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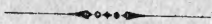
DISCOURSE

OCCASIONED BY THE DEATH

OF

JACOB STRAWN,

THE GREAT AMERICAN FARMER.



DELIVERED IN STRAWN'S HALL, JACKSONVILLE, ILL., SEPTEMBER 17, 1865,

BY

REV. L. M. GLOVER, D. D.,

Pastor 1st Presbyterian Church.

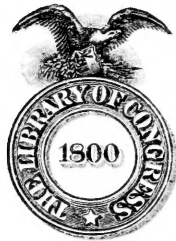


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1865.

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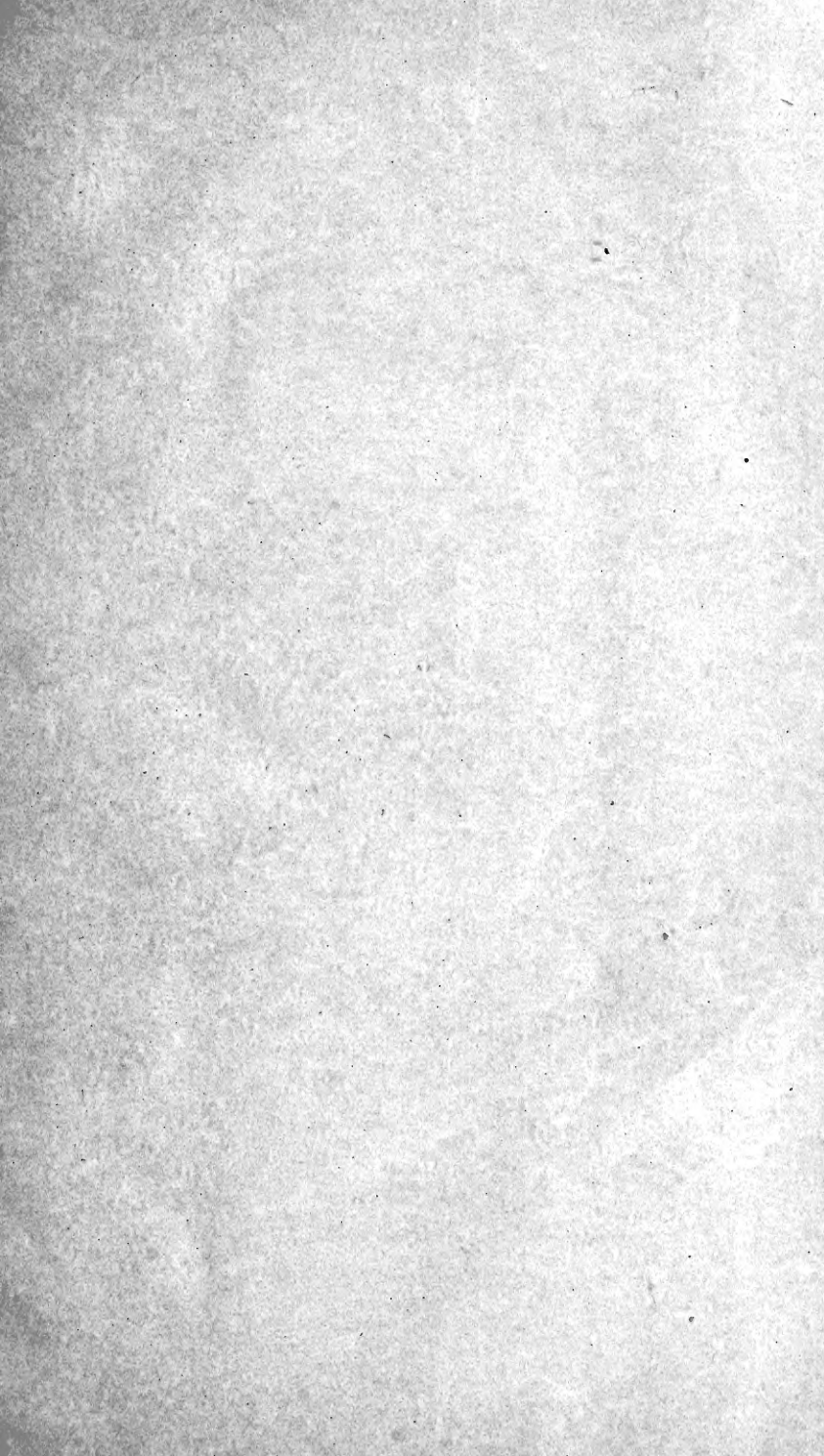


