

THE
DISSOLUTION OF NATURE
IN THE
VIGOUR OF LIFE:

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SUCH A PROVIDENCE.

A FUNERAL DISCOURSE,

ON THE

DEATH OF MISS MARY ANNE KINNEAR, COUNTY TYRONE, IRELAND,

DELIVERED BY THE

REV. C. R. VAUGHAN,

Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Lynchburg, Virginia,

ON SABBATH MORNING, NOVEMBER 2, 1856.

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1857.

At a Meeting of the Sabbath-School of the First Presbyterian Church in this City, the following Preamble and Resolutions were unanimously adopted, viz. :—

It has pleased God once more to invade our ranks, and take from us a most devoted and active teacher, Miss MARY ANNE KINNEAR. Her place, so regularly and efficiently filled while she lived, is now vacant. We miss her cheerful face; we miss her active co-operation in this Sabbath-School; yet we feel that our loss is her gain, and that she now enjoys the everlasting and glorious rewards of her faith and her truly Christian life. Be it, therefore, resolved—

1st. That we, as a Sabbath-School, both teachers and scholars, deeply feel and mourn the loss we have sustained in the death of this lovely young lady; that we have lost in her a teacher and friend, whose place cannot be easily filled; but that we rejoice to believe her good works have followed her, and that she now rejoices in fulness of joy at God's right hand.

2d. That we tender to the afflicted friends and relatives of this deceased sister, our warmest sympathy in their bereavement, hoping that, by the grace and mercy of our blessed Lord, we shall meet with her in that great day of final account, to receive God's eternal blessing, and henceforth to part no more for ever.

3d. That a copy of these Resolutions be handed by our Secretary to the family of our deceased sister.

(By order)

AMOS BOTSFORD, *Superintendent.*

LYNCHBURG, VA., Nov. 3, 1856.

A FUNERAL DISCOURSE.

"She hath given up the ghost: her sun is gone down while it was yet day."—
JEREMIAH XV. 9.

THE special object of the services of this morning is to improve for the benefit of the living the act of Divine Providence, which has lessened the number of the members of this Church, and brought deep sorrow upon a circle of friends, by terminating the mortal career of Mary Anne Kinnear, County Tyrone, in Ireland. This lady was the youngest daughter of Rev. James Kinnear, Pastor of Lower Clenanneese Presbyterian Church, near Dungannon. Some twelve or eighteen months ago, she left home for a visit of some months' duration to her friends living in this place. It was not her original or subsequent purpose definitely formed to take up her abode here; but in obedience to a wise impulse, looking to the contingencies of a protracted visit, she brought with her a certificate of dismission from the communion of her father's Church to enter the communion of any Church into which providential guidance might seem to direct her. Upon this certificate she was received into this Church, and, with commendable promptitude, at once engaged in its work. She entered the Sabbath-school, and soon became thoroughly interested in its fortunes, and particularly of the class placed under her care. She was distinguished for the steadiness and promptness of her attendance on all the social and public worship of the Church. She was always in place. It seemed to be an unaffected pleasure to her to go up to the house of God. Her attention to the preaching of the Gospel was peculiar: the eager and animated expression of her countenance, showing her interest in the discussion of the

truth, has more than once attracted attention and remark from members of this congregation. It is hard for me to realise, that the animated face which, for the last twelve or eighteen months, has greeted me from the sitting on the left of the pulpit is now vacant and still in the sculptured repose of that sleep which knows no waking. For several months she went forward in the discharge of her duties, and the happy enjoyment of the social pleasures she had sought in her visit to America. She made friends rapidly. Conspicuous by her fine person and the amiable expression of her countenance, moving with an elastic, energetic step, which seemed the index of an unusual vigour of character, seeking to please and willing to be pleased, she conciliated the regard of all who came into her company. Thus time passed pleasingly on: memories of the past were giving way before the entry of new elements of purpose and desire; all seemed promising in the future; not, indeed, with the gorgeous colouring of early life, for she had lived long enough and tasted deep enough of the streams of time, to know the waters were not wholly sweet, but still promising to the eager hopefulness of a young and sanguine spirit. During the last few weeks, she determined on a visit of pleasure to friends residing in the city of Baltimore. Gaily the journey was planned and executed, alas! in utter unconsciousness of the final issue:

“Fair laughs the morn, and soft the zephyr blows,
While proudly riding o’er the azure realm,
In gallant trim the gilded vessel goes,
Youth on the prow, and pleasure at the helm;
Regardless of the sweeping whirlwind’s sway,
That, hushed in grim repose, expects his evening prey.”

