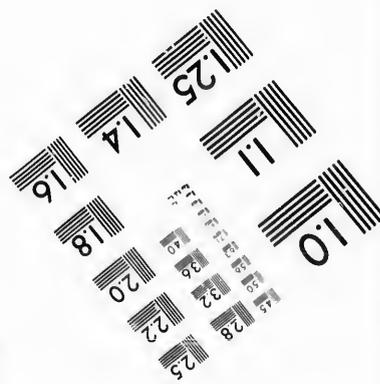
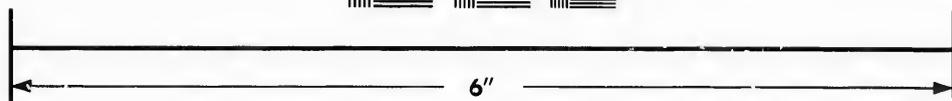
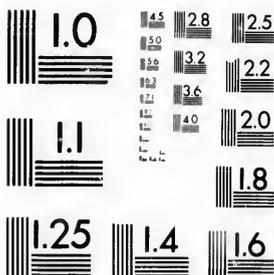


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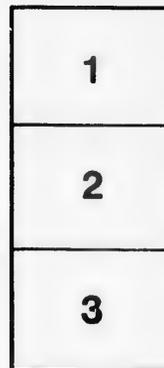
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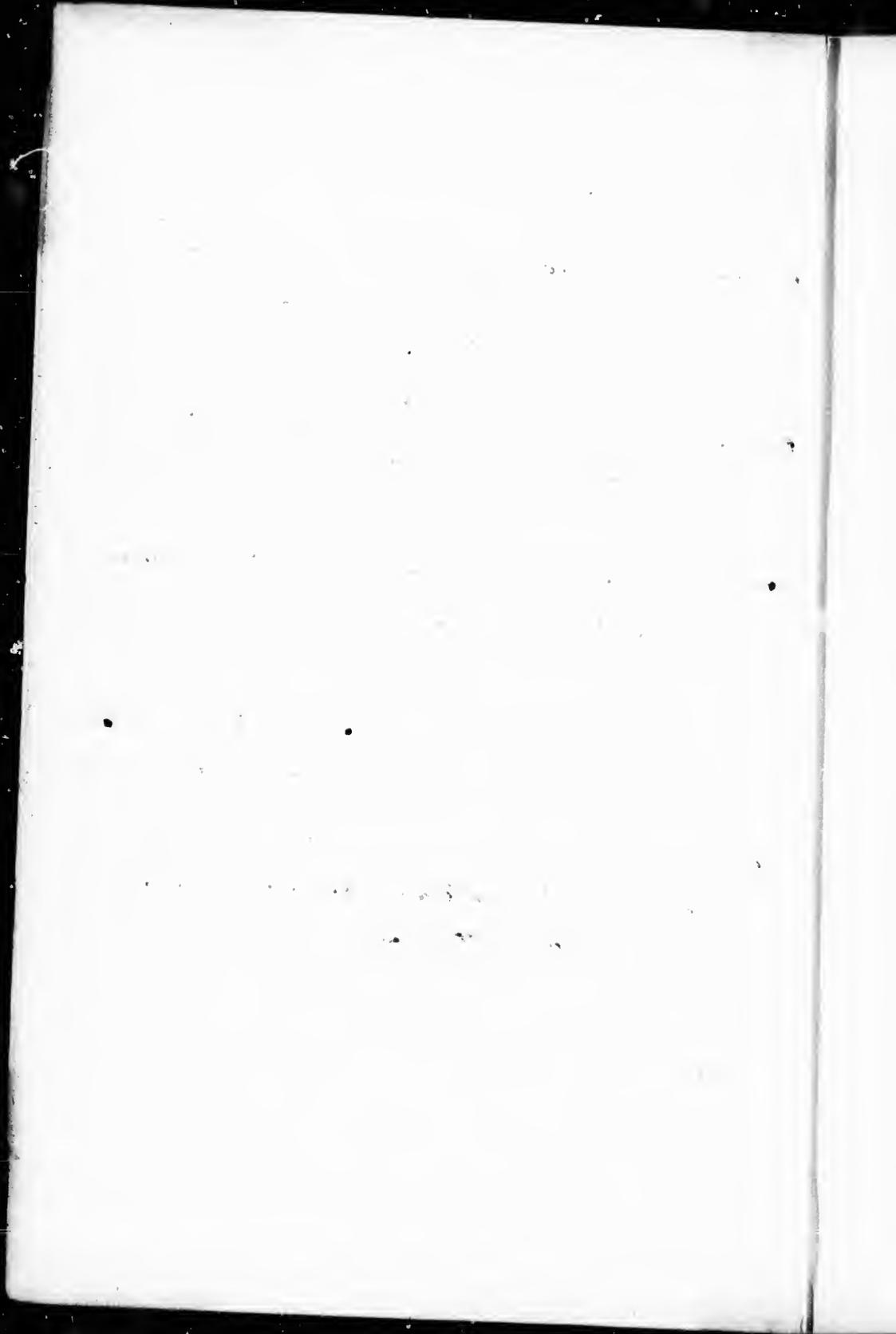
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A S E R M O N ,