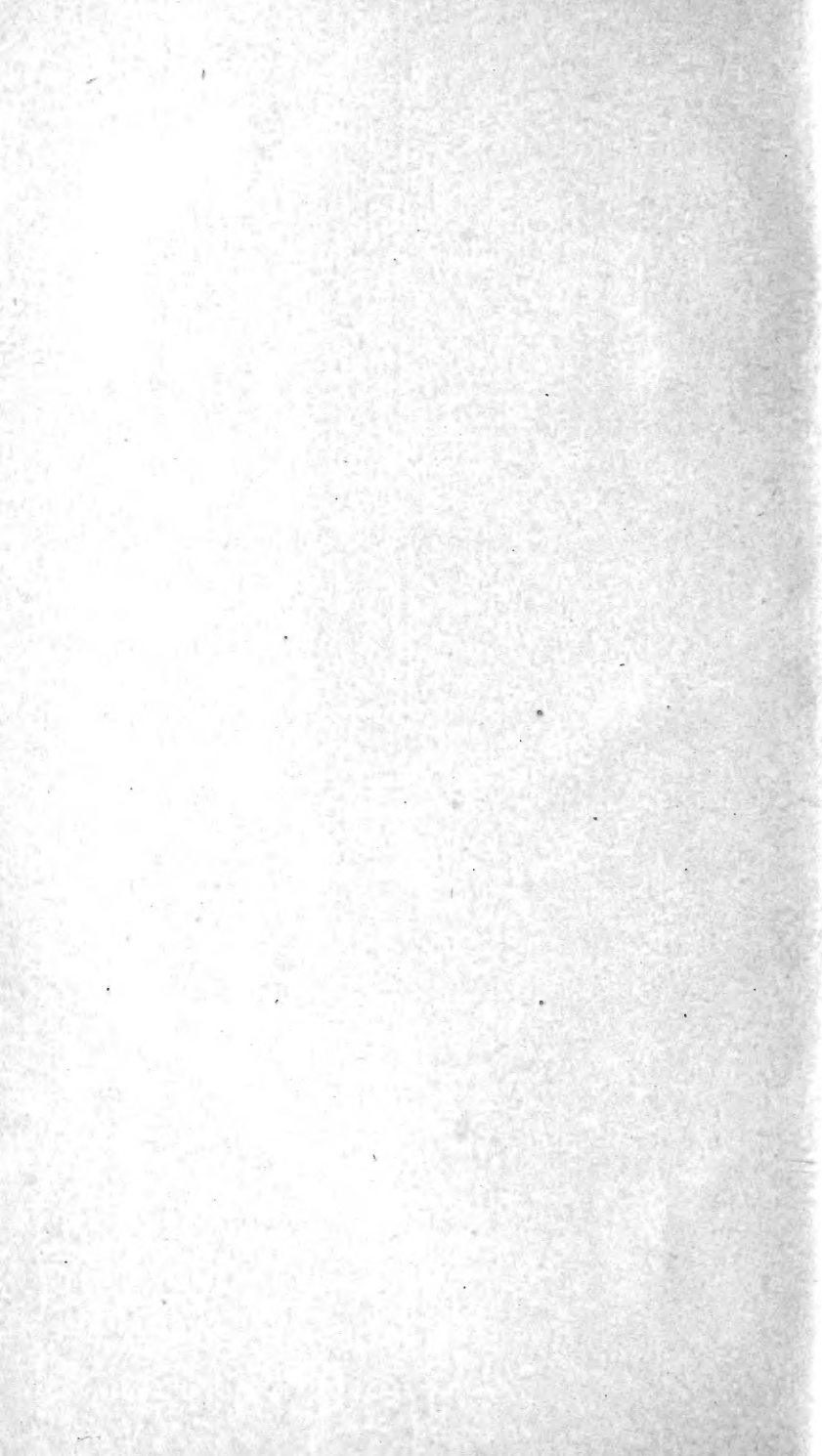
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PROV. 10: 4.—He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand; but the hand of the diligent maketh rich.

JACOB STRAWN was born May 30, 1800, in Somerset county, Pennsylvania. When he was seventeen years old his parents removed to Licking county, Ohio, where he was married, at the age of nineteen, to Miss Matilda Green, with whom he lived twelve years. Seven children were born to them, of whom three sons are living. In the year 1831 he removed to Morgan county, Illinois, where soon losing his first wife, he married Miss Phebe Gates in July, 1832. By this marriage he had six children, five sons and one daughter, all of whom survive except one son who was killed in an ox-mill wheel when five years old. After a life of almost unexampled activity, and of very unusual success in amassing a fortune, Mr. Strawn died suddenly, at home, of a disease to which he had for years been subject, on the 23d of August, 1865.

