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Received Dec 13, 1869.

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S E R M O N ,

PREACHED IN TRINITY CHURCH, BOSTON,

ON SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 1843:

ON OCCASION OF THE INTERMENT OF THE

Rt. Rev. Alexander Viets Griswold, D.D.

BISHOP OF THE EASTERN DIOCESE, AND SENIOR AND PRESIDING BISHOP OF THE
PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES.

BY THE
RT. REV. MANTON EASTBURN, D. D.,

BISHOP OF MASSACHUSETTS,
AND RECTOR OF TRINITY CHURCH, BOSTON.

PUBLISHED AT THE UNITED REQUEST OF THE CLERGY PRESENT, AND OF THE
WARDENS AND VESTRY OF TRINITY CHURCH.

BOSTON:
JAMES B. DOW, PUBLISHER.

1843.

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12, 27.

2, 3, 4, 7

Dec. 13, 1869.

WM. A. HALL & CO.'S PRESS,
No. 12 WATER STREET.

SERMON.

ROMANS XIII. 11.

NOW IS OUR SALVATION NEARER THAN WHEN WE BELIEVED.

THE condition of the Christian in this world is one so full of difficulties, peculiar to his vocation as a follower of the Redeemer,—and which are over and above those trials and sorrows incident to him as a man,—that he requires the consolation of constant motives, to refresh him amidst his journey. He is like a pilgrim, who, every now and then, wants a cordial to recruit him; and, unless he obtains it, he will be in imminent danger of lagging on his course. Now these motives, or inducements to labor, are to be found scattered, in the thickest profusion, through the book of inspiration. We are presented with one of them in the passage which I have just pronounced in your hearing. St. Paul had been recommending perseverance in the discharge of those various duties to

their neighbor, by the performance of which the people of God manifest their consistency. And he then proceeds to tell them, that they might well be active in their work; for that, since the period of their conversion, they had drawn just so many days nearer to their great reward, than when they first cast themselves upon Christ. Let us be animated,—he seems to say; for the end of our journey is more close at hand; we have accomplished this much more of our conflict; and we begin to perceive, with clearer vision, the battlements of that heavenly Jerusalem within which we shall be enclosed forever. *Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.*

Let us consider, for a few moments, the nature of that future blessedness, to which the apostle here applies the comprehensive title of “salvation.”

The very lowest part of this portion of the redeemed in a better world, is that it brings an eternal salvation FROM EVERY INFIRMITY AND SORROW.

No man has opened his eyes long upon this vale of time, without having begun to prove, in various ways, that it is a scene encompassed with trials. There are the griefs which arise from the changes of the world. Our outward circumstances are liable to change. Our friendships and associations become changed. Our prospects are subject to change. Then there are the pangs of heart

which arise from the bereavements of the world. Death, the relentless executioner, smites down, one after another, those who have rejoiced with us in our joys,—who have mourned with us in our hours of sadness,—whose smile animated us in the discharge of duty,—and whose counsel, with timely aid, guided us amidst our difficulties. And then, again, there are the pains which spring from the possession of corruptible and decaying bodies. From the moment that we begin to breathe, we may be said to begin to die. Some members of the human family wear away with gradual decline:—others writhe under the agony of periodical assaults of pain:—disease, in one, or in another form, reminds almost every man, long before his last change comes, that to the dust from which he originally sprang he is rapidly descending. Now it is the privilege of the redeemed in glory, to obtain an entire and permanent exemption from all these sources of sorrow. Change cannot have place in that world of happiness: for it is “a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” Bereavement cannot mar the bliss of its inhabitants: for within the precincts of that blessed kingdom, into which the pardoned spirit enters, “there shall be no more death.” Disease cannot interrupt its pleasures, nor cloud the sunshine of its peace; for it is prom-

ised to us, by Him who made that world, that “the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick,”—“neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away.” My brethren, what a prospect this, amidst the sufferings of the present imperfect condition! A full and complete salvation from all anguish! “The creature was made subject to vanity:” but a time of release is approaching: that which is perfect shall come: and the ransomed soul shall “be delivered into the glorious liberty of the children of God.”

The happiness of the redeemed is, further, a complete salvation FROM THE POWER OF SIN.

