

6

“The Prophets, do they Live Forever?”

A DISCOURSE

COMMEMORATIVE OF THE CHARACTER AND LABORS

OF THE

REV. ROBERT JOHNSTON,

Preached before the Synod of Allegheny, in Session at New Castle, Pa.,

SABBATH EVENING, SEPTEMBER 29, 1861,

BY

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WITH AN

APPENDIX,

CONTAINING A MINUTE IN REFERENCE TO THE DEATH OF MR. JOHNSTON,
ADOPTED BY THE PRESBYTERY OF BEAVER, AND AN OBITUARY
NOTICE BY REV. LOYAL YOUNG, D. D.

Published by request of the friends of Deceased.

S E R M O N.

“YOUR FATHERS, WHERE ARE THEY? AND THE PROPHETS, DO THEY LIVE FOREVER?”—*Zech* 1.: 5.

It was with a feeling of sadness that I approached on the evening before last, this pleasant town, in the recollection that I should not now meet here, as I had been used on former occasions, the venerable minister of Christ whose decease we are met this evening to commemorate. This feeling was deepened on entering this sanctuary, where, on two or three former meetings of our Synod, we enjoyed the benefit of his counsels and his prayers. Although the largest part of his ministerial life was not passed within what are now our Synodical bounds, yet his first pastoral labors were enjoyed by two of our present congregations—and here he has closed his earthly career. His settlement at Rehoboth and Round Hill occurred but two years before my installation in Pittsburgh; and I hold in my hand two notes which I received from him, the one forty-one and the other forty years ago this season, and in which he sanctions an arrangement, which was made by three of us, to unite and in succession visit and hold meetings in our respective congregations, appropriating a week's labor to each. He was then but little past forty years of age, and in his prime, and these services, which comprised three meetings on each day, with other more personal and family exercises, brought me into a more intimate knowledge of his worth—the tone of his piety and the character of his preaching—than one ordinarily acquires in the space of half a dozen years. In the thought that not only he, but the great proportion of the many hundreds of people whom we then addressed and exhorted, often amidst weeping and deep emotion, are now on the other side of life's solemn boundary, there is to me a mournful impressiveness which well befits the tone and spirit of the text.

The Bible itself throws a sort of sacredness about the memory of departed worth, and by its own example shows that one of the best and most attractive forms of inculcating and fostering the love of excellence, especially in the youthful mind, is to recall and record the virtues of the useful and the good. The successful and peaceful termination of the long and arduous, and often difficult and adventurous campaign of the tried and faithful soldier of the Cross, in its narration often quickens the march, and strengthens the resolution, and confirms the holy courage of those, who, amid the dust, and danger, and discouragement of the same conflict, are urging their toilsome way to the same goal. The text speaks of the Fathers, as though the tenderness of the relation implied in this term, when blended with the experience of mature age, would give additional force and interest to their example.

The impressive inquiry in the text was addressed by the Lord to the Israelites, in connection with a solemn reproof for their inattention to his word, delivered to them by his prophets. It seems to have been intended to arouse them, by contrasting the mortality of man with the immortality of divine truth; and the untrustiness and instability of the conduct and life of mortals with the certainty and perpetuity of the word of the Lord. This word, it is true, is revealed through, or spoken by mortal lips, but its own certainty and immortality is attested by its full accomplishment; and what the departed prophets foretold, or the deceased minister has preached, still lives in its effects, and in the temporal and eternal developments to which it leads. The fact that Jehovah's word comes to the world by frail, erring, and dying men, does not impair its own infallibility and eternity. Your fathers—your progenitors, God seems to say, even the most aged of them, to whom my word was preached, have, you see, in all their successive generations, passed away as shadows o'er the plain, but they have each carried with them to the grave the verity of my promises or threatenings, and the results of my word in and upon them, will continue through endless duration. My prophetic or official servants, by whom my word has been proclaimed, even those of them who, by reason of advanced years, have been called the fathers by the younger ministers, have all in succession left this stage of action. And what solemnity does it give to the brief and imperfect work of all my ambassadors to consider that their ministry was and ever is a savor of life or of death eternal, and that its issues will live and abide forever!

In the text, the first interrogation refers to the people, and the second to the ministry; and hearers and preachers of the Gospel are alike short-lived, dying men, but the fruits and consequences of their hearing and their preaching are everlasting. It matters not to the hearer that the minister's

life is as a vapor, since he proclaims to him an undying Gospel; and no matter to the preacher that the lives of his assembled hearers are as the “weaver’s shuttle,” since they will carry upon their souls the marks of his faithfulness or criminality on the journey of their endless being. This is the teaching of the text, and it offers four topics of contemplation: The lifetime of allotted hearing and preaching; Death as the cessation of each; The estate which follows both; and The appropriateness of the inquiry, “*where are they?*” since they do not live forever here. And,

I. The interrogation implies that they were once here—they *once lived*; and it was a life of active probationary accountability. Between the cradle and the grave, there is to mankind a period of duty, of grace, and of trial, in which they are to meet their earthly destiny—to act their parts as lost sinners, to listen to the instructive voice of God in Nature, in Providence, in the Bible, and the everlasting Gospel; and that, through Christ, it should early become to them a converting, controlling, and sanctifying Word, leading them to the Savior—the ways and experiences of the Christian life, and to a course of exemplary usefulness and godly obedience, ending not in impenitence and perdition, but in a safe and happy dismissal from the church below to join the church above. This period, whether long or short, smooth or rugged, improved or misimproved, is the day of salvation—the time to live, to hear, to obey, and to prepare for another world. If men are called into the function of the Eldership or the Holy Ministry, it is also their duty to watch for souls, to teach, to preach, to exhort, and, as heralds of the Cross and sentinels on the walls of Zion, first to fulfill Christ’s allotted work, and, on his call, to ascend and take their places in their Captain’s host on high.