In consideration of Mr. Strawn's long residence in our neighborhood, the marked peculiarities of his character, his prominence as a business man within the special sphere of his activity, and the wonderful achievements of his life, as well as out of regard to the wishes of his family and their numerous connections, it has seemed appropriate that a discourse embodying the main facts and lessons of his history should be prepared and delivered as soon after his decease as convenient, in the presence of his fellow citizens, and in this hall bearing his name and erected as a public benefit by his munificence. It is believed that there is important instruction connected with the subject which should be elicited and employed; it is also believed that

there are misconceptions about it which need correction.* The present occasion is designed to meet the demand referred to, and the discourse to which your attention is now invited is meant to give utterance to all that friendship may claim, and to all that duty may require, a limitation which should ever be regarded in speaking of the dead, so as at once to be just to human feelings and just to God.

I speak of Jacob Strawn under the conviction that he was not a common man. Let me add that I seldom passed any time in his company without having the feeling more deeply impressed upon my mind that he was a great man; great, it is true, in a sense peculiar to himself; great in his kind, and as few men of his kind ever come to be. He was as distinguished, in the sphere of his operations, as Napoleon was in his, or Washington in his, or Clay and Webster in theirs. He was as truly a prince among agriculturists and herdsmen as Frederick was among crowned heads, or as Bacon was in the realm of mind. His origin was humble but respectable. His education was limited to the essential rudiments of knowledge. He was not born to great possessions, but to the necessities of labor. He was not advanced to wealth by rich legacies, or by the accidental falling into his hands of large estates. His success in business was no chance result. It did not come about by favoring circumstances. It was no mere achievement of good luck. The greatness we ascribe to him was legitimate; it was in and of himself, and not in or of fortuities in any sort or to any degree. It does not often occur that so much is accomplished by the forces which are within a man; by sagacity, by self-reliance and energy of will. The problem of his success in life is not solved by the simple fact that he was industrious and hard working. Other men, also, are industrious and hard working, and yet without success, or if successful, usually in a far lower degree. If, therefore, it be said that any one might achieve what he achieved by doing as he did, we reply that this cannot be so, unless by doing as he did is meant not simply toiling as he toiled, but also planning as he planned. Given, the same amount of

* See Appendix A.

muscle, the same power of endurance, and the same zeal of work that he possessed, and yet you have not necessarily the man he was, nor do you account for the results of his life. But given all these things, and genius besides, and you have the elements which constituted the real Jacob Strawn, and by virtue of which he became the most distinguished farmer of the age. For he was a man of genius in the proper sense of the word. Genius is not altogether intellectual in its scope. It is not confined to fields of literature and works of art. It cannot be appropriated by poets, philosophers, painters, and sculptors. It belongs also to such as have a special gift in any department of human enterprise and effort. There is no reason why labor should not have its geniuses as well as learning, no reason why the workshop and the farm should not give birth to representative men as well as the learned professions. A man of extraordinary capacity in his sphere, who rises to the first rank in that sphere, who makes himself a model in it, who lays down laws and furnishes examples which it is difficult if not impossible for others to attain unto is a genius. Mr. Strawn was born of the soil, and for the soil he had a kind of filial regard. He took to farming naturally, and from a love of the employment. It was the bent of his mind. In early life, doubtless, he dreamed of broad acres and vast landed estates. But the special inclination of his genius was toward the handling of cattle. This showed itself when he was a boy ten years of age. Even then he began to exercise himself in that way, and determined that it should constitute the business of his life. And so it did, farming, as commonly pursued, being only incidental and subsidiary to the rearing of stock to supply the markets of towns and cities. The genius of the man led him into extensive operations in his line. He could not farm it on a small scale. A farm which one might walk over in a few minutes would not satisfy him; he must have one which a day's ride on horseback would hardly encompass. He must have broad fields, and many of them. He must have large tracts of land in various places for the accommodation of his stock. These extensive operations involved the employment