There was a messenger for her in that city. He came as the messenger of the king came to the company of pilgrims, as they waited on the banks of the river, somewhat suddenly. She did not expect him there. It had not occurred to her that she would be called to pass through the dread mystery of dissolution, and that her spirit would place its naked feet on the void impalpable, amid the crowded mansions and rushing throngs of the monumental city. Yet it was even so. There is a wild, high romance

in all human life, no matter how commonplace it may be, connecting the beginning and the end, the worldly and the spiritual aspects of it; the development of destiny here in this temporal scene, with that unutterable emergence from this material life into the splendours of immortality. There is no human being who is not invested with a sublime and mysterious importance. Men commonly dread to speculate closely on death: they dread such realising contact with so appalling a mystery. But it is no theme of ordinary interest to a mind alive to the grand and pathetic aspects of his own existence, to forecast the time, place, and circumstances of his own encounter with the last enemy. When shall it be: where shall it be: in what frame of spirit shall I be: how shall I meet the rush of the eternal vision, the landscape and the dwellers in the vast and glowing scene! It is a high, though hidden question. This young immortal had sprung into existence amid the green hills of Ireland, in the quiet shades of a country parsonage. Her summons met her amid the roar of a foreign city, and amid the dense masses of a foreign people she greeted the wonders of the life to come. But, God be praised, she was not unprepared: she had put her trust where no trust ever failed. She had relied upon a Saviour, whose power is circumscribed by no bounds, and limited to no locality: and although called in a foreign land, and far from her rural home, and, what is yet more affecting, far from the tenderness and the weeping sympathies of her venerable parents, she was not alone. She was girded about by the power of One who is able to redeem to the uttermost. She expressed again and again her confidence in Him. She again and again gave token of the submissive trust, the reposing quietness of soul, which is so often breathed by Christ into the hearts of His dying saints. The spirit of solicitude for the prosperity of the Church and cause of the Saviour, which has always signalised the character of His children, was displayed in her. She spoke earnestly of her adopted Church here, of her pastor, of her school and class, and lamented the languishing condition of all its affairs, the neglect of its social worship, the barrenness of its public ordinances. She spoke modestly of her own hope and prospects: she hoped she was prepared: she was fully resigned to any change which might be ordered; and to her aged parents

she sent the richest consolation which a merciful God could mingle in so bitter a bereavement—that she died in the full hope of a glorious immortality, and trusted, as she could see them no more in the flesh, she would meet them in the better land. With a parting blessing to her young niece,* she sent the warning suggested, doubtless, by her own pathetic fate, falling in the young morn of life, “to prepare for an early death.” So she passed away. At ten o’clock on the night of October 20th, amid the darkness which shrouded the streets of the monumental city, God changed her face and took her away. It is affecting to remember, that scarce more than a week had elapsed since a member of her Sabbath-school class had preceded her into the other life.† Oh how sad and how mysterious is this mortal existence!

This brief sketch of the facts of the incident which gives colour to the services of this day, will now permit us to turn our attention more closely upon the truths implied in the text we have selected, and embodied in the event before us. The passage in question sets forth the significance of premature death, under the beautiful and striking imagery of a sudden and premature sunset. *Her sun is gone down while it was yet day.* This means that life terminated while the capacities of nature and the rational prospects of usefulness and enjoyment existed in full strength, undisturbed by the inevitable decays or obstructions of age, disease, and misfortune. It implies a peculiar solemnity and pathos, in such a dissolution of nature. Death is always solemn; it is very grand in its sublime mystery, even when it comes to the easy chair of “the lean and slippered Pantaloon,” and leads him trembling away; but it is specially so when it terminates the joyous march of youth and vigorous maturity. The descent of the sun with long-lingering radiance to the evening heavens, is full of solemn glory; but it would affect the heart like a portentous omen to see it plunge headlong from the zenith, its golden fragments shivered on the eternal

* Louisa Jane Kinnear, eldest daughter of the Rev. John Kinnear, of Letterkenny, to whom she was deeply attached.