It is very evident, that the deliverance which the believer experiences in this respect, in the present state of existence, is only partial in its extent. The Holy Spirit does, indeed, impart to him a new nature; and, in consequence of the change which thus takes place, he pursues a life, the motives, the affections, the objects of desire, and the main tenor of which, are totally different from the course that he once maintained. But, notwithstanding this transformation, it is still true, that the original corruption of his nature is only deprived of its dominion, but not eradicated from within. He is liable to temptation: he relapses from the path of duty: he fails in gratitude and love: he is imperfect in his obedience. And this

daily experience of the still remaining force of sin, forms one of the chiefest sources of disquietude to the enlightened servant of God. He mourns at the discovery, so constantly forced upon his mind, that he exemplifies, in such scanty measure, the principles of his high calling; and, in the dejection of his spirit, occasionally breaks forth into the cry, —“O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” It seems, then, that it appertains to the Christian, while in this lower state, to groan under the burden of iniquity:—but, my brethren, when the disciple of Christ has crossed the river of death, and entered into glory, the last hold which evil had upon his nature is let go forever. The time of his conflicts is ended; and he commences a career of unimpeded and unmixed purity, within the mansions of light. He loves God without interruption: he serves him without deficiency: no memory of failures darkens his retrospect of the past, and no anticipation of coming transgressions poisons his prospect into the future. If there be any one consideration which, more than another, renders the hope of that better world dear to the heart, it is surely this;—namely, that, when the Christian has reached its shores, he has done with sin,—forever. He then receives a perfect salvation from his evil nature. “Beloved,” says St. John, “now

are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."

In that world of glory which is laid up for the people of God, they shall experience, also, a complete salvation FROM THE FEAR OF COMING SHORT OF EVERLASTING LIFE.

My friends and brethren, who is that Christian pilgrim, in whose heart there do not arise some occasional forebodings, in regard to the end of his course? When we look around us at the manifold temptations that beset our way,—when we then turn our eyes into the weakness and the corruption that are within,—and when we call to mind the incessant activity of the great Adversary of men,—how can we but sometimes heave a sigh of apprehension, lest, at last, we should miss that crown of happiness which is full before our view? Some feelings of a similar character seem to have cast an occasional shadow even over St. Paul's characteristic confidence; for he himself gives expression to the dread, lest, after having preached the gospel to others, he should himself be at length "a castaway." Now, while these fears of a final loss are made an instrument, through the Holy Spirit, of quickening us in the race to heaven, how consolatory is the thought, that, in that land of

happy spirits which is beyond the grave, they shall never be permitted to have a place! The apprehensions which the Christian feels in this world, spring from his profound conviction of the power of sin. But, as sin is to have no existence in the future dwelling-place of the redeemed, so those anxieties which are the effect of sin must also be excluded from those seats of bliss. The believer, having passed through this brief probationary existence, at length enters into his rest; and it will form one of the principal sources of his happiness in that rest to know, that he can never be banished from its enjoyment. He will find his solicitude lulled to peace. He will breathe freely,—so to speak;—as one who, having been long haunted by fears, and tortured by a thousand gloomy anticipations, on a sudden feels them dispelled; and exchanges for tremblings and agitation a free and placid calmness of the soul. My brethren, what a transporting prospect this, for the tempest-tossed spirit of the struggling servant of God! In that blessed abode, doubt is an emotion that is unknown. It is all glorious certainty. There is a salvation from the bondage of that fear, which, on earth, was such a prolific source of torment. The inhabitant of heaven is assured, that, having attained his recompense, he shall hold it forever. His feeling is this:—I am now the partaker of “a

building of God, an house not made with hands, ETERNAL in the heavens!"