of very many hands. His estates must be covered with tenants to carry forward the farm work. Numerous persons must be employed to look after the cattle and drive them from field to field, and from farm to farm, and then to market. The oversight of such business required a mind to comprehend the whole. He who watched the entire movement of the machinery and kept all a going must possess great quickness and range of eye, vast power over details, a wondrous faculty to combine and harmonize and turn to a single result such numerous minds and hands and operations. Mr. Strawn was one of a very few men who unite in themselves the various qualifications for such extensive responsibilities. His thoughts ranged rapidly over the whole concern. Nothing appertaining to it escaped his notice. Quick, rapid, and exact, no interest suffered. While attending to what was required at one point he did not allow neglect at another. For to a perfect understanding of the business in which he was engaged he added a thorough knowledge of men. His judgment of character was very keen and accurate. He surveyed a stranger with a most penetrating eye, and seldom erred in the estimate he formed. He did not like a person who could not look him in the eye; he took it as evidencing want of spirit and self-reliance, it not a consciousness of being unworthy. He rightly judged that they would be most likely to respect him who gave him most occasion to respect them. This insight into character was an indispensable condition of success in the vast business which he carried on. It enabled him to adapt men to places, and thus protect his interests at every point against liabilities of loss or failure. The vicious he would not employ, and the unfaithful he would dismiss. He soon saw who would serve his purpose and who would not. The honest and industrious he encouraged with additional rewards, and thus attached them permanently to his interests, so that they became, in not a few instances, identified for life with his estates. Surely he who could constantly keep in view concerns so numerous and varied, who was capable of such a combination of means and measures suited to a single purpose, cannot be set down as a common man.

Let it not be supposed that he carried forward these great farming operations by proxy. He was no gentleman farmer. Besides superintending, he took part in the hardest of the work. He showed by example how things were to be done. Before infirmities began to thicken upon him there was not one among all his tenantry whom he did not surpass in actual labor. He wrought with his own hands upon the great problems of wealth which engaged him. Indeed, he was a prodigy of labor. In all weather, by night and by day, he pushed his business forward. Often he got his sleep in the saddle. Nothing but impossibilities were allowed to interfere with the carrying out of his plans. He scorned difficulties. The greater the difficulty, the stronger was his purpose, and the higher his ambition to overcome it. Of privations and hardships he made light. He ceased from nothing deemed necessary to be done, by reason of the heat, or the cold, or the storm. That must have been an iron frame that was equal to such toil and exposure, and met them so long without weariness or exhaustion. We wonder it had not sooner given way before that restless and resistless spirit which wrought in it and by it.

Mr. Strawn's life is a lesson of industry, promptitude, and thrift. It shows what power there is in singleness of devotion to a given object. It illustrates the dignity of labor. It exemplifies what the Bible says, "The hand of the diligent maketh rich," and, "Seest thou a man diligent in business, he shall stand before kings, he shall not stand before mean men." Mr. Strawn's maxims in regard to the way and means of worldly thrift, which some years ago found their way into the newspapers, are very pertinent and valuable, in matter and form reminding us of many of the wise and pithy sayings of Benjamin Franklin.* Idlers he could not abide, nor such as neglect their business, and waste their time going to towns, sitting on street corners, talking of the news and discussing politics. He held laziness to be one of the chief vices, and the cause of most of the poverty and distress in the land and world. He taught

* See Appendix B.

that if people would improve in honest labor the time they squander in sleep and ease and pleasure, and in making and unmaking public officers, there would be prosperity and abundance, begging would cease, and that kind of dishonesty, too, by which a part of the community live on the other part. He urged that the way to have money is not to beg, steal, or borrow it, but to make it by early rising, by promptly doing what the hand finds to do, by economy in expenditures according to Poor Richard's maxim that "a penny saved is a penny gained." By living up to such rules as these he proved their soundness and value; he made great gains, and those gains were legitimate.

This leads me to speak of the deceased in a more personal way, as to the principles of action which animated him, and the general estimate which is to be formed of his character. If, unfortunately, any entertain the impression that he was a bad man, it can only be because they have misjudged or have been misinformed. As to his views, I am not aware that he held any which were corrupt. On the contrary, he is believed to have held all the commonly accepted truths of religion and morality. His habits, too, were certainly more unexceptionable than is usual among the opulent. He was not addicted to any vices. In principle and habit he was a thorough temperance man, never using intoxicating liquor in any shape. Nor could he endure men about him who did indulge in strong drink. He set down all such as trifling fellows, and he had no use for them. Tobacco, also, he discarded as both unnecessary and injurious. In moments of high excitement and passion he would employ expressions that are usually regarded as profane, but he was not in the proper sense of the word a profane swearer. He was also remarkably free from the ostentations of wealth. He exhibited none of the vanity which riches are adapted to produce. He had too much good sense to boast of his possessions. In dress and equipage he was plain as became the first farmer of the Republic. And in regard to his business, so far as I have known and have been able to ascertain by inquiry, he always conducted it on the strictest principles of uprightness. He had a very