II. The fathers are all *gone*, the prophets cease to live, and thus a probationary life ends in death. All who have lived before us, even those whose race was longest, have moved onward to join their fathers in the grave and in another world. Where are the people who first dwelt amidst these verdant hills and valleys, and by moonlight listened to the murmurs of these rivers—walked these streets, and on the Sabbath hearkened to the calls of the blessed Gospel? When, at nightfall, I first visited this town, now long ago, and in company with a ministerial brother,^a approached the pastor’s dwelling, I heard the voice of lamentation and weeping. It was the voice of the pastor himself. His bosom companion had just ceased to live. And now many years have rolled over his grave, and over that, also, of the one who accompanied me, and, I may doubtless add, of most of the people who heard the Gospel from their lips. Ah! yes, the old and the young, the believer and the sinner, the humble, the great, and the gifted—die, and alike go down to the land of silence and darkness. “I have said to cor-

ruption, Thou art my father; and to the worm, Thou art my mother and my sister."

III. When the Lord propounds the question, "Where are they?" since they do not live forever on earth, it imports that they are still *somewhere*, and it thus carries our thoughts from time to eternity—from this visible to its proximate invisible world. If in one sense they are in the grave awaiting the morning of the resurrection, in a higher one they are in the world of departed spirits—that vast, unchangeable and solemn state to which we all hasten. The immortality and accountability of the soul, is a doctrine of Christianity which we may say enters into the convictions of all mankind. It teaches us that the wicked as well as the righteous live forever. The Neros, and Herods, and Judases, and Rousseaus, and Paines, and the great crowd of unbelieving, wicked men who have trod this earth in departed and distant times, are here no more; and to the question, "*where are they?*" we need borrow nothing from the painful terrors of an affrighted imagination to picture to us the gloom which enshrouds their awful destiny, now mercifully portrayed to us in the Bible, that while among the living we may *take heed how we hear*. On the other hand, how confident was the devoted Apostle that when he became absent from the body he should be present with the Lord! Did the dying thief need any further guarantee that ere the end of the crucifixion day, with his Redeemer Jesus, he would enter into Paradise? Where but near the Mediatorial Throne did the beloved Apostle stand when he exclaimed, "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth; yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them"?

IV. This divine inquiry dismisses all uncertainty as to whether it is proper for us mortals here below to extend our contemplations to that invisible world, and inquire how and where the fathers and prophets who have died in the Lord, are now occupied and entertained. When God himself puts the inquiry to the living, it seems our privilege and our duty to think about it. It is not irreverent in us, in our dim and feeble manner, to conceive of the present joy of those whom Jesus has taken to himself. It is not unlawful for the affectionate thoughts of surviving children to follow the receding footsteps of a beloved father as he enters Jordan and passes within the vail. It is not unmeet and unprofitable for us, who are yet in the warfare—in the strife of battle in the wilderness, fainting, trembling, faltering, and hesitating, often to ask, Where are now those fathers with whose struggling, heaven-bound spirits we may have often communed on these mortal shores? Where are those who have borne the burden and heat of the day for many a toilsome year, and have received

their dismissal and reward? To be assured that they are now, just as surely as they ever were, *living*, thinking, rejoicing; and to gain some conception of their present thoughts and affections and modes of being: who has not felt that this would be refreshing? To see, for example, the supplicating Jacob and the faithful Abraham, and to hear them pray; to become acquainted with the pious David or the seraphic Isaiah, and hear them sing; to converse with Paul, and Silas, and Stephen, and hear them preach—would afford you a sweet enjoyment, and possibly that enjoyment would be but little less, were you allowed to commune with those with whom you have been associated below. But these things belong not to our present state, and in all questions as to where they are and what they are, we can reply only as the Spirit in the Bible giveth utterance. We know from it that the faithful ministers of the Lord, having departed this life, as will all the heirs of salvation, are gone to be with Christ in Paradise.—Clothed with indissoluble lustre and loveliness, the Savior there receives them to himself. The taint of sin and mortality has consumed their sublunary life, and their worn and weary bodies having descended to a peaceful and consecrated grave, all communion with sense and sensible objects has ceased. The inherent infirmities of the flesh, and the “law of sin in the members” having come to an end, the mind, in all its relations, sympathies and exercises, is wholly separated from the body. As this reunion will not occur until that body, whose absence subtracts something from the perfect blessedness of the redeemed, is restored in sinless and sufferless and deathless glory, it is true to say of them, that having passed the final struggle, suffering grief and sorrow have ceased forever. The ills, and cares, and diversified trials of time—its days of darkness, its oppressive infirmities, its sundering of the cords of earthly affection, and its varied perplexities, are all left behind. That corporeal nature is gone through which the world allured, and by the various senses and members of the body became the inciter as well as the instrument of Sin. Earth’s sultry skies, and chilling storms, and tempestuous nights, give place to one eternal day. But this relief from all earth’s cares and sins, toils and sorrows, is not to be separated from perfection in holiness: the glorious vision of God which follows a passage beyond the confines of time, begins the everlasting and faultless adorations of eternity. Adorned with every heavenly gift and blessing, they have entered into rest—into the joy of their Lord—into the companionship of pure, immortal minds, comprising the patriarchs, and prophets, and apostles, and philanthropists, and patriots, the noble confessors and martyrs of Jesus, with all the loved and saved of their own land and kindred. Yes, they arrive “unto Mount Zion and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels; to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in

heaven ; and to God, the Judge of all ; and to the spirits of just men made perfect ; and to Jesus, the Mediator of the New Covenant ; and to the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel.”

