude, and you have the sweet thought, to lay like balm in your wounded breasts, that one who loved him with more than a mother's love, arranged every incident in the process of his removal.

“Servant of God—well done,
Rest from thy loved employ—
The battle o'er, the victory won
Enter thy Master's joy!”

I have two brief suggestions to add in closing these remarks. The one, my Christian friends is to you. May not one of the lessons intended to be impressed upon your minds by this myste-

rious Providence, be that the great duty which Christ demands of his friends at this place, is to *make sacrifices* for him? Think of your Pastor, his life laid down here for his Master's cause, I say, if it does not seem to call upon you all solemnly, to go and do likewise; to go and make sacrifices—of your ease, your time, your talents, your wealth, your lives, if need be—for the same object. Your Pastor's death may have been designed, in part, to teach you, that the work of any one of you is *sacrifice*. And perhaps a long life could not have fastened this lesson—a lesson which may be fundamental to the success of Christ's cause here, a lesson which includes everything you needed to learn, as forcibly as his death has done. My other suggestion is for the impenitent and ungodly portion of my hearers. My friends, Mr. Williams died for your souls. As the Apostle speaks of filling up the measure of Christ's suffering, by the suffering which he endured for the conversion of men; so we may say of the death of the late Pastor of this Church, it is something added to the death of the Saviour, as an argument to appeal to your feelings, and convince you of the necessity of fleeing to Christ for salvation. The Saviour died for you, as no creature can, to effect your redemption,—to atone for your guilt and deliver you from the wrath of God. Mr. Williams died for you, because he sacrificed his life, out of his earnest desire to persuade you to apply to that Saviour, and out of his conviction that if you do not apply to him, you must perish forever. Nothing but this brought him here, where he has found his grave. Your salvation, in his view, demanded this risk, this sacrifice; so precious did he hold your souls, so desperate did he regard the need of rescuing them! O, is it so? And will you not pause to-day, and reflect upon the appeal which comes to you from his mute tongue, with a tenderness which it seems to me, the living one never could have expressed, and ask yourselves if it is not time for you too to recognize the worth of your souls, and begin to make the sacrifices required for your salvation?

And now, dear brother farewell! We feel as if we had been communing with thee once more, and we shrink from closing this scene, as if it had in it the agony of another parting. But it must be, and so farewell! Thou canst not come to us, but blessed be God, we can go to thee! And here over thy grave we desire anew to pledge ourselves to our Master; to glorify him on the earth, and to finish the work he has given us to do; that when the time of our departure shall come, thy rest may become our rest, and the broken ties of love be re-united in heaven!