high sense of honor in his transactions. His word he held sacred. His promptitude in meeting promises was proverbial. If he owed a man, he paid him on the very day, the very hour specified in the agreement, and when men owed him he required them to come to time in like manner. It came to be understood that when Jacob Strawn engaged to do a thing he would do it, whether with or without a written obligation. Between the making of a bargain and the sealing of it by legal forms there was with him no flinching or backing out. His trading, too, was uniformly honorable. He was fair in buying, and he was fair in selling. He practiced none of the sly arts of dishonesty. All deception he despised, and there is no reason to believe he ever practiced it for the sake of advantage, and there is as little reason to think it was ever successfully practiced upon him, for he was too discerning to be caught in that way. Honesty, he knew well enough, was a part of his capital, and yet I do not believe he was honest because honesty is the best policy, but because he had no disposition to pursue any other policy. I have yet to hear of a single instance, during the long period of his residence among us, in which he has been known and acknowledged to have departed from that policy, and this is saying much for one who carried on the extensive operations that he did for so many years. He amassed a great fortune, but it is believed he did it by methods entirely unexceptionable. He made money very fast, but the means employed were legitimate. It was not by running hazards of speculation; it was not by any manner of stock gambling, but by the regular operation of the laws of labor and of commerce; by keen, far-sighted management, such as seldom failed of the results intended. Mr. Strawn was not one of those who have a faculty of making a fortune one day and losing it the next. He was not of those who risk and break, and whose prosperity is a certain presage of ruin. He never failed, and had no need of laws in aid of bankrupts, for he did his business on principles that do not expose to unanticipated pressure or disaster. It deserves also to be told that the rectitude of his transactions did not have its rule and

measure in that which is strictly and merely legal. Many things that are legal are not exactly right according to higher principles. There are many ways of doing among business men which, though covered by forms of law, are yet unequal and oppressive. Mr. Strawn was remarkably free from vices of that sort. He was slow to take advantage of a man's present necessities, much more of his misfortunes, to further a selfish end. He took interest for his money, but not exorbitant interest. He never acquired the reputation of a hard and uncompromising usurer. Nor did he incur the odium which, whether justly or unjustly, attaches to dealing in other men's paper, commonly called shaving notes. He was not a jockey of any sort. He did not enrich himself at the expense of his neighbors. He did not increase his own by unsettling the estates of his fellow men. Doubtless, he often pressed his claims by legal means, but he got no one into his power for the sake of fleecing him, nor was his thrift due to any advantage taken of persons fallen into straits. Though little disposed to favor such as had failed of their engagements through laziness or neglect, he was not guilty of distressing any whose misfortunes made an appeal for leniency. It was not by any sort of rapacity that his great fortune was amassed. His reputation is not associated with the foreclosing of mortgages, and the enforcement of executions, regardless of mercy's and humanity's claim. Nor was he an oppressor in the matter of wages. He did not grind the faces of the poor. He gave those in his employ what was just and equal, and numerous persons who served him, and who with their families were dependent upon him, will doubtless feel that in his death they have lost a friend. For he was a friend to working men, a friend in need to the poor and suffering. If any conceive of him as hard-hearted and unfeeling, they mistake. Under that rude exterior there beat a heart that was easily touched by an appeal to sympathy. Rough, bustling, and stormy as he was at times, at other times he was mild and gentle as childhood. The real story of poverty and want never failed to reach his ear. He did not turn away coldly from any well authenticated tale of sorrow. I have seen

him melted to tears by tender words. I have seen his great frame convulsed as he listened to touching narrations of suffering and sorrow. For the soldier and his family he had warm sympathies, and as his heart prompted aid in their distresses so his hand did not withhold it. He loved his country and those who served her in the field. He was warmly attached to the late President, because he believed him honest, sincere, unselfish, and earnestly devoted to the welfare of the nation.

It would not be strange if some thought Mr. Strawn miserly. If so, they either mistook him or the meaning of the word. He was doubtless fond of making money, and the money he made he took good care of. He was no spendthrift. He wasted nothing in the ways of a thoughtless prodigality. He studied carefulness and economy, but he was not small and penurious. He was no miser. The miser is the meanest form of human character. He loves money for its own sake. He pursues it as an ultimate good. He hoards it as a source of delight. He values it more highly than anything he can buy with it. It is to him more than meat and raiment. It is to him comfort and luxury. All other comforts and luxuries he denies himself that he may enjoy his money alone. His happiness is in counting what he has got and in getting more. With an abundance at hand, he impoverishes both his body and his mind, making no provision for social or intellectual enjoyment. To the calls of sympathy and friendship he gives no heed. To the appeals of suffering humanity he is deaf. Though eagerly gathering in the means of good, he gives out nothing from his full store. With Mr. Strawn it was far from being so. He held to his money with no such miserly grasp. What he deemed necessary for himself or family he supplied cheerfully and bountifully. He stinted none dependent upon him in the matter of food and raiment. To the poor and suffering he lent a helping hand. To immediate objects of charity he usually gave something. To more general benevolent causes, such as make their appeal to a decided religious principle, he was more slow to contribute; and yet if an enterprise struck him as good and beneficial in its