These reflections lead us to a more particular application of our subject, to the life and labors of that venerable minister of Christ whose recent decease we commemorate.

The REV. ROBERT JOHNSTON was of English extraction, being a lineal descendant of Oliver Cromwell by Bridget, the eldest daughter of the Protector, and who was first the wife of General Fleetwood, and afterward of General Ireton. His paternal grandfather emigrated to this country in early manhood, and settled and married in the State of New Jersey. He had three sons—Abram, Robert, and Elisha—and one daughter. Robert, the second son, settled as a farmer on the west bank of the Juniata river, in what is called Sherman’s Valley, in Cumberland (now Perry) county, Pennsylvania, where he was married to Miss Jane Graham. Of her father the following touching incident has been recorded. “When approaching the end of his days, he was at his own request led to the door by his attendant watchers, and, it being night, he looked with anxious gaze toward the heavens, as though longing to fly away to God. Returning he passed this grandchild, then an infant in its mother’s arms. Smiling upon him, he again raised his eyes to heaven and poured forth a most earnest and impassioned supplication for this little grandchild—and it proved to be his last and dying prayer.”

Mr. Robert Johnston had five sons—James, Edward, Robert, Francis, and William ; and two daughters—Nancy and Mary. Edward obtained, when somewhat advanced in life, an education, and was licensed to preach the Gospel ; and I find it mentioned in the report of the Presbytery of Hartford to the Synod of Pittsburgh, in October, 1809, that “they had lost by death Mr. Edward Johnston, a licentiate under their care, who died September 20, 1809—the very day on which they had expected to ordain him as pastor of the congregations of Brookfield and Hubbardsville.”

Robert, the third son and the subject of this biographical sketch, was born on the seventh day of August, 1774. It appears that at his birth his parents resolved to devote him to the ministry, if he should live and his father be able to educate him ; this remaining, however, a secret in their hearts until the time arrived for its execution.

When he had attained a suitable age, he learned the trade of a wagon-maker, and followed that occupation until he commenced his education. He had a taste and fondness for mechanical pursuits that continued throughout his life.

In 1792, and when he was about eighteen years of age, he removed with his father's family to a place near Canonsburg, in Washington county. His father had endorsed to a large amount for a friend, whose person and property were subsequently seized for debt. In order to meet his obligations, it was necessary for him to leave his comfortable home and part with his valuable property at a comparative sacrifice, and remove his family further West. Soon after this removal their circumstances began to improve.

In May, 1796, Mr. Johnston's parents made known to him and to the other members of the family their long-cherished purpose of giving him a liberal education, and he soon after began his studies at the Academy in Canonsburg. This Academy then possessed, of course, very slender opportunities for thorough literary attainments; though even then it was favored with very competent teachers. It was sustained by the nurture and the prayers of Dr. McMillan, justly called the Apostle of the Western country, aided by the pious people whom he had gathered around him. The establishment of this institution, and the great revival which soon after followed, formed indeed an important epoch in the history of Presbyterianism in Western Pennsylvania. Soon after the peace of 1783, and the comparative cessation of Indian depredations upon the Western frontiers, there sprung up a pretty rapid emigration of Scotch-Irish and Pennsylvanian and New Jersey families into this whole region, and there was a great want of ministers to meet the exigence. This institution, founded in prayer but without endowment, was intended to meet this necessity, and the fathers early gathered into it a class (some of them somewhat advanced in age and experience) of strong-minded and devoted men, who became in after years, if not the most learned, yet among the most steadfast and useful ministers of the Presbyterian Church. This Academy, founded in faith and hope by a few humble Christians in a comparative wilderness, has not only grown into one of the most respectable colleges of our country, but it has furnished a succession of able and faithful ministers of Christ.

In the Autumn of 1801, Mr. Johnston, having completed his collegiate course, commenced the study of Theology with Dr. McMillan, entering a class consisting of the late Drs. Carnahan and W. McMillan, and the late Rev's. Robert Patterson and Stephen Lindsley. He was engaged at the same time in studying Moral Philosophy with the Rev. Mr. Watson.

On the 22d of April, 1802, he was licensed to preach the Gospel by the Presbytery of Ohio. He then spent one year as a missionary, chiefly in Ohio and Kentucky.

Mr. Johnston left in his own hand-writing a brief sketch of his life and ministry. This has come into my possession, and as it gives an account of his

several Pastoral charges and the events of his ministry in a style and manner more proper and concise than I could state them, I shall take the liberty of quoting largely from this autographical manuscript. I may here add, that about this time he was married to Miss Elenor, a daughter of Judge Wright, long an eminent ruling Elder in the Church, and with this excellent and devoted wife and mother he lived near fifty years.

“After prosecuting,” says he, “the study of Theology about eighteen months, I was licensed by the Presbytery of Ohio, on the 22nd of April, 1802. After riding one year as a licentiate, I received a call from the United Congregations of Scrubgrass and Bear Creek, and entered upon my charge on the first Sabbath of August. I had become familiar with the great Western revival which commenced in Kentucky, in 1802, having seen it there and in Ohio during the Summer, and and in Western Pennsylvania in the Fall and Winter following, and felt anxious to see it in my own charge.”

“The settlement in Scrubgrass was new, and composed generally of young families, and was lamentably destitute of vital piety. So far as I knew, there were but three praying men in the congregation, and they lived in the extreme parts of it and could not be convened for a prayer-meeting.”