Preached on the 1st March, 1857,

BEING THE FIRST SABBATH AFTER THE FUNERAL OF

H E W R A M S A Y , E S Q . ,

BY THE

REV. WILLIAM SNODGRASS,

MINISTER OF ST. PAUL'S CHURCH, MONTREAL.

"The memory of the just is blessed."

Published by request ; for private circulation only.

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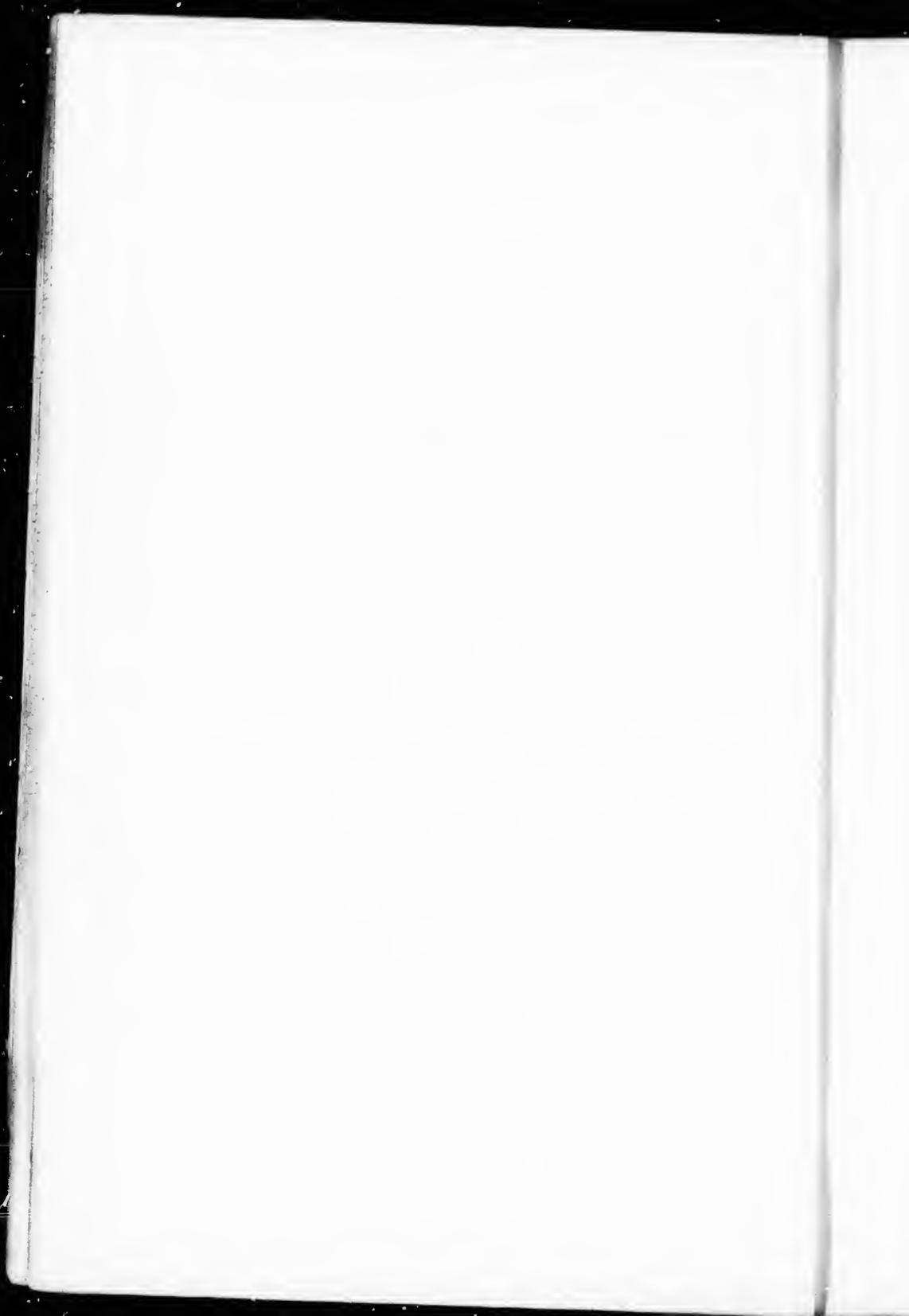
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SERMON.