tendency he was likely to do something for it, and I never knew of his contributing even the smallest amount to any doubtful or bad object, or such as he thought to be so. He would help build school-houses and meeting-houses, but he would do nothing in aid of any enterprise intended, or in his estimation adapted, to corrupt or injure society. In various conversations with him I urged the importance of more bountiful giving to acknowledged good causes, for this reason, among others, that it would add to his enjoyment. To this he assented, saying he thought it likely. And afterward, when he made the munificent gift of ten thousand dollars to the Christian Commission, he is understood to have admitted that it gave him more pleasure than any other act of his life. A few days before his death he contributed again to the same object. A man of miserly spirit makes no such record as this. Devoted as Mr. Strawn was to the acquisition of wealth, he condescended to nothing little or mean. His money he did not keep to look at, but put it forth and kept it in motion, with an active and enterprising spirit, in matters of trade and commerce, whereby, while reaping large advantages himself, he conferred great favors upon the community. He usually entered on no enterprises but such as he knew would pay. There is one eminent exception to that course, namely, the erection of this magnificent Hall, which he well understood could be remunerative in no degree commensurate to the vast amount of funds invested in it. Some speak of it as designed for a monument to himself. I am sure, however, that he did not authorize the idea, and yet if he intended it to be so it is to his praise that he sought to associate his name with a work not only noble in itself, but so well adapted, by proper management, to be a public benefit, and that for many years.

It is well known that Mr. Strawn never made any professions of piety. He was not a contemner of religion. He believed it important and necessary. He looked upon the Bible as a good book, and of divine authority. He was no reviler of Christian people, but for those whose lives and spirit commended them as sincerely and truly pious he showed a marked respect; at the same time, Christians who

act like sinners he despised. It would be useless to deny and needless to affirm that he had something of a self-righteous spirit, for that is not so much the fault of particular persons as of the whole race. But he was not to my knowledge offensively faulty in that regard. He doubtless saw some making larger professions than himself who fell below his own standard of moral action and well doing, and he may occasionally have drawn the contrast. Yet he was far from thinking himself perfect, and there is no reason to presume that he looked for salvation on the ground of personal merit. He no doubt oftener had a sense of imperfection than he expressed it, at the same time it was not unfrequently that he acknowledged regret for his errors. It is well known to his friends that he was often deeply pained at the remembrance of many things said and done by him in moments of unrestrained passion. He felt the difficulty, and yet he knew the importance of curbing that vehemence of temper which was characteristic of him, and there is some reason to think he did try to break in upon the tendency and the habit. It was noticed that toward the close of his life he was more quiet and subdued than formerly. This was doubtless due in part to the infirmities which kept him more in-doors, and that forced him more to reflection and to a forecasting of the future. He seemed latterly to be fully impressed with the near approach of death, and the thought, so far as entertained and dwelt upon, could not fail to be salutary. It was also observed that the last few weeks and months were much spent in reading the Bible, and it is supposed he perused large portions of that sacred book, if not the whole of it, during those closing periods of his life. As we look back upon his course the error which impresses itself upon us was not that of openly despising religion, but of practically neglecting it. He probably intended attention to the subject at some future and convenient season, yet like others he did not find that worldly cares and business relaxed in favor of religion and the pursuit of it, but that the more deeply he became involved in outward things, the less he was inclined to the pursuit of those things which are spiritual and eternal.

