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FUNERAL SERMON

OF

MRS. S. A. WINGATE,

NOVEMBER 27, 1864.

PREACHED BY

REV. S. CLARK,

Pastor of the Cong. Church, Wolfborough, N. H.

DOVER, N. H.

GEO. WADLEIGH, PRINTER—ENQUIRER OFFICE.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

MRS. A. W. WILSON

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• S E R M O N .

For here have we no continuing city.—HEBREWS 13 : 14.

That this is a world of change, that the fashion of it passeth away, that there is nothing upon which we can fasten the eye and feel that this is firm and enduring, none will be disposed to question. “What shadows we are, and what shadows we pursue,” is a sentiment, which under various circumstances, must force itself upon the mind. Whatever the inward thought of some may be respecting the continuance of their dwelling places to all generations, they are on the whole convinced that in reality there can be no such permanency, and that “nevertheless, man being in honor abideth not.” He and his, and all with which he has to do must quickly be removed, and give way to some other fitting view of life’s ever shifting drama.

The very globe we inhabit, with all its materials must become disordered, and in form at least moulded after some other pattern—for the period is approaching when the “elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burnt up.”

And even now, before the advent of such a catastrophe, there are constantly occurring marked alterations, serving to stamp upon the structure of this terrestrial abode the impress of change and decay. So that it is only in a modified sense, or as contrasted with other evanescent things, that

we are permitted to speak of the everlasting hills, the bounds of the sea, and other similar phrases ; for as a matter of fact mountains and vales, the coasts of ocean and the channels of rivers, in some instances in revolving centuries are found to greatly differ from their original limits. Numerous islands have sprung from the deep abyss, and been overspread with soil and vegetation ; while on the other hand desolations have swept over regions once superlatively fertile. Earthquakes and volcanoes have contributed their share in the wondrous transformation. A very different world is this which we behold, in its exterior even, from that upon which our first parents looked before the primal curse.

Equally unstable have been the doings of those who have inhabited this changeable earth. Mankind have ever been on the stretch for something in advance of what at present exists. Nothing becomes truly established. Nations and dynasties have been subject to a similar law of fluctuation. New forms of government have supplanted the old. One renowned family or race been jostled off the stage to make room for rival aspirants. Empires have risen and fallen—cities become magnificent, then passed to utter ruin. The “glory is departed,” has been written upon many a proud monument of human greatness ; and in reference to all the pomp and splendor of the works and ways of man, as portrayed in the history of former tribes and kingdoms, we might inscribe as the only fitting memorial “vanity of vanities.” And as it has ever been with their enterprises, so has it been with the *men themselves*. “One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh.” Since death commenced its ravages among the descendants of Adam, from age to age, in one unbroken procession, the mighty concourse have gone to swell the ever increasing multitudes comprising the tenants of the tomb. And of the throngs who survive, it is certain all at length—soon at the longest—must join that silent congregation, already so vast. There

is no friend however dear, none with such health and strength, or power to resist the inroads of disease or ward off harm, that such can form exception to the general, universal rule. "There is no discharge in that war." The infant, the child, the youth, the parent, the husband or the wife—those with bright hopes beckoning them forward, and such as tread the pathway of gloom—each liable to the shafts of the dread destroyer,—and none sufficiently wise to calculate which from the varying classes shall first be summoned. Of course, as forming a portion of these masses of human society, thus subject to the presence and sway of sickness and accident and the corruptions of the grave—we ourselves are perpetually exposed.

And not simply are our lives thus precarious, but all our plans and projects, these are all depending upon causes beyond control, for their prosperous accomplishment, or eventual disappointment and failure. Thus uncertain, thus fitfully changing, are all things here below. The scenes associated with this world are transitory, and lights and shades constantly intermingle.

After reminding the suffering saints whom he addressed that there is no continuing city, the sacred writer adds—"We seek one to come."

It may be of interest and profit to glance briefly at the counterpart of all this instability.