The memory of the just is blessed.—PROVERBS, x. 7.

“THIS is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all.” “All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth and to him that sacrificeth not; as is the good so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath.”* This is the language of The Royal Preacher in another portion of his writings. It is one of the many graphic descriptions, in which his discourses abound, of “the travail which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it.”† Literally it is true. Taken by itself, it is no overdrawn picture of a particular aspect of human vanity. Apart from the fear of God and the truths of the Gospel, it is more than enough to occasion unmitigated “vexation of spirit.” The fact adverted to is not without a mischievous in-

* Ecc. ix, 3-2.

† Ecc. iii, 10.

fluence upon the sons of men, who for the most part seem to shape their conduct more in accordance with the manifested evidences of a fallen state, than with the obligations that are suggested by a prevailing belief in the existence of an all-righteous and overruling Deity. Unwisely and thoughtlessly keeping themselves apart from every principle which is fitted to elevate and deliver, with cowardly satisfaction they yield themselves wholly to the pressure of unavoidable but not unmitigable evil. They foolishly despair of rising, and so make up their minds to a deeper fall.

Solomon knew better than the majority of his readers care to know. His judgment in the case is according to truth. He deals in no chastened or deceitful delineations. He does not call the good, evil; or the bitter, sweet. He makes no concealment of the fact, that, in the mysterious commixture which checkers the life of mortals, the righteous endure suffering as well as the wicked. His language indeed oftentimes implies, if it does not actually assert, that there is frequently an intensity in the tribulations of the former from which the latter seem to be utterly exempt. He makes no abatement of the marvel of an actual similarity, in many respects, in the life-course of the just man and the profane, or

in the termination of their earthly existence by a common event, which—disguise or qualify it as we may—is still a terrible evil. In this he is faithful to the cause he espoused. If we would derive the full benefit of his extensive wisdom and dearly-bought experience, we must be content to receive from his hand the sweet and the bitter fruits, even as he gathered them. If we would learn from him the elements of true and lasting happiness, we must expect to taste the sharp ingredients, with which they are associated in this life. The elimination of the good from the evil, though the necessary process through which immortals reach their high and happy destiny, is itself an evil—a sore and ineffectual trial to mere flesh and

The sermons of Sol neither the cold and cruel teaching of a principled fatalist, nor the morbid pulings or unsympathizing ascetic. If he describes what man is, he also informs us what he is capable of becoming. If he dwells on the dark side of the picture, he also, with matchless skill, introduces the bright side to our view. If his details of what transpires on the agitated and troubled platform of humanity betray an experience derived from associating with the masses, his mode of introducing them, and the sound practical remarks with which he

accompanies them, testify his acquaintance with a more secure and elevated position—even that which the believer finds in the unchangeable attributes of Jehovah.

The quotation which I have made from the book of Ecclesiastes intimates the apparent absence of all distinction between the righteous and the wicked, in so far as they are equally prosperous or unfortunate. One event happens to both. They walk together in life, and they meet together in death. But The Preacher knew and taught that, however much this distinction may appear to be lost in the common participation of those whom it concerns in good and evil, it is nevertheless faithfully preserved in God's moral administration of the universe—not alone in the respective rewards of a judgment day, but also in the conscious enjoyment of God's favor and protection in the present life. It is remarkable that the ninth chapter from which the passage is taken begins in the verse immediately preceding, with a declaration to this effect—a most significant silence being preserved with reference to the wicked—"the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God." In another place he goes a step farther, declaring not only that many of the occurrences of life happen equally to the righteous and the wicked,