Such are a few features in the character of that future salvation, to which the justified and sanctified believer is translated after death. He is released from his sorrows;—he is emancipated from the power of sin;—he is rescued from the harrowing fear of losing his crown. And that such a deliverance from every evil is, at this moment, the inheritance of that great and gentle spirit, whose deserted tenement of clay now lies before us, who among us does not confidently feel? Commiseration for *his* lot were superfluous indeed. Could the veil be withdrawn from that undiscovered country, what should we behold? Severed from the flesh by a momentary and indulgent stroke, he is now saved from all physical and mental anguish; he is delivered from all impurity; he is beyond the reach of all fear. It is for ourselves, who feel that he is no longer among us, that we are called to utter the sigh; and not an individual in this numerous assemblage enters more acutely into this sense of privation, than he whose unexpected duty it now is to speak to you over the ashes of our departed Father and Head. When summoned, a few months since, from the scenes of my past ministerial life to the associated charge of this diocese, the change was soothed by the anticipa-

tion, that, in this untried station, I should be introduced, by degrees, into the cares and responsibilities of so weighty an office, under the shelter of his parental wing. In an hour when I least expected it, he has been taken from my side; and I can only now implore you, my reverend brethren, and others of the same household of faith, to mingle with your sorrows your prayers, that Almighty God may so prevent me in all my doings with his most gracious favor, and further me with his continual help, that I may be, in some little degree, worthy to follow him, who, with such impressive suddenness, has been called to "receive the end of his faith, even the salvation of his soul."

And yet, amidst the shock which we have all experienced, by this startling termination of the earthly ministry of our revered Ruler and Guide, will not every voice unite, with one consent, in the exclamation, that the exit of him whose remains now lie in our view,—whether that exit be considered in reference to the precise period of his life when it was made—to the spot on which it was witnessed—or to the manner in which his sainted spirit took its flight,—is marked throughout by circumstances of almost unparalleled sublimity and beauty? Let us contemplate together, for a few moments, this striking spectacle. As if to call our hearts, in a more than ordinary man-

ner, to a sense of the presence and the providence of God, it pleased Him to take to himself our departed Overseer, within a few short days after the consummation of a wish, which had occupied the thoughts of our venerated Head through long previous years. The desire of his soul had just been accomplished. He had seen the council of his diocese, which had been assembled at his own earnest summons, meeting in harmonious brotherhood, and appointing his official successor. He had received the kind voice of confirmation to this choice, from the near and the distant portions of that spiritual Body, of which we are a parcel and a part. And, when all these preparatory measures had been completed, he had, in company with some of his brethren in office, and in the presence of his assembled clergy, performed the last finishing and apostolic ceremonial, within the precincts of this consecrated temple. And now, having been permitted to behold all things done, he walks to and fro, for a few weeks, in the midst of us; and then, in the fulness of years, he passes instantly away, and enters into an everlasting rest from all his labors. And, to invest with still farther interest and solemnity the closing moments of his career, it is so ordered, in the course of Providence, that his spirit shall escape from its earthly prison-house beneath the very roof of him,

who had been destined to stand in his room, and to continue his labors; and thus, by a most singular concurrence of circumstances, the father lays down his trust, literally speaking, at the feet of the son. But the glorious picture is not yet completed. You have seen this good old man separated from those over whom he presided, immediately after the fulfilment of his dearest wish and prayer. You have seen him yielding up the ghost within the actual dwelling of his successor in duty. And now, how does he die? Could any departure have been imagined, more entirely in harmony with the previous tenor of the character and life? After a lengthened course of calm and meek exertion, he resigns, without a struggle, his ransomed soul into the arms of its Redeemer. He sweetly falls asleep in Christ. And as I stood over that noble and majestic form, and watched the almost imperceptible ebbing of existence as it hastened to its close, I could not but inwardly exclaim to myself, in the feeling, though not in the language, of the bard of life, death, and immortality, —

“Starts timid nature at the gloomy pass ?

The *soft transition* call it; and be cheered !”

But interesting as it is, my hearers, on this impressive occasion, to contemplate the peculiar and

remarkable circumstances attending the end of our spiritual Father, equally so will it be, and infinitely more important, to let our thoughts dwell upon some of the prominent features of his official life and character. To attempt, at this time, any biographical sketch of his past history, is manifestly out of the question. That this duty will be performed by some hand or other, capable of doing it justice, and entering upon the task with filial reverence and affection, there is no reason to doubt. What I propose, at present, is simply to occupy a brief space, before committing his lifeless clay to its kindred earth, with a view of some of those aspects in which he stands before us as worthy of our imitation; and for which his memory should be cherished, — and more especially by the clergy, — with abiding and grateful recollection.

The first, and prominent thought, suggested to the mind of every person present by the remembrance of this departed prelate, is that of HIS SINGULAR HUMILITY.