With God, the Father of lights, we are told, is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. He is from everlasting to everlasting. Amid all the changes of time's advancing periods, the rise and fall of numerous nations, the ever shifting and often conflicting events of their rulers and people, the great Monarch of the Universe has remained firmly established upon his throne, and holds dominion both on earth and in heaven. And must thus continue for endless ages. We are expressly informed respecting him—"Thy years are throughout all generations—thy years shall have no end." We are invited to consider "Jesus Christ the

same yesterday, and to-day, and forever." The angels who adore in the upper sanctuary are ceaseless worshippers. So the spirits of just men made perfect go no more out from their celestial abode forever.

Whether we contemplate Heaven as a place or a state, the idea of permanency is often plainly implied or definitely expressed in the Scriptures. The patriarch Abraham and other ancient worthies who sought a country besides the land of promise, who sought a better, that is an heavenly, such looked for a "city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

The Psalmist, in the midst of perplexities and trials through which called to pass, consoled himself with the reflection—"I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness."

The Savior pledged his disciples mansions, at length to be secured, to cheer and sustain during the troubles and conflicts then surrounding. The apostles frequently direct the thoughts to the inheritance which would not fade away. To all the people of God there remaineth a rest, when the earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, there is assurance of a "house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

Concerning the enjoyments and employments of the Paradise above, it is true we have merely glimpses instead of minute details. The Bible does not gratify the curiosity upon many points where people are not seldom inclined to vainly speculate. But enough has been revealed, in regard to the future destiny of both the righteous and the wicked, to occasion fear lest any come short of the proffered rest. And it may be observed, in passing, that the same figures are employed, and similar representations made, when speaking of the retribution awaiting the finally impenitent, as when describing the blessings in reserve for believers.—As the character shall be at death, as that character shall be manifested at the judgment, in strict accordance must

be the after state. "He which is filthy, let him be filthy still, and he that is holy, let him be holy still."

But to dwell more particularly upon the condition of the redeemed. We may contemplate the happiness of the upper world, as freedom from all the annoyances and trials of the present, and as containing in addition sources of positive joy and glory. Such as shall be counted worthy to partake of the resurrection of the just, shall be forever free from sickness and from grief. "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; there shall be no more death."

Nor will the followers of Jesus be any longer disturbed by the presence and power of sin.

Having been enabled to triumph through the blood of the cross, they will never again experience temptation from an evil heart of unbelief. But then, having become wholly sanctified by the Spirit of all grace, they will delight themselves in bowing before the throne, and worship in the beauty of holiness.

There will, moreover, be the society of the holy angels, and sacred converse with the ransomed of the Lord—with many of whom, it may be, there was enjoyed below sweet and precious communion in acts of devotion, or in united labors to promote the cause of truth and the welfare of souls. Nor such alone, but the pious of every age and clime—prophets and apostles, confessors and reformers; those gathered from all the nations, kindred and people of earth, and brought to sit down in the kingdom of God.

And then in conspicuous form will appear the glorious Savior—as a centre of interest and love, and of adoration—for we have a description of the thousands of thousands, proclaiming with a loud voice, "worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing."

Yet who can adequately paint the peace, the joy, the bliss, which will be shared hereafter, by the countless host, in the new Jerusalem, the city of our God?

“Where anthems of praises unceasingly roll,
And the smile of the Lord is the feast of the soul,”

we can simply say, but this is sufficient, since it comprehends everything, such will be *satisfied*.

And that happy, glorious state will never know of change. Written upon each joy, stamped upon each pleasure, engraven upon each glory, in characters of living light, will be found the image and superscription of immortality.

In view of this subject there may be derived some practical lessons.

We should learn to duly estimate earthly possessions and advantages. And according to the principles of approved calculations, the fact that the treasures and other resources for enjoyment, after which multitudes eagerly aspire, are all of uncertain attainment, and of but slight tenure if for the time being secured ; this should serve to detract from the value so often placed upon them, and lead those who seek or obtain them, to be admonished not to set the heart upon them.

And while temporal good may be appropriately sought to a certain extent, and has really intimate connection with the happiness and usefulness of men, still these things have but a secondary importance, and should never usurp the position of those which the changes of time can never reach to destroy.