but also that, in so far at least as one event is concerned, man is no more exempted than the beast of the field; "for that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other."* But then, in the immediate context, besides asserting that God shall judge the righteous and the wicked, he affirms the humiliating influence which this should have upon the naturally proud spirit of man, and afterwards counsels the doing of such works as a being like man might rationally rejoice to do—such works as it would afford him pleasure to review. In yet another place, to which I refer as bearing more directly upon the subject of the text, The Preacher affirms that "there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool forever."† This also is a vanity with which the sons of men are exercised—a testimony alike of the existence of evil and the guilt which occasions it. Yet, between wisdom and folly, and between the wise man and the fool there is an essential and important difference which remains unaffected by the forgetfulness of the world—"Wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness. The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walketh in darkness."‡

* Ecc. iii, 19

† Ecc. ii, 16.

‡ Ib., ii, 13, 14.

Surely this manner of teaching, which so largely characterizes the writings of Solomon, and in the use of which, throughout all the juxtapositions and antitheses he is wont to indulge in, the good is ever maintained to be good, and the evil declared to be only evil—notwithstanding the confusion that sin and its consequences have produced—ought to be an effective means of edification and comfort, tending to preserve our Christian equanimity and to banish all moroseness and melancholy, when we are called upon to witness or endure the calamities of time, or when we contemplate the many discrepancies which seem unfavorably though inseparably distinctive of the present state of being. In the spirit of this teaching, I would seek to place before you, on the present occasion, a few considerations of which the words of the text are suggestive—“The memory of the just is blessed.”

Our attention is at once arrested by the occurrence of an event, which—construe or qualify it as we may—we must account an evil, underlying and colouring every view of the subject. That event is the death of the just. We deem it a hardship that they must cease to be our friends and companions on earth—that we must be deprived, by their departure from the land of the living, of all the benefit of their

personal intercourse, their kindly offices, their encouraging example. It is a matter of bitter and abounding regret, that at every turn we should meet the blanks which their death occasions, and be called upon to mourn the loss sustained in every sphere of usefulness to which they were devoted, and to feel the lasting and irreparable isolation in which they have left us. It is a saddening thought, that those features which showed intelligence and sympathy at every movement have become stiffened and still—that we can no longer hear the words of wisdom and love to which we have been accustomed to listen, as, in tones of cheerfulness and pleasantry, they relieved and improved the passing hour—that a stop has been put to those abundant deeds which testified how active and busy were the hands that toiled in ceaseless obedience to the impulses of a willing and generous heart—that all that the just man was, and all that the just man did lives only in the too treacherous though ineffaceable remembrance of sorrowing friends. It is a sore trial to our affections that those we love, and in whom we confide, and on whom we depend, should be taken away from us. Our faith in the righteousness of the Almighty's dispensations is strongly tested, when we find that all the noble qualities which enter into the compo-

sition of the just man's character are not sufficient to ward off the anguish of great and protracted bodily suffering, or to spare him from an untimely grave.

This is a great evil by which we are exercised. In all circumstances it is so. There are individual instances in which it is peculiarly so. We know that we must all die; and though the best and wisest of us are too prone to lay aside all thought of the evil day, and defer all preparation for it, yet, reconciling ourselves to some extent to a lot which is universal, we are ever ready to assume that there is a degree of fitness or unfitness in some men's departure. We may feel deeply, but we do not wonder at, the death of the aged saint. Loaded with years and burdened with infirmities, we rather account it a relief. It is an occurrence we have been expecting. His race is run; his course is finished. He has long since, with honour unstained and credit unimpeached, retired from the busy haunts of the world. His place is taken and his work is prosecuted by others. His toilsome day, spent in the service of God and man, has come to an appropriate and seasonable close: and, though not without a tear, yet not without some measure of satisfaction, we can say, Farewell! as he exchanges the earthly house of this tabernacle for a building