“On the fourth Sabbath in August, there were two Elders from sister congregations present. The subject of Discourse was Repentance—the text being in Acts 17:30. The day was fine, and the congregation unusually solemn. Having obtained the consent of these strangers to remain with us, I ventured to appoint a prayer-meeting at my house in the evening. Such a meeting was new to many in the place, and at an early hour the house was full. We had one man in the congregation—the father of Walter Lowrie, Esq., now corresponding Secretary of the General Assembly’s Board of Foreign Missions, who was a host in himself, and he with the two Elders mentioned, took part in the exercises of the evening. A solemn stillness pervaded the assembly, while those who led in prayer seemed to take hold of the strength of the Lord and to wrestle for the blessing.”

“Nothing special appeared until we were about to close the meeting. In the closing exercises we sang the fifty first Psalm, Second part, L. M., when as we closed the Psalm a woman, with a heavy sigh, sank down upon her seat. We pronounced the benediction, and in a few moments the most solemn scene commenced which I ever witnessed or felt. Truly might every one have said, “How dreadful is this place; truly God is in this place and I knew it not.” While a solemn awe was visible in every face, five or six appeared to be awakened to a sense of their undone condition,

among whom were two of the most unlikely persons in the house. One of these was the largest man in the assembly and full of self-importance, the other a file-leader in the devil's camp, who attempting to escape by flight, got entangled in the bushes and was forced to come back for a light to find his path, and who the moment he set his foot inside the door fell prostrate on the floor, under a sense of self-condemnation. We continued in prayer and exhortation until towards midnight before the assembly would disperse. It was evident to us all that the same powerful awakening which had attracted so much attention in other places had commenced among us; and such was the rapidity and power with which it spread that in a few weeks it had reached every quarter of the congregation. Our religious meetings became frequent, solemn and deeply interesting; and although it was not uncommon to see a large portion of the assembly affected during divine service, some agitated in body and others lying motionless, we had no confusion, nor outcries to interrupt the hearing or to disturb the solemnity of divine worship."

Mr Johnston proceeds to give a more particular account of this work of God and his views of it; and he states that the hopeful fruits of it in the Scrubgrass congregation (for in the other they were not so extensive,) were about one hundred conversions, comprising fully one half of all the adult persons in the congregation.

Resuming his narrative, Mr. Johnston says, "not long after the revival had ceased I resigned the charge of Bear Creek and devoted my whole time to Scrubgrass, where I continued to labor in peace and comfort until interrupted by claims to the soil, presented by land jobbers, which eventually drove many of my best members from their farms into the State of Ohio. This reduced the congregation so far that I was laid under the painful necessity of parting with the remains of a flock, endeared to me by every tie that could bind a Pastor and his flock together in love."

"In February, 1811, I took my leave of this little flock and moved to Meadville and took charge of that congregation, with two others, Sugar Creek and Conneaut Lake, devoting half my time to Meadville and the balance to the other two. Here I continued to labor until the Spring of 1817, when for causes not under my control, I felt it to be my duty to leave them and to remove to the congregations of Rehoboth and Round Hill, in the forks of the Youghioghny River, under the care of the Presbytery of Redstone."

"In these congregations I continued to labor in peace and comfort, and I trust not without some degree of usefulness, until December, 1832, when for various reasons which to me appeared sufficient to decide the question

of duty and which I presented to the Presbytery in writing, I took my leave of that people. I spent the following Winter principally in an agency for the Board of Domestic Missions; and in the Spring I accepted an agency in behalf of the Western Foreign Missionary Society, and part of the Summer and Fall I acted as agent of the Western Theological Seminary."

"On the first of November, 1833, I visited Bethel Congregation, Indiana County, Penna., where I spent the Winter as Stated supply, and in the Spring accepted a call and became their Pastor. Here I continued until through the infirmities of old age, I became unable to endure the fatigue and exposure, necessarily connected with parochial duties, particularly family visitation, district catechising, and Bible Class and Sabbath School instruction. Believing that in ordinary cases no man is justifiable in holding an office in Church or State, the duties and responsibilities of which he is unable to discharge, I asked and obtained leave to resign my Pastoral charge in October, 1841, and at the request of the Congregation I continued as stated supply for six months. While I felt it my duty to resign the charge of a congregation, (Mr. Johnston was then about sixty-eight years of age,) I had no design to quit preaching, and being blessed with health and strength of lungs beyond the lot of my fellow laborers, I had no desire to demit my beloved employment, and for six years that I have been without a charge, I have, in assisting my brethren on communion occasions, and in supplying their pulpits when they were necessarily absent, and occasionally supplying a vacant congregation, preached as many sermons as there have been Sabbaths since my dismissal in 1841, up to October 1847. Since that time I have not been able to preach so frequently."

I have thus followed Mr. Johnston's course through the whole of his Pastoral life, as very modestly and judiciously narrated by himself. In this connection it may be proper to add a few remarks. If the first years of his ministry at Scrubgrass were those in which, more than at any subsequent period, he was greatly owned and honored of God in the conversion of sinners, the fourteen years which he spent at Rehoboth and Round Hill made up the season of his greatest usefulness as a minister of Christ. This position brought him into active connection with the College at Canonsburgh, as a Trustee, and with all the benevolent operations of the Synod of Pittsburgh, as a business manager and efficient officer. That was a period when Sabbath Schools and Bible and Tract Societies, especially in rural districts, were comparatively unknown. Besides his zeal and energy in instituting these Schools in his own congregations, there was started, I recollect, within those bounds a district Bible Society, called from its location between the Rivers, the Mesopotamean Bible Society, which maintained for years a healthful vitality, and I think it may be justly said that Mr. John-

ston was not only the originator but the life and soul of that organization. He was always found a ready, watchful and active supporter of all the institutions of benevolence in our church and Country, and took much pains to foster them among his people. At that early period in the temperance reformation, I recollect he was, in his Presbytery, almost the only one in favor of total abstinence, and he sometimes drew forth the repartees of his brethren for his stern denunciation of the use of all intoxicating drinks.