However much may be acquired, the season is rapidly approaching when it must all be viewed as comparatively worthless.

“What though we wade in wealth, or soar in fame,
Earth’s highest station ends in—‘here he lies’—
And dust to dust concludes her noblest song.”

Again, we should learn in view of this subject to cheerfully acquiesce in the trials of life.

By deeply realizing the insufficiency of mere temporal things, to afford the good which is desired ; by dwelling

upon their transitory nature, and contrasting them with what is abiding, both become in some good degree rightly appreciated. Earthly joys and advantages will not be deemed as rightly claiming very prominent desire or exertion, for they must soon be removed—and adversity can be borne with fortitude, if known and felt to be of short continuance.

This it was which enabled the apostle to say—alluding to severe discipline to which himself and others had been called—“We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair.” This it was which led to the expression of that strong and seemingly contradictory statement, “For our light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” Light! consisting of the scourge, the prison, and manifold exposures to death; but for a moment! protracted for years, and “constituting, as it were, his very life?” yes, even so—compared with the weight of glory, and in contrast with Eternity.

And in like method may they who are now called to pass through ways of sorrow be brought to the place of refuge and strength, or comfort and peace. If there can be gained the assurance that the afflictions of life may, and, if those exercised thereby permit, will be so overruled as to wean from this world, and prepare for another and better, then can such find consolation in all their troubles.

Still further, we perceive the propriety and necessity of earnest effort to be brought and kept under the influence of eternal realities.

The season is hastening on when these affairs will be of absorbing interest to every serious mind—those only with which we have to do. It would therefore appear the dictate of reason, as well as the requisition of Scripture—“Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.”

And it should be a weighty consideration that, speaking in general terms, these concerns which relate to the soul,

have regard to moral and religious responsibility, and a bearing upon the duty and the destiny of men, are beyond the compass of mortal sight. God is a spirit. The inhabitants of Heaven are spiritual existences. The things which assist or retard in the Christian race are, perhaps, for the most part, neither tangible nor visible.

And here lies one grand source of difficulty, one influential source of danger. We must have a plan, and use exertion, in order to feel the significance of these momentous themes. For what though they are of mighty import, high as heaven, deep as hell, and broad as Eternity—the nearer, ever present influence and contact of things temporal, without great caution and labor, will dissipate and destroy the most solemn impressions; and inferior things will become unduly magnified, or be esteemed as of priceless value. Hence the need of ceaseless vigilance and earnestness.

Things of Eternity alone are substantial. Here we have to do with shadows. And yet, what crowds move amid these flitting forms and crumbling ruins, as if here only were sure foundations, and structures secure against winds, and storms, and floods. We witness many who seemingly live as though they had an undoubted promise of length of days, and a “title clear to mansions in the skies.”

Still the truth remains—and by no possibility can it be denied—these things by which we are surrounded are all fast passing away. Soon will each be obliged to close the eye upon these fleeting, decaying objects.

And say, my hearers, what to you shall be the changeless vision then revealed?

The Providence which to-day brings us together, on this funeral occasion, is itself an illustration of the topic which has engaged our notice; and a striking comment on the declaration of the text

But a few weeks since we were summoned to perform the last sad rites for parents who were called to bury their

only child ; and now to mingle our sympathies with the lone survivor, as he stands by the coffin and grave of the companion of his life.

And not with him merely, but with this assembly of relatives, friends, and acquaintances ; who mourn the sudden departure of one whose education and position, whose social and other qualities, had so largely fitted for usefulness, who had devoted some of the closing days of earthly existence to acts of kindness in caring for others.

Strange, may some exclaim, that one who had such opportunities and desires for doing good, should thus be taken from the midst of life's activities.

And truly it is not easy to solve the problems connected with this event. But let us look up, and seek for light and guidance there. We may rest assured that however dark apparently, there is, in fact, associated with this dispensation, infinite and divine wisdom—"righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne."

I would, therefore, commend this afflicted circle to God and the word of his grace.

May you be enabled to find support and consolation, and, looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of faith, at length obtain a home in that city which will continue, that "better land," where peace and joy abide forever.