of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. And as with the very aged so with the very young. Their death is more a wrenching of the affections than a trial of our faith. A fond parent's hopes may centre upon them, and they themselves may evince a seriousness and an intelligence beyond their years,—the earnest and the promise of future usefulness. But they are untried by the world's temptations and inexperienced in this life's cares, and we may err, as we are liable to err, in our most wary and prudent calculations. The expectations we entertain might be disappointed. The comfort we promise ourselves from witnessing their future career may be turned into sadness. With such considerations we are somewhat prepared to reconcile ourselves to the dispensation of the Lord, as we resign them to his everlasting and gracious keeping. But, my brethren, it is far different with other instances which come under our observation, and sorely try us by the extent to which our best interests, personal and relative, temporal and spiritual, are affected. It is far otherwise when the just man goes hence in the prime of life and in the midst of his usefulness. With the most submissively disposed of us, it is a work of time to be reconciled to so great a disaster. When our departed friend has deservedly acquir-

ed pre-eminence for all that is included in the enviable distinction of being a just man—one that feared God and was of good report—when he hath approved himself to be a man of high principle and unswerving fidelity, of unostentatious demeanour, and gentle, conciliating manners—when his life has just been long enough to evidence a most reliable devotedness to the interests of true religion, and to gain the confidence of all classes in the community, from his rareness of forethought, his ability to advise in the most perplexing circumstances, his willingness to undertake, and his aptitude to manage—when we know how disinterestedly and zealously he toiled in the prosecution of laudable public affairs, and how unobtrusively, by the native force of his character, he gave them a direction and infused into them a spirit the most effective and the most commendable—when such a man—the affectionate husband and pious parent, the valuable citizen, and the consistent member of the church of God,—is carried away from the scene of his labours and in the midst of his years, we feel as if the society he blessed and improved were deprived of a pillar ere a substitute is provided; as if the best and strongest link in the circle of our friendship were dissolved, and, Who shall unite the ends thereof?—as if our highest interests

were impeded, and, Who like him shall espouse them? This, this is a sore and trying evil. "Help Lord! for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men." This is an event which a pious belief in the righteousness of God's dispensations alone can qualify. This is a bitter cup which needs the sweetening consolations of religion to make it tolerable. Some such modifying, compensatory considerations we find embodied in the words of the text, for "the memory of the just is blessed."

It is true that one event happeneth to the unjust and the just. But the issues of that event are very different both in the future experience of the deceased and in the reflected influence of their conduct upon the world which they leave. What say the Scriptures? "Those shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." "The memory of the just is blessed; but the name of the wicked shall rot."

Though just men die, that is not the end of them. HE, in the conscious possession of whose friendship and love they lived upon earth, is mindful of their disembodied spirits. They return to HIM who created them at the first and who re-created them in likeness to himself, to enjoy for ever the favor of his immediate presence.

They cease from their labours upon earth to enter on the felicities of heaven. They exchange the wearisome toil and harassing trouble of a brief existence in time for the unbroken rest and enduring rewards of eternity. "The ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." How consoling a thought is this to connect with the memory of the just! If their name, and their character, and their works are not utterly blotted from our remembrance, can we fail to associate with them, in our recollections, the place to which they have gone, the company of just men made perfect into which they have entered, and the pure enjoyments in which they now participate? If we sorrow over the loss we sustain by their departure, shall not our sadness be turned into joy, as we consider their inestimable gain? Thus God blesses and sanctifies the memory of the just.

By all the sacred obligations of an avowed friendship, by all the recollections of a hallowed intercourse, by all the monuments of departed goodness, we feel constrained to look to the same glorious inheritance to be enjoyed with those we have loved and valued upon earth in everlasting fellowship, in the world to come. If our

professions of esteem for the dead be anything more than a name, if there be any reality in the value we attach to their lives, let us not be chargeable with the inconsistency and unfaithfulness of ceasing to be followers of them who are now inheriting the promises. If we would have grieved to offend the meek and holy spirits of the just when living, let us not dishonour their name or violate the pledges we exchanged, by aught that is offensive now. The sincerity of friendship is tested by the separation of friends. If our unity of sentiment and cordiality of fellowship, if common interests and common aims, do not survive a temporary absence, our attachment is empty and vain. Let not the brief space which intervenes between us and the grave, effect a disunion, in our principles and sympathies, from those whom we are destined soon to meet around the throne of The Eternal. Rather let us strive to claim a nearer kindred with Him whose friendship is closer than a brother's, and whose name and righteousness are the endearing and imperishable bonds which unite all His disciples in one holy company—one endless and blessed brotherhood.