For all these causes he labored much and faithfully. After his re-settlement at Bethel, his location as well as his age prevented him from taking an active part in many of these Synodical and Literary associations.

When the speaker became a member of the Synod of Pittsburgh, in 1819, he very early discovered that Mr. Johnston was distinguished above most of his brethren for his influence in its counsels, for his ready, simple and earnest engagedness in his official work, for the tone of piety which marked his social intercourse and the promptness with which he embarked in every good work. In Synod as well as in every judicatory and Board to which he belonged, he gave close attention to and took a leading part in its deliberations; and it is not therefore surprising that with his honesty of intention and soundness of judgment he should stand among the most influential of its members.

Still to a stranger there was a seeming sternness in his look, and in his blunt and unpolished manner, and a severity in his disapprobation and reproofs, which at first promised little as to those gentle, kind and fraternal affections which on further acquaintance he was found to possess in an eminent degree. He could give no quarter to sin and error either in doctrine or in practice; and in his abiding fidelity to the dictates of his understanding and his conscience he sometimes delivered himself in terms of strong displeasure; while in dealing with the troubled, afflicted and distressed, there was the flowing tenderness of a truly gracious sympathizing heart.

These reflections, however, naturally lead us briefly to speak of him as a Christian, a Preacher of the Gospel, a Presbyterian, a Pastor, and a man; in all which respects, you will be prepared to find rather the happy and useful combination of all desirable qualities and powers, than the extraordinary prominence of any one. I say this, because I think, if any decided preference were given, it would be of his character and attainments AS A CHRISTIAN.

Although it was not until some time after he had entered upon his studies, that he heard incidentally the intention of his parents to educate him for the ministry, he had himself never thought of any other profession, and accordingly he soon after resolved to make a public profession of

religion, "Having," as he says, "no doubt of my qualifications, having been trained from my infancy in the doctrines of the Bible, and never permitted to contract any habits of open immorality. Accordingly I attended at Dr. McMillan's, on the day appointed for conversing with applicants, when I found to my astonishment a number of questions proposed, which I had never thought of. The result was, that the Doctor honestly told me that I was yet unacquainted with my own heart, and advised me to postpone my connection with the Church for the present. On my way home a conflict arose in my mind between the exalted opinion I had formed of the Doctor's knowledge and piety, and the good opinion I had entertained of myself. The conflict continued until as I humbly trust, through the influence of the Holy Spirit, I was brought to see that the Doctor was right and I was wrong." The result was, that this solicitude continued amidst the most diligent use of the means of grace, and varied exercises of mind for some months, when under a discourse of Dr. McMillan on the character and law of God, his mind realized a surprising sense of the purity and spirituality of the divine law, and of the excellency and glory of the character of God. Without any thought that this implied a saving change in himself, his heart was filled with unspeakable delight in this view of the character and government of God. His sense of the greatness and solemnity of the work of the ministry which he had before contemplated, now brought him to a pause, and it was not until many weeks of deep searching and prayerful meditation had been passed, that he saw his way clear to devote his life to the holy ministry, and to commence the study of Theology. Here, my Brethren, the evidences of the gracious work of the Holy Spirit strikingly appear, and they afford us a clue to the discovery of the source of that decided, eminent and growing piety, which distinguished him through life. The Church of God cannot be too earnest in her prayers, that all her candidates for the holy ministry may thus be taught by the divine Spirit. Mr. Johnston, like Edwards, and Hall, and West, and Hopkins, at first built his christian hope on that sandy foundation on which it is to be feared that many christians and even ministers continue through life; and as in the case of these eminent men, the solidity, and strength and power of his piety, was due to that painful scrutinizing process through which he passed. This protracted experience of the operations, both of sin and of grace in his own heart not only formed him to habits of close discrimination and a deep acquaintance with his own inner life, but fitted him to exhibit the varied workings of grace and nature in the human heart, and to describe experientially the deepest processes of awakening, conviction and spiritual deliverance in seasons of revival. Perhaps the prominent characteristics of his religion could not be better expressed in a single sentence than in this. I recollect when riding with him one day, in the fulfilment of the appoint-

ments to which I have referred, he sportively said, "I have pride enough I think, to do for twenty ordinary men, and yet I do not know that I ever felt the fear of man, either in or out of the pulpit." Here was a deep, humble and operative acquaintance with his own heart, and a firm conviction and a fearless advocacy of the truth and the whole truth of God. Before God he was nothing; he was humble and submissive as a child. Before men he was bold and undaunted.

2. AS a HERALD OF THE GOSPEL, Mr. Johnston was an able, instructive and impressive preacher. Without being what is familiarly called an eloquent, polished or captivating speaker, he possessed strong lungs, a voice capable of filling with ease the largest building, and an enunciation so distinct that any in the largest assembly could easily hear him. If his voice was mighty in strength, and solemn, and commanding in its utterance, it lacked melody and softness. Its tones, united with the earnest gravity of his countenance qualified him rather to awaken and impress than to sooth and allure. Without any show of great originality of thought, or power of argument or vividness of fancy his discourses were methodical and perspicuous, abounding in clear views of gospel truth. They were direct and practical in their tone, exhibiting the traces of comprehensive and careful reflection. His manner in the pulpit was grave, solemn and often impassioned, attesting the profoundest sincerity and ardor; and at times his appeals to the conscience were thrilling and powerful. In his devotional performances, there was often a pertinence and copiousness, a solemnity and fervor, which awakened a response in every gracious heart.