† This person was Mary Hamilton Kinnear, daughter of Andrew Kinnear, who died aged fourteen.

arch, and quenched in the rising floods of premature and unnatural darkness. Even so, premature death, entering the yet undecaying tabernacle of the immortal spirit, and driving out its undisturbed vitality, awakens peculiar sensations. It raises in new and more perplexing forms the great why and to what end? It lifts into more threatening attitude the terrible doubting inquiry, *Hast thou made all men in vain?* It forces upon us the question of the significance of premature death, What can be the grounds of that mysterious ordering so often seen in the dispensations of Providence, by which the powers of nature are destroyed before they have been used, and all the rich elements of wisdom and power embodied in the noble constitution of a human being are deprived of their apparent uses of a premature dissolution? To an answer to this inquiry, we shall devote the lesson of this occasion.

That God is wise, is one of the necessary elements in every just conception of his character. The idea of divinity is necessarily a perfect idea; it is the provision to meet that demand of the human soul for an object on which to lavish the most unbounded exercise of the affections. To admit the Deity to be imperfect, is at once to undeify him, since on such supposition it would immediately become possible to conceive of a being without such imperfection, and man would immediately transfer his highest veneration to that imaginary divinity. By the constitution of his nature, he will regard that most in which he perceives the most to be regarded. To answer the demand, then, of the human spirit for a God to adore at all, a divinity of absolute perfection must be furnished him. His conception of what is excellent must be filled, or he cannot regard. To exclude, then, the idea of wisdom from the character of God, is to unsettle his whole claim to divinity. Man, intelligent himself, cannot fear or love a being for whose intelligence and capacity to injure or bless him he indulges contempt.

It is of the nature of wisdom, first, to select proper ends to be pursued, and, second, proper means to pursue them. Any misconception here will at once reflect upon the intelligence of the agent. To select foolish or improper ends, or to overdo or underdo, in contriving means to execute ends in themselves

worthy to be attained, will at once impeach the judgment of the actor. Now it is obvious that God must have had an end in the creation of all that he has created, and that the creature made for that purpose is exquisitely adapted to secure it. He has done nothing without a reason. Every act of his must necessarily take a tincture from every part of his character: it must be wise, because he is wise; it must be just, because he is just; it must be worthy of him, and wear the semblance of his own nature. Whether his act be permissive or efficacious, it is wise and good, as a permission or a performance. His ends are always good, his means are always wisely adapted to attain them. This is eminently true as the scale of creation rises. The nature of the means is often a guide to a conception of the end, where the end itself is not distinctly perceived. The creation of the noble nature of man points to the grandeur of the ends to be attained by it. Man is the last and best of the works of creative energy on the earth. His physical constitution is the most consummate model of mechanical wisdom in the combination of its parts. His intellect is enriched with capacities inconceivably wonderful in their functions and their susceptibility of increase. Above all, his moral and emotional faculties, endowing him with the very image of the Divinity, and rendering him capable of a grandeur of elevation and an infinity of happiness, which finds no limit, even on the boundless courses of eternity, make him the first of creation. "What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculties! In form and moving, how express and admirable! In action, how like an angel! In apprehension, how like a god! The beauty of the world, the paragon of animals!"

Who can rightly estimate the elements of inconceivable wealth which enter into the composition of a man, or fully comprehend the nature or the number of the ends which are arrayed in the plans of the infinite mind to be wrought out by them?