My personal recollection of our venerated bishop dates from the period of my early youth. Thrown into his society, at that time, by circumstances of a most interesting character, a near view was thus afforded me, at this season of my opening life, of that wonderfully “meek and quiet spirit,” which

accompanied him at all times, and through all places; and it is impossible for me ever to lose the impression which it produced. It was this quality, in truth, that gave such attractive beauty to his fine countenance,—which had an expression upon it such as we frequently see upon the canvass, in the embodied conceptions of the great masters; but which we seldom witness in our daily walks among men. That the habitual feeling of that sainted man, whose loss we are now deploring, was one of entire self-renunciation, all who knew him will bear witness; and how instructive for us to survey such an example, in a world where eminent models in that department of Christian virtue are so rarely to be found, I need not surely remind you. To this spirit of humiliation the whole current of the world is so utterly opposed, that it is considered as of slight account in men's estimate of human excellence. And yet who can forget, that, when our divine Master pronounces his beatitudes upon the mountain, he numbers this same lowly mind among the most resplendent endowments of the creature; and holds it up to our contemplation as the object of his choicest benediction? “Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth:” “Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Or how can we likewise forget, that

this humbleness of soul, so little esteemed by a vain and self-seeking world, is the very mind that was in Christ; “who, being in the form of God, made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant?” To this chastened and unpretending spirit, therefore, so preëminently characteristic of the departed servant of God, whose remains are now before us, let our thoughts be turned this day. Let us seek to form it within ourselves as he formed it,—by daily walking with God, in the secret and subduing exercises of meditation and prayer. There was something majestic in the simplicity of that venerable man;—something which, while it awakened love, kept at a distance all profane intrusion, and compelled from others that deference which was his due;—something, which one could never be in the presence of, without an immediate consciousness of beholding the perfect exemplification of that scriptural sentence,—“He that humbleth himself, shall be exalted.”

The regret has sometimes been expressed, by the friends of our lamented Father, that, in company with this beautiful meekness of his character, there should have prevailed so constant a reserve, and such an habitual fewness of words, in his daily intercourse with others. Let it be remembered, however, that this deficiency,—as many among us

have been apt, perhaps, to consider it, —grew out of that very grace of profound humility which we have already been contemplating; and without which he would not have been the man that he was. Instead of imagining, therefore, what he might have effected with those colloquial powers which he had not, let us rather look at what he did achieve, by the moral influence of that mortified spirit which he had. And who can doubt, that to this quiet and subdued aspect, and this unpretending demeanor, carried about with him wherever he went on his official visitations, is to be traced no inconsiderable degree of that favor which our glorious Church now enjoys, in these Eastern States of the Union? The descendant of the pilgrims, reared in hereditary jealousy of our forms, and ministry, and institutions, found in our revered Father nothing, which corresponded with his preconceived imagination of the pomp and pride of prelacy. He recognized in this man that apostolic and primitive spirit, which so signally adorned his apostolic and primitive commission. He was seen to be the self-denying missionary of the cross. He put forth no arrogant claims. He assumed no superiority. His every movement seemed to say, “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches

of Christ." Thus overcoming prejudice by the irresistible argument of his daily character, who, I repeat, can question, that the altered eyes with which we are now regarded, in this quarter of the United States, are, to a large extent, the result of his past life, and his peculiar temperament? Will not every man amongst us be disposed to say, that he was altogether the very person for the position which he filled, and for the times in which he flourished? Let us this morning, then, glorify God, for what he has accomplished by this honored instrument: and let it be our delight to call up before us, from day to day, the sweet vision of this man of God,—moving about as a ministering angel of love; and proclaiming, by his silence no less than by his words, that his message was, "We preach Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake."

But I must not omit to hold up to you that eminent man, whom we are about to consign to the tomb, AS A MODEL OF SOUND AND WHOLESOME DOCTRINE.