3. AS a PRESBYTER, and Church officer, Mr. Johnston was an uncommonly active and useful man. Indeed he was in this regard, one of the most reliable men I ever knew. At all meetings of Presbytery, Synod and General Assembly, when he was sent to that body, and in all Boards and Committees to which he belonged, he was sure, in all but the most imperious circumstances, to be found at his post. No matter if his home was distant from the place of meeting, or the weather was inclement or the season of the year a hurried one, all calculated that whoever else might be absent, Mr. Johnston would be there; and there to take a ready, interested and useful part in the proceedings, whatever they might be. I think I never knew a man less disposed to excuse himself from preaching, or serving on difficult and laborious committees. His self-distrust and disposition to defer to the judgment of his Brethren, and his conciliating manners made it pleasant to work and council with him. I may here also say, that to an unusual extent among his cotemporaries, especially in the rural districts, he devoted himself exclusively to his appropriate work, not so much in his study and in Theological and Literary investigations perhaps as in active labors among his people.

Although his ministerial support was in all these places limited and uncertain, there never was a surmise, I believe, from any quarter that Mr. Johnston, though living amidst an agricultural people, and many opportunities of worldly gain, had ever turned aside from his sacred functions ; or become skillful and worldly for the improvement of his temporal circumstances. The fact that he was able to rear and educate* his family and exercise a free and open hospitality, evinces the wise and provident economy, which distinguished not only himself but her who was his beloved help-meet for many years. The ministry was to him the great business and the delightful employment of his life. He loved the Church of God, and had enlarged and cheering thoughts of the coming glory of the kingdom of Christ on earth. As a standard bearer in its ranks he nobly fought and nobly fell.

4. As a PASTOR, a CITIZEN and a PATRIOT, his influence and his worth were highly appreciated. The congregations among whom he lived and labored, knew him as a devoted man—as a laborious, faithful minister, as a wise and prudent counsellor, and as a sincere and constant friend. He was plain and outspoken, yet kind and social in his disposition. He was always true to his convictions; a warmer friend, a more obliging companion, and a kinder sympathizer in the sorrows and adversities of his Brethren and his people, it would be hard to find.

In his social and domestic relations, he was kind, amiable and fraternal. He loved the society of his Brethren, and warmly cherished the ties of Domestic life. On the decease of Mrs. Johnson, he expressed this with so much tenderness and pathos, that I am once more led to quote his words. “I have been recently called,” he says, “to occupy the painful post of observation, darker every hour. My beloved companion, who for almost fifty years had been the counsellor and solace of my darkest days, was on the fourteenth day of June last, removed from the earthly house of her tabernacle, and introduced, I humbly hope, into the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. By this dispensation of Providence, I seem to be left alone in the world. The generation to whom the active years of my life were devoted, have passed away and a new generation has arisen, in whose movements I can feel comparatively little interest, not being able to share in their responsibilities. I am surrounded it is true with children and friends, who treat me with all the respect and affection that could

*Four of Mr. Johnston's sons received a liberal education, and are now respectably engaged in professional life—viz: The Rev. J. W. Johnston, of the Presbytery of Beaver; Hon. S. P. Johnston, President Judge of the 6th Judicial District of Penn'a; Rob't. Johnston, M. D., of West Middlesex, Mercer Co., Pa., and James W. Johnston, Esq., Practicing Lawyer, of Lawrence Co., Pa.—with whom the father resided after the close of his Pastoral labors. Of his two surviving daughters, one is the wife of the Rev. Loyal Young, D. D., of Butler, and the other of Alexander Ross, Esq., of New Castle.

be desired. My son and his wife, with whom I live, appear to feel a pleasure in doing every thing in their power to make me comfortable, and I have every accommodation the world can give. Still my bosom friend is not here, and my sweetest hours are found in retiring to my room, where she and I spent many a pleasant hour conversing about the interests of that Kingdom, to which we have been permitted to devote our lives and labors for half a century. In these retired moments, I sometimes feel like one standing on the bank of Jordan, waiting for permission to venture in, in hope of meeting the dear departed, in Canaan's happy land!" Of tender, hallowed, domestic love, and of elevated consolation to his surviving children, volumes could not speak more than is contained in this last reference.

And so he felt to the end, and on the 20th day of May last, in the 87th year of his age, the Lord said, "it is enough," arise and pass over. And now a voice inquires, *where is he?* His enfeebled, venerated person is not here with us to-night, nor was he with us this morning, at the Sacramental table of our Synodical Communion. He is not in any of those distant pulpits as in the days of his vigorous manhood, dispensing the Gospel. "I have," says he, in a letter to Dr. Elliott, "preached to a crowded assembly when more than one half of the people were lying helpless before me, during the greater part of the divine service, without the least noise or disturbance of any kind to interrupt or divert the attention of any one from the word spoken." Solemn scene, indeed! These preaching opportunities are passed, but may he not *now* be with many of these hearers before the throne! If he is no more in the much loved circle of his children, and his Christian Brethren, may not the fruits of his example and his prayers still come down upon us? Yes, sainted fellow soldier of Jesus Christ, thou hast reached, we trust that "Canaan's happy land," which thou didst so much long to see,—Jesus in his glory—heaven in its beauty, and the Church of God in its Sabbath home.

Dear Brethren in Christ, Johnston is not here, and it must soon be asked of each one of us, *where is he?*

"Part of the host have crossed the flood
And part are crossing now."