This is usually, indeed, necessarily so. And hence the importance, in every case, of giving heed to paramount interests, of seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, of securing before all things else an inheritance in the skies. When this is done a man's spirit is altogether in harmony with his real welfare, his life is marked by a proper unity of purpose and effort, and his whole character is fashioned to the just proportions of an immortal existence. The qualities which we admire in our great citizen farmer, as diligence, energy, perseverance, are not the less but the more to be admired when animated and inspired by the lofty principles of religion. And I have often thought during his life what a grateful thing it would be to see that restless spirit quieted and subdued by the love of Jesus; to see that mighty working force, body and soul, energized by an active and childlike faith in the Redeemer; and to see all the capabilities and results of that wondrous life laid down at the foot of the Cross. That would have been such a sight as is not often witnessed. That would have been a character as much excelling in moral greatness as the character I have described actually excels in the elements of natural greatness. That would have been a piety unusually illustrated with virtues, and made memorable for ages by the good fruits attending it. And nothing is more demanded in our day than such consecration of mind, of energies, and of acquisitions to God and the great objects and interests of the Christian faith. It is not desirable that there should be less of worldly thrift and prosperity, but that these should be properly employed, and wisely directed to useful ends; that "Holiness to the Lord" should be written upon all the capacities of man, and upon all the wealth he honestly acquires. And if we may anticipate a time when this shall take place, how unspeakably glorious the day will be. Then will the energies and the activities and gains of this world flow unto him who hath redeemed the world by the price of his blood, and whose all things are by the covenant thus sealed and ratified. Then will men lash themselves and nail whatever they possess to the Cross; upon it shall be suspended the fruits of their

toil and genius, the wealth of labor and the wealth of love; all the riches of the earth shall pour into Zion; they shall bring their gold and silver from afar; the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts, and every thing beautiful and precious shall deck the diadem of the despised but exalted Nazarene. Blessed millennial period, let it soon come!

My friends, how soon death closes the scene of our earthly existence. "The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off and we fly away." The life we have been contemplating fell short by several years of the allotted period. There is now an end of all his earnest thinking, all his wise planning, and all his vast labors. That restless heart has ceased to beat. That busy, unquiet life has reached its goal. All those vast and effective energies are forever still on earth. In the grave whither he has gone "there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom," neither has he "any more a portion forever in anything that is done under the sun." And as it is with him so will it soon be with us. Similar destinies hang over our earthly existence. In a little while there will be an end of all those worldly plans, interests, and pleasures which now occupy us. Swiftly and suddenly, as in his case, the messenger of death may come, and between the warning and the time set for our departure the period may be exceeding brief. How serious the thought of making an exchange of worlds, and of making that exchange upon a hasty and unexpected requisition of the soul. And how imminent the danger of receiving the summons before our work is done, of its being delivered at the very time when we are thinking ourselves happily and securely fixed for many years, and even when we seem most essential to our families and friends, and the circles in which we move. Let us, therefore, watch and be ready. Let us seek the proper fitness to live that we may also possess the proper fitness to die, so that whether living or dying we may be the Lord's. And let us remember that the fitness which adapts to the emergencies, both of the present and the future, life and death, is a vital interest in the exhaustless merit and the cleansing blood of the adorable Redeemer, to whose love and grace and saving power I commend you all. Amen.

Appendix.

(A.) Most of the newspaper notices of Mr. Strawn contain many errors. For instance, it is said that his whole fortune at the time of his settling in Illinois was five hundred acres of land and fifty cents in silver. He may not have had much ready money on his arrival, but the fact is that at that time he was worth from six to eight thousand dollars, certainly a very good outfit for a new country. His father, though not wealthy, was well off, and gave his children a respectable start in the world.

Again, the papers report that Mr. Strawn had been in the Legislature of Illinois as the Representative of his District; also, that he built pretty much the whole of Jacksonville, (now a snug city of about eight thousand inhabitants), both of which stories are made out of whole cloth. He never held any office, and the only part of Jacksonville he built is the Hall which bears his name, nor did he own any other town property.

The reports about the "snap" method of getting his wives, and various other stories concerning his eccentricities, must be taken at a discount.

(B.) Mr. Strawn's Maxims, published several years since, and designed to give the secret of his success:

"When you wake up do not roll over, but *roll out*. It will give you time to ditch all your sloughs, break them up, harrow them, and sow them with timothy and red clover. One bushel clover to ten bushels timothy is enough.

"Make your fence high, tight, and strong, so that it will keep cattle and pigs out. If you have brush, make your lots secure, and keep your hogs from the cattle, for if the corn is clean they will eat it better than if it is not.

"Be sure to get your hands to bed by seven o'clock; they will rise early by the force of circumstances.

"Pay a hand, if he is a poor hand, all you promise him; if he is a good hand, pay him a little more; it will encourage him to do still better.

"Always feed your hands as well as you do yourself, for the **LABORING MEN** are the bone and sinew of the world, and **OUGHT TO BE WELL TREATED**.

"I am satisfied that getting up early, industry, and regular habits are the best medicines ever prescribed for health.

"When it comes rainy, bad weather, so that you cannot work out of doors, cut and split your wood.