But while God thus sanctifies the memory of the just by taking them to himself and keeping them by himself, when they are removed from

the world, by a variety of means, he preserves their memory among the living, and this operates in a diversity of ways to our comfort and advantage. If we have cherished any sense of admiration for the character of the departed, if we have been privileged to enjoy the advantage of their friendship, if we have directly benefitted by their wisdom and energy, we will fondly preserve the memory of their virtues, and God will bless it to our good. Thus we may live over again the delightful seasons of intercourse which we spent in personal companionship. We will recall the profitable conversation in which we were wont to engage. Emergencies will arise to prove the judiciousness and value of the counsel we received. Occasions will occur suggestive of the manner in which the just would have acted. All this will have a sanctifying influence on our lives. We will praise God for having favored us with so brilliant and winning an example; and if there be any sincerity in our gratitude, we will strive to imitate it, in so far as it was in imitation of Christ—pre-eminently **THE JUST**. Though removed from the land of the living, the just are still present in the existence of many a salutary impression and blessed influence. They being dead, yet speak; and theirs is a language, solemn and awful, which the living voice cannot

repeat. All that they were and all that they did is still, with more or less power, according to the susceptibility of different minds, directing the current of our thoughts and biasing the tenor of our ways. Impressions effected by contact with the moral and the spiritual are much more durable than those which are produced by the physical. They are wrought into our nature and have much to do in the formation of our character, while the removal by death of those from whom they have been received, serves to deepen and confirm them. The forms and the features of departed friends may soon fade from our recollections as they do from our eyes, but the elements of their character—their dispositions, habits, and principles—cleave to our very spirits. And the great day of disclosures alone will reveal how much we are indebted to this very circumstance, for the attainments we have acquired and the good we are enabled to do. Long after the blanks which they leave shall have ceased to be continually and painfully palpable, when we no more miss them on the streets, or in the place of business, or the house of God, our character will continue to exhibit more or less fully the reflected lineaments of their lives—the result of an affectionate and trusty friendship. This is a truth, the force of

which is often imperceptibly or vaguely realized. Men are not so sensible as they might be of their indebtedness to the lives and character of the righteous. Yet the raising up of the just in our midst, our associating with them in our lifetime, and the preservation of their memory and its influence after they are gone, are means which God has instituted and which he often greatly blesses for the assimilation of his people to one another, in the same qualities of righteousness and holiness in which his people become like unto himself. The kind of means and the principle of operation are the same, as when, through faith, God's sanctified children grow up into Jesus Christ in all things, walking in love as he also hath loved them and given himself for them. By faith we are united to an absent Saviour; by sight we associate with the righteous who are alive upon the earth, and at their death we are not divided, for our faith, fostered by an affectionate remembrance, follows them whither they go, and brings us nearer, as it follows, to their God and our God. In either case it is impossible to delight in the presence of goodness, visible or recalled, without becoming good, or of wisdom without becoming wise. And thus does the memory of the just, no less, if not more, than their bodily presence, exert a kind of

missionary agency, which elevates whatever it touches, and sheds a most benignant influence wherever it penetrates. If there be any virtue in the friendship of friends, if any depth in the affection of relatives, if any gratitude in the hearts of dependents, if any sympathizing susceptibility in the souls of associates and neighbours—who can estimate the blessedness of this agency? By all that is precious in this arrangement, and by all that is comforting in these considerations, let us moderate our grief at the departure of the just, devoutly adoring the Lord for having enabled them to do so much when they were with us, and for making the amount of good which they have accomplished at once the instalment and instrumentality of a great good yet to be achieved.

But it is not alone in the personal recollections of familiar friends or favored compeers that the memory of the just is preserved and blessed. With the generation to which they belonged their names may cease to live. In a few short years it may be impossible to trace the works of the righteous to the individual and respective agents who performed them. The founders of useful schemes may be forgotten. The visible outgoings of cordial sympathy and active co-operation which give an impulse to the improvements and progress of the day may sink into oblivion.