Our preaching days as ministers, and our overseeing days as Ruling Elders are hastening us along, we are sure, to a solemn account, and we would fondly hope to an approving Lord, and a greeting concourse of holy, happy sinners saved by Grace. How shall we preach, how shall we watch for souls, in the space of time that yet remains? Sentinels, fellow soldiers, beloved watchmen, "the night is far spent, the day is at hand." Courage! Hope!—for Christ and the kingdom onward move.

Men and Brethren, did you ever hear Mr. Johnston preach? If not, you have heard others of Christ's ambassadors, and the truth taught us is that the results of these hearings are eternal. Vanity is stamped on your life and on all earthly things around you. Your day is passing, your fathers are departing. The everlasting Gospel is preached by dying lips, and the gates of life are open. Millions of ages are coming on to tell how you have heard the word. Let it now lead you all to Christ and holiness—to duty and immortality in heaven.

A M I N U T E

ADOPTED BY THE PRESBYTERY OF BEAVER, AT NEW CASTLE, JULY 9, 1861.

In the Providence of God, this Presbytery is again called on to record the departure of one of their members to his eternal state.

On the morning of the 20th of May last, the Rev. Robert Johnston closed his earthly pilgrimage, and we confidently hope entered into the rest that remains for the people of God, having nearly attained the age of 88 years.

He was one of the pioneers of the Gospel in the section of country which now includes the Presbyteries of Erie, Allegheny and Beaver. He was licensed by the Presbytery of Ohio, in April 1801, and spent the ensuing season itinerating in Eastern Ohio and Western Pennsylvania.—About a year after his licensure, he was ordained by the Presbytery of Erie, and installed Pastor of the congregations of Bear Creek and Scrubgrass, in Venango County, Pennsylvania.

He entered the ministry about the time of the great revival, which spread over the Western country in the beginning of the present century.

In that work he took a deep interest, and was one of the instrumentalities employed by the head of the Church in carrying it forward and gathering souls into the Kingdom.

He sustained the pastoral relation the most of the time from his ordination till the year 1843, when in consequence of increasing infirmities he felt it to be his duty to resign his pastoral charge. He still continued to preach occasionally till the year of 1853.

Father Johnston was constitutionally possessed of a kind and obliging spirit. His preaching was plain and practical, and was delivered with earnestness, so as to engage the attention of his audience.

The great object which he desired and sought, was the honor of his Master in the salvation of souls.

During his protracted life he sustained an irreproachable character and was generally revered and loved.

He was never absent from the judicatories of the Church, of which he was a member, except when Providentially prevented. He was a useful and worthy member of these judicatories.

He was a decided friend of Education, both Literary and Theological, which is attested by the fact that for nearly 20 years he was a Trustee of Jefferson College, and for several years a Director of the Western Theological Seminary.

The great benevolent enterprizes of the Church were not neglected by him, but his energies were employed in encouraging and sustaining them.

The Lord favored him with the right exercise of his intellectual powers till the close of his life. In old age he was composed in mind, cheerful and happy.

He outlived all the other Fathers, who organized the Churches and first settled in this section of country.

When the Master came and called him he was ready to answer.

He came to his grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in his season. "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord from henceforth, yea saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors and their works do follow them."

AN OBITUARY NOTICE OF MR. JOHNSTON,

PREPARED BY THE REV. LOYAL YOUNG, D. D. AND ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED
IN THE PRESBYTERIAN BANNER.

It is pleasing to contemplate, in this world of sin, a life comparatively free from blemishes; and much more a life of great moral and religious excellence, full of good works. While good men are yet alive, we may imitate, admire, and even applaud, in a quiet way, their virtues. But when they die, it is proper that a public record be made of their works of faith and labors of love. Ere the box of precious ointment be broken, its fragrance can hardly be confined; but when broken, like Mary's alabaster box of ointment poured on the head of Jesus, its odor is wafted abroad on every zephyr. "A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death is better than the day of one's birth;" better to him that deserves the good name, for then the incense of a holy life offered on God's altar fills the whole temple with its fragrance. A good name, if well deserved, is invaluable. It has influence while the possessor lives. It is embalmed in the hearts of the living when he dies, for "the righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance." It is written in heaven.

These reflections arise in view of the recent death of that aged and faithful servant of God, Rev. Robert Johnston, so well known in Western Pennsylvania and other parts of our country. His decease occurred on the 20th of May, A. D. 1861, in the eighty-seventh year of his age.

Rev. Robert Johnston was born in Cumberland county, Pa., Aug. 7th, 1774, of pious parents, where he lived till about sixteen years of age, when he came with his father and family to Washington county, where they settled. An incident occurred in his infancy worthy of being repeated. "When he was an infant of days, his maternal grandfather died, who was a devotedly

pious man. Just before his death he was led to the door, at his own request, supported by his attendant watchers. It was night. He looked with anxious gaze toward the heavens, as though longing to fly away to God. But his work was not quite done. As he cast his eyes downward, the little babe in his mother's arms smiled upon him; at which sight he lifted his eyes again toward heaven, and poured forth a most earnest and impassioned prayer for the infant. It was his dying prayer. His work was now done, and he fell asleep in Jesus. From that hour the parents, who had already devoted the child to God in baptism, resolved with unwavering purpose to educate him for the ministry." Accordingly, when the time came, he was sent to the Academy at Canonsburg, and was instructed by Dr. McMillan and Rev. John Watson, receiving as good an education as the times afforded. He studied theology with Dr. McMillan, and Rev. George M. Scott, his pastor. He was licensed by the Presbytery of Ohio, April 21st or 23d, 1802, and is reported by that Presbytery as a licentiate, at the first meeting of the Synod in Pittsburgh, which met September 29th, 1802. Next year he is reported by the Presbytery of Erie as having accepted a call from the united congregations of Scrubgrass and Bear Creek. On the 3d Wednesday of October, 1803, he was ordained and installed over the united congregations of Scrubgrass and Bear Creek. In a letter to the writer, dated Indiana, October 10, 1849, he says of attending the approaching meeting of Synod: "My health has been so precarious for some weeks past, that I felt it would not be prudent to be from home for any length of time. I have therefore concluded to be absent for the first time for the last forty six years." This is a remarkable example of punctuality to Church courts, and it rebukes, as he often did in words, the criminal negligence of those who absent themselves for trivial reasons.