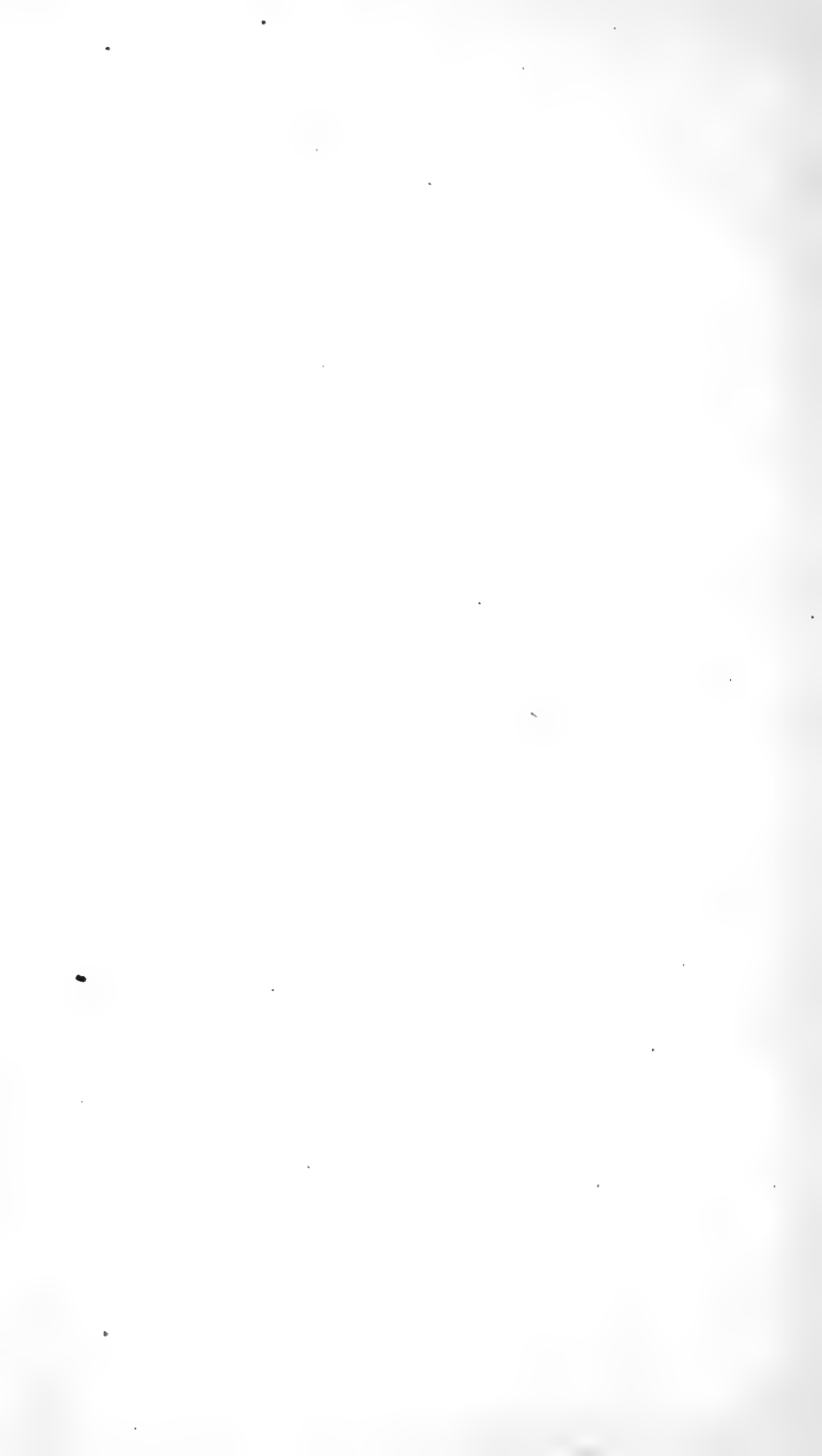
"Make your tracks when it rains hard, cleaning your stables, or fixing something which you would have to stop the plow for and fix in good weather.

"Make your tracks, fixing your fence or a gate that is off the hinges, or weatherboarding your barn where the wind has blown off the siding, or patching the roof of your house or barn.

"Study your interests closely, and don't spend any time in electing **PRESIDENTS, SENATORS**, and other **SMALL** officers, or talk of hard times when spending your time in town whittling on store boxes, etc.

"Take your time and make your calculations; don't do things in a hurry, but do them at **THE RIGHT TIME**, and **KEEP YOUR MIND AS WELL AS YOUR BODY EMPLOYED.**"











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