But the characters of the just will exist and influence posterity long after those who exhibit and sustain them shall have vacated the sphere of their labours. Though the place which gave them birth, and the community which prizes their beneficence, and the spot that receives their bodies, may be effaced from the surface of the earth and the page of current story, yet will a wholesome and beneficial energy be transmitted from age to age and communicated from place to place. The moral and spiritual survive all material aids to perpetuate their existence. The deep lines of the chiselled marble shall be obliterated, but the virtues they record shall not perish. The pen of the biographer may be wisely employed, and may greatly assist, to particularize details and preserve the vividness of rare and singular traits, and may enable posterity for centuries to refer the works of the mighty dead to their several authors; but ere that pen indites a word, the influence of their holy lives has taken effect upon the hearts of living men, and has been launched upon the current of human sympathies, which is destined to carry it on and on into the endless future of spiritual existence. Oh, my brethren! if this be true, who can estimate the preciousness of those arrangements which God has contrived and set in operation to preserve and

perpetuate the memory of the just, and who can tell the extent to which the world is blessed by the vouchsafement at any period in its history of one holy life? "The righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance." "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth; yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; *and their works do follow them.*" Their light, which began to shine on earth and which shined more and more until the hour of their death, scatters its cheering beams upon all the gloom of the sorrowful present, imparts a steadiness to all the uncertainties of the future, and breaks in upon the thick darkness of the grave itself; but the full developement of its perfect day is reserved for the ages of eternity. Let such considerations comfort your hearts when the heaviest losses befall you. The good and the just who, through the portals of the grave, have entered the threshold of everlasting life, cannot, if you dared to wish it, return to you. But open ye your hearts to the sacred influence of their pure dispositions and virtuous deeds, and of that same faith in a crucified Redeemer by which they lived. Under the blessing of God, that shall take you to them, and qualify you to rest and remain with them in that happy abode which your Saviour has prepared for all such as love

is appearing. "Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." "Be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

It is seldom, my brethren, that a family, a congregation, a community, have occasion to lament so deeply the ravages of death as we now do the premature departure from among us of that just man, whose mortal remains we last week accompanied to the grave. Many of you and multitudes around you are not slow to testify to the rare excellence of his busily and speedily spent existence. I could wish that some one, who has been privileged for years to enjoy the intimacy of his friendship, were in this place to pay a becoming tribute to his respected and blessed memory. Brief, very brief, but while it lasted, full of promise and buoyant with hope, has been the intercourse permitted to him who addresses you. Yet such was the open and approachable character of our beloved friend, that this period, short as it has been, has not passed away without leaving a very decided impression,

that this community has been deprived of one of its most worthy and favourite citizens, and this congregation of its most valuable member. Possessed of a penetrating but shrewd observation ; blessed with an enlarged and most useful experience ; keen and earnest in the acquisition of knowledge, of which he had amassed extensive treasures ; and gifted with a rare power of pleasantly and profitably communicating his ideas ; withal, a man of unobtrusive but genuine piety, which imparted a subdued tone to all his words and gestures—he must have been the soul of many a nappy company, and it is difficult to conceive a man with whom one could hold more agreeable or improving intercourse. Of amiable and gentle manners, he was accessible to all—kind and sympathizing, much of his time and means was devoted to the service of others. Distinguished among many for his singular forethought, understanding, and prudence ; for the soundness of his judgment, which was often appealed to ; for the excellence of his counsel, which was extensively acted upon ; for his high principle, which preserved a beautiful consistency of life ; for his tact of management and willingness to work—the important position which he held in public life, though neither the foremost in office nor the most conspicuous in notice, was

natural and proper, and his connection with many of our most useful institutions was greatly valued as it was greatly blessed. A husband and a parent, much of his happiness seemed to be enjoyed in the domestic circle, and he conducted the religious duties of the family with interest and pleasure. A devoted and zealous member of our Church, he took much delight in the foundation and management of our most valuable schemes, and reviewed the proceedings of our Ecclesiastical Courts with affection and regard. An office-bearer in this congregation, much of what has been the means of promoting your comfort and stability originated with him, and he was ever ready to give an active and cheerful support to all that is calculated to establish and extend the interests of pure and undefiled religion. In a word, and that in the language of Scripture, he was "not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord."

His useful and honourable career has been brought to a close. He has been cut down in the prime of life and in the midst of his activities. He has gone to his rest under the burden of many engagements. It is the Lord's doing. It must be a kind dispensation, however severe. It is our warning. Up and do! May the Lord give us grace to kiss the rod with which we are

smitten, and from his rod and word to gather the peaceable fruits of righteousness. We lament his departure, but we are comforted with the thought, that his memory is and shall be blessed. Amen!