After being licensed, Mr. Johnston took a missionary tour into Kentucky and Southern Ohio, where he labored in revivals of religion, then so prevalent in those regions.

Mr. Johnston's first settlement, as stated, was at Scrubgrass and Bear Creek, where (especially at Scrubgrass,) a great work of grace commenced soon after his settlement, the precious fruits of which appear to this day. The aged of that congregation delight to dwell on the scenes which transpired during that glorious revival of God's work. And it is thought that no church in Western Pennsylvania has furnished as many ministers of the Gospel as the church of Scrubgrass, some of whom were brought in under Mr. Johnston's ministry, and have labored with great success in the vineyard of God. On no subject was he more enthusiastic than that of training young men for the ministry. And many ministers now in the

Church feel a debt of gratitude for the interest which he took in their success, and the encouragement which he gave them when preparing for the work.

After laboring in the above-named charge about seven or eight years, he became pastor of the church of Meadville, Pa., where he continued about six years. In 1817 he took charge of the churches of Rehoboth and Round Hill, of Redstone Presbytery, where he labored sixteen years. His last pastoral charge was Bethel, in Indiana county, where he labored about ten years. In all these churches he labored with zeal and great success, and but few churches have given clearer evidence of abiding good accomplished by pastoral labor. After retiring from the pastoral charge of Bethel, he continued to reside with his youngest son, James W. Johnston, Esq., first in the town of Indiana, and then in that of New Castle, till his death.

His wife, who entered into the spirit of his labors with all her heart, accompanying him on horseback in his missionary work, sharing his privations in the new settlement at Scrubgrass, and taking such part as an accomplished and devoted Christian lady can, in all his labors afterward, died in New Castle about nine years ago.

Besides his pastoral labors, Mr. Johnston abounded in efforts for extending the kingdom of God throughout the world. Every proper scheme for suppressing vice and promoting virtue, he espoused with zeal. The Boards of the Church he prized and advocated. The Temperance cause he urged with earnest zeal. Schools and Seminaries he patronized—especially were Jefferson College and the Western Theological Seminary objects for which he labored earnestly and prayed fervently, being one of their Trustees for many years, and attending the meetings of their Boards with his characteristic punctuality.

To the doctrines and order of the Presbyterian Church, Mr. Johnston was devotedly attached; and yet he loved with true catholic charity all that bore the image of Christ. No man more appreciated than he, a good sermon or address, and he was enraptured by the power of eloquence, especially when the subject was the excellency of Christ, the glory of his coming kingdom, or the work of his grace on the hearts of men. These were themes of which he never grew weary. These themes so filled his heart during his last years, that he was always happy. Never, perhaps, was an old age more cheerful. His wonder was why God should continue the life of one so useless, and he said often that he was just waiting in daily anticipation of his departure. A few years before his death, and the last time that he was at the house of the writer, while the family were gathered for

worship on the evening of the Sabbath, he gave utterance to words so full of longing desire for heaven, that the pen can do no justice in attempting to record them. He said he had such an insatiable desire to know what the glory of heaven was, that he felt almost impatient for the time to come when he should be permitted to behold it; and this was said with so much pathos, and with a face so radiant with joy, that we all felt that we were communing with a man that had a foretaste of the bliss to which he was going. It was then, or at a later period, that he informed the writer that he had an *abiding* assurance of his being accepted of God, and of his final happiness, and that for many years he had had no anxious doubt. In view of the millennium, whose dawn he soon anticipated, he would sometimes say, that if it were lawful, he could wish to have been born fifty years later. But he remarked to one, after the present troubles in our country began to thicken, that he could not *now* wish to have been born later, for he did not wish to witness what was coming.

Mr. Johnston's preaching was earnest, solemn, and instructive. Often was he so deeply moved by the importance of his themes, that utterance almost failed. This was more especially the case in *prayer*. The unction and pathos of his prayers are well known by those who have often bowed with him at the family altar. The circle gathered there have often found the place a Bochim, while he led in penitential supplication. To look upon his stern face at times, a stranger might have supposed him beyond familiar approach. The first impression sometimes was, when introduced to him, that he was too stern to be companionable. But all such thoughts were dispelled when the introduction was finished. No one was more genial or less forbidding. Faultless he was not. Disapprobation of what was wrong sometimes seemed to amount to censoriousness. But no one intimate with him doubted his generosity, even toward those with whom he differed.

Though a cripple for several years previous to his death, so that he could walk only with crutches, he was punctual at the house of prayer. Always in love with the truth, and devotedly attached to the minister on whose services he attended, he felt it a great cross to be absent, even when his infirmities compelled him. His last sickness was only of about two weeks continuance, and at last he seemed literally to fall asleep, without a muscle indicating a departing struggle. He is gathered "as a shock of corn" ripe for the harvest.

L. Y.