Let us now look for a moment at the space given in the present system of existence to the exercise of these powers, and the conditions under which they are acting, and see if there is not something in the fettered and limited theatre and conditions of human action, which is intensely significant of the great doctrine,

that the present is not the only scene of human existence, the only stage of human action—that there is really no proportion between the wealth of powers in human nature and the ends which are attainable here. The existence of man on earth is short at the best. Brevity of continuance is an universal peculiarity attached to the high capacities of the human constitution. But it is not only short; it is embarrassed in its energies by innumerable evils which encumber, and, in an inconceivable majority of cases, utterly prevent the just and legitimate action of the human powers. Poverty, for example, the inexorable demand for the means of living, makes exhausting requisitions upon the energies of vast multitudes of these grand, star-eyed immortals, and leave them no time for the high, intense, and full culture of their powers. Sickness, pain, business, corruption of the moral powers, ignorance, vice, all bind down the energies of the human soul in a bondage so profound, that the vast myriads of human beings live and die without one solitary just conception of the real nature of their high endowments, or the unutterably pathetic nature of that curse which left them blind and senseless to the facts. The world, in which the great powers of human nature are acting, is overshadowed by a curse; and amid all the unspeakable woes and sorrows of its system of existence, they act under fetters of galling bitterness, blind, senseless, dead; and that, too, at the best, for the brief duration of three-score years and ten. The question *forces* itself upon us, Is this the only scene for the existence of man and the employment of his energies? If it is, where is the adaptation of means to end? Why create such a being as man, and so limit the duration and so fetter by irrevocable evils the perfection of his action? Has God made man in vain? We see beasts and birds fulfil their destiny, and cease to be. We see a longer period of life accorded to one of these inferior natures than to the high powers of man. Why does God so limit the scope of powers so lavishly adorned, and made strong with all capacities for his glory? All the ends of human life, so far as they terminate on the things of earth, are out of proportion to the powers of human nature; so that if they were all gained, the mystery would still remain to be solved by the one only solution, Why the disproportion between the means

and the end? Much more is this true in the case of a premature dissolution: the removal of the capacities of human nature before even the temporal ends of life are attained. The argument is greatly intensified by these acts of Providence, the dissolution of nature in the vigour of life. It points with unutterable significance to a future life. It tells of an existence beyond the line of time on which man is to enter. It affirms on the basis of the Divine wisdom that there is a duration and a system of existence, between which and the grand powers of human nature there is no disproportion. It declares that the sun has not fallen irrevocably from its post; it has only wheeled out of sight; that its orbit stretches partly over time and partly over eternity, and that when it disappears from off the space visible to men, it is still rushing with inconceivable splendour along the far vaster segment of the circle which bends round the throne of the Eternal God. This is one grand significance of premature death: it is to present in an intensified form the argument for the immortality of man and a future life, which is drawn from the wisdom of God as the one promise, and the facts of human life as the other. These acts of Providence, which seem so mysterious to us often, these premature dissolutions of Nature, are of vast value in this regard. They present the argument in a form not to be resisted. The sceptic may raise some resistance to the argument of non-completeness in human life, in the case of old age completing an apparent cycle; but there is no reply to the sudden withdrawal of the individual from the scene before *any* of the ends of life are fully attained. The argument then presses with naked and resistless force on the mind.

From this view of the subject, we derive one of the strongest elements of consolation in a premature death. This is, that it does not interfere with the attainment of the principal end of human existence. The chief reason why a premature death is so oppressive to the human heart, is the complete nullification it effects in the attainment of all the minor ends of existence in this world. This is true; and it is an affecting consideration. It cuts off the individual from all the joys and business of this mortal scene. For the early dead, the sun will no more adorn the morning skies and light up the loveliness of nature; for