My reverend brethren, when one who has been, for a long succession of years, a ministering servant of Christ, is called to his account, how important is the aspect in which his past labors are made to appear! The first inquiry which suggests itself to our minds is,—While life lasted, was he faithful to

his momentous trust? Did he shun not to declare all the counsel of God? Was he careful to dispense the true bread of life? Or did he leave the objects of his ministrations, all through his career, in the wretched predicament of hungry sheep, who look up for nutriment, and are not fed? And need I say with what tenfold solemnity this question forces itself upon us, when an individual is summoned from the midst of our number, who has been placed by Providence as a chief watchman upon the battlements of Zion? Has his preaching been an example to the ambassadors of Christ, of that scriptural instruction which is able to make men "wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus?" Has it been drawn from the living and undefiled source of God's inspired word? Has it set forth, with simplicity and clearness, those grand truths which our ancient standards enforce? Has it breathed forth, audibly and distinctly, so that no man may mistake it, the tone of our precious Liturgy; of our inimitable Articles; and of our searching and pungent Homilies? These are the thoughts which fill our hearts, when one who has been invested with the fearful responsibilities of a bishop on earth, is called to render up his stewardship to the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. But, my brethren, it were superfluous to remind you, that, upon the present impressive oc-

casation, our minds are left unclouded by a single shadow of a fear. Let me now be permitted to hold up that holy man, whose lifeless ashes are before us, as a teacher whose instructions were imbued with the choicest spirit of pure and unadulterated doctrine. It will, I think, be acknowledged, by all who have had the privilege either of listening to his public discourses, or of examining those which he committed to the press, that our late honored and beloved Head was a preacher, whose ministrations gave forth the genuine and true principles of the reformed Church of England. The excellency of the scriptures,—the justification and redemption of fallen man only through the expiatory cross of Christ,—the necessity of the Holy Spirit's influences to change the heart, and sanctify the life,—the obligation to show forth fruits of holiness as the evidences of our faith,—these were the views which he exhibited; and which were attended, as they alone ever will be attended, with evident and abundant tokens of a divine blessing upon his labors. The simplicity and singleness of purpose for which he was distinguished, led him, perhaps, to a too studious disregard of the ornaments of language; ornaments, which, from his sound classical training, from his various attainments, and from his habits of patient study, few were more capable of supplying than himself.

And yet, in the place of these graces of polished diction, there will be found a fulness of matter, and a quaint pithiness of phraseology, which carry us back in remembrance to the divines of the seventeenth century; and which are warmed with an unction from above, that reminds us of the pages of Archbishop Leighton. If our younger clergy would see what it is to preach the gospel, and would have a specimen of the doctrines for which Luther braved death, and for which Latimer and Ridley died, they may find the object of their search in the writings of our lamented Father and Friend. He whom we are this day to commit to his resting-place, was, thanks be to God, an exemplification of St. Paul's counsel to Titus:—"In doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech that cannot be condemned."

And now, my reverend brethren, and others who are here assembled, you will bear with me, if, before performing the last office of our venerable Church for him who has thus gloriously sunk to rest, I feel constrained to give tongue to the affecting associations which gather within me, while I cast my eyes upon that inanimate clay. With that pure, and wise, and meek being, are connected some of the tenderest recollections of my life; recollections which no intervening distance from his person, or multiplicity of cares and occupations,

has ever had the power to obliterate or diminish. I remember him as the Guide and the Counsellor, under whose vigilance an accomplished brother, long since transferred to his heavenly rest, was fitted for the exalted office of the ministry of reconciliation. I remember him as the mild and gentle Father, beneath whose sacred roof I have often laid me down to sleep, in my fresh and early days. I remember him as the parent of sons and daughters, whom, for a short season, I knew and loved; and who, in the flower of their days, were transplanted, one after another, from the stormy climate of this world, into that land "where tempests never beat, nor billows roar." I remember him as one by whose side I have sat, and whose benignant aspect I have contemplated, within the precincts of my parental home. And I remember him as one, who, during all these periods of his course,—in his joys, and in his sorrows,—in his days of darkness, and in his days of light,—was ever the same lowly and beautiful impersonation of the Christian life and character. Are there not some here to-day, whose experience corresponds, in these touching aspects, with my own? But if so, let us rejoice together. Let us bid the widow and the fatherless rejoice. Let us bid that Church general of which he was the Senior, rejoice. For he was "ready to be offered." He had "fought a good

fight ;” he had “kept the faith.” And, although his mortal part will soon be deposited within the same sepulchre, with that predecessor in station whose mural tablet adorns these consecrated walls, yet his spirit is now possessing that “salvation,” which is laid up for the pure in heart “with Christ, in God.”



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