them, no more will the fragrance of flowers, the juices of luscious fruits, the verdure of the spring, the golden autumn, and the winter fireside, gay with the charms of a happy home; no more the voice of merriment and social pleasure; no more the promise of connubial and domestic love, the joy of successful energy in business or ambition; no more the precious delight of books and triumphant thought victorious in the struggles of life; for them, no more of all wordly things will *any one* appeal to the sources of joy in the heart. The loss of these, in the vigour of the capacities to enjoy and use them, makes up the bitterness of premature dissolution. But all these do not compose the highest or the greatest, in point of number, even of the ends of life. There is a higher grade of life, grander in its business, more precious in its joys, in which the main ends of existence are alone attainable. If only the right preparation for that higher life is made in the brief sojourn in the present, a premature death is not the cruel nullification of all rationality it might seem to be to the eye of an unaided reason. There is no special cause of mourning, then, in the premature decease of a young believer. True, all the charms and cares of this sublunary world are for ever closed against the victim by death; but a premature dissolution has no power over the grand and chief end of human existence. Death—master of all else—is powerless to assail them: the only enemies which can triumphantly assail them are sin, and a rejection of the Gospel. It should also be remembered in this connexion, that if premature death cuts off from the joys and business of life, it also terminates exposure to the evils which are intermingled with them all along the pathways of this present world. What sorrows, what pains, what brokenness of heart, what sins, what temptations, what perilous risks a merciful God may mean to forestall by an early summons from the scene of danger, who can tell? It is certain, at all events, that the premature death of a saint of Christ does bear him away from the great tribulation which hangs like a thick cloud over the world, and establishes him in the glory to be revealed. Surely, however sorrow over such a death may pierce the hearts of weepers here, it does not mingle in the radiant visions of the departed and ransomed spirit.

Another significance of premature death is, doubtless, the illustration of *the fearfulness of sin*, the reality and the awful nature of the curse of God on a fallen world. It is so even in the case of the young believer; it is specially so in the case of the young impenitent, hurried away in early life, cut off from all worldly joys in the vigour of his powers, and called to answer at the awful bar of an angry God for the sins of his young and brief, but guilty and awful rebellion. There is something in youth that pleads for forbearance with its faults. This plea is very powerful with kind and compassionate natures. It is very powerful with the kind and compassionate God; and it is a fearful index of the intense provocation and evil nature of sin, when it draws down the swift, relentless, and damning curse of such a being on the young head of daring rebellion. God shows, in the premature death of his own children, what he is justified in doing even with them; and while his taking them away is not an index of his displeasure, but is really a proof of his tenderness towards them, yet the fact that he is justified in so pathetic a course with them, illustrates powerfully the general evil of sin, and the reality of the miseries of his curse on the world. Premature death calls with startling accents on the secure in sin, and especially on the young impenitent. The incident which excites our reflections calls powerfully on the young and impenitent female. It tells her that neither youth, nor beauty, nor the pleading tenderness of female frailty and dependence, will arrest the inexorable march of the destroyer. Death is no carpet knight, lipping and mincing in a lady's bower. He is the king of terrors, the right royal ruler of the sorrows of human life. He smites because of sin, and sin shows terrible in its mysterious abomination, when it justifies God in the rapid and appalling stroke of dissolution in the midst of youth, beauty, and the unexhausted vigour of a capacious nature.

It also illustrates with wonderful force the vanity of all human things, and the value of the glorious Gospel of the Son of God. It illustrates the precarious tenure of human life, by which all its deceitful and destructive joys are held. It shows that strength, vigour of limb, youth, and gay spirits, give no guarantee of the continuance of life. Men presume immensely on these things.

They put off repentance, saying to themselves, there is yet time; our youth, our vigorous health, our unfinished plans, for surely God will not strike us down in the midst of them; all guarantee us time and space for future action. How stern the sudden light thrown upon this false and reckless presumption by the explosion of a premature death! Oh, madman, pause and test your guilty logic. Are you young? Lo, here the chilly frost and the marble stillness lay on the unwrinkled brow of youth! Are you in health? Lo, here death has congealed the rich juices of a noble vigour in these frozen veins! Are you full of bright and reasonable schemes? Lo, God hath palsied the powers of a teeming brain, overturned the gorgeous barbican and battlements of its castle in the air, and now calls upon thee to muse over the fragments of its fragile beauty! If ye believe not the Word of God, proclaiming the vanity of all earthly things, and the presumptuous fallacy of a delayed repentance, at least lend your ear to the stern logic of *the facts* in his visible providence.

Another of the designs of premature death is to teach gratitude to those of his people who are left in life, to rouse them up more earnestly to their work, and to call sinners to repentance. We who are left are still blessed with life. Though not merely as only a blessing, yet it is a blessing, viewed in connexion with its true aims. Life is the time to work the great work of God. It is an inconceivable honour, which is peculiar only to man in the flesh. Angels cannot share it; saints in glory cannot share it: it is the sole honour of man in the flesh to be a co-worker with God in the redemption of souls, and the final rescue of the world from sin. He that converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death—a greater work than if he rescued a planet from disastrous and complete destruction. To build up the kingdom of Christ, to govern in grace, to put on the beauty of the Lord, to lay up a good foundation against the time to come—this is the grand work to which God calls us, and which, when done, shall follow the happy soul to heaven, where it ceases from its labour. Let us be up and doing. The time is short: the day is far spent: the night is at hand. Our sun may fall suddenly in the early quarter before high noon: let us work while it is day. But especially ye who are still out of Christ, come and

seize upon your golden opportunities. Be grateful that you still live, and evince that gratitude by devoting your life to its true ends.

Lastly, God means to signalise in the premature dissolution of nature his own wise, holy, just, and absolute supremacy over all human things. He is a sovereign God: he does as he will in heaven and earth, and gives no account of his matters to any. But his sovereignty is a perfect and immaculate thing. He does all things well. The prompt and unexplained decisions of great minds often powerfully illustrate their greatness. Let us trust him where we cannot understand. His character stands the eternal guarantee of the excellence of his orderings. Let us be still, and know that he is God. Let us put our hand upon our mouths because THOU DIDST IT.

O B I T U A R Y .

DIED, in the City of Baltimore, Maryland, at ten o'clock, on the night of October 20th, 1856, during a temporary visit to her friends, Miss MARY ANNE KINNEAR, County Tyrone, Ireland, second daughter of the Rev. James Kinnear, Pastor of Lower Clenaneese Presbyterian Church, near Dungannon, and sister to the Rev. John Kinnear, Pastor of First Letterkenny Presbyterian Church, County Donegal. Between twelve and eighteen months ago, she left home to pay a visit, of some months' duration, to her friends living in Lynchburg, Va. After a happy sojourn for a period, she went on a brief trip of pleasure, to call on friends in the City of Baltimore, and while there was smitten by disease, which, in a few weeks, terminated her mortal career. A stranger in a strange land, far from her native home, and, by what seems now a singular providence, removed from the immediate circle of friends in Lynchburg, this amiable and lovely young lady has been called to encounter the greatest of all earthly ills. Elements of most pathetic feeling mingle in this distressing event. She was young: she was lovely in person, and more lovely in an amiable and cheerful spirit. Life was opening with promise before her. She was from home, and far from the tenderness of her aged and venerable parents; and, although cheered by the most solicitous attentions of the kind friends around her, surely death came to her in a land of strangers, arrayed in most pathetic garb. But, notwithstanding, she died in great peace. The consolations which have cheered the martyrs and saints of Christ in all ages, were her happy portion as she passed the valley. The friend that sticketh closer than a brother was with her; and although she was to see her earthly home, the old Parsonage, near Dungannon, no more, she rejoiced in the near prospect of the saintly felicities of the heavenly home. The absence of the aged father, over the ocean, was more than supplied by the presence and effective grace of a Father in heaven. A saintly death, "in the full hope of a glorious immortality," in which she departed, is very blessed, even when it arrests youth and loveliness in the gay march of joyous life, and summons them into the unseen but sure glories of the life to come. Tears are due in this affecting death; but not tears alone; smiles and blessed breathings of gratitude and praise are equally due to a redeeming and covenant-

keeping Saviour, for the displays of his mercy and the triumphs of his grace—

"If thou and Nature can so gently part,
The stroke of Death is as a lover's pinch,
Which hurts, and is desired."

The heart moves and melts at the vision of youth and every element of a happy and energetic existence perishing in the early outset of life; but it recovers and rejoices, even in such tribulation, to behold them entering the Eternal City, and beginning their career in a system where no pain will ever mar the capacity of delight, and no sin ever peril the consummate perfection of her immortal action. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord."—*Lynchburg Daily Virginian of October 28, 1856.*