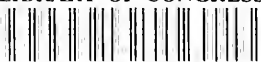


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A SERMON

ON THE

DEATH OF DANIEL WEBSTER,

BY

REV. ANDREW L. STONE.

A

S E R M O N

PREACHED IN PARK STREET CHURCH,

ON

THE SUNDAY SUCCEEDING THE

DEATH OF DANIEL WEBSTER.

BY

REV. ANDREW L. STONE.

BOSTON:
TICKNOR, REED, AND FIELDS.

MDCCC LIII.

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City of

Wm. W. W. W.

June 15/57

Boston, February 11, 1853.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

Having listened with great interest and pleasure, to the beautiful Sermon delivered by you on the occasion of the Death of Mr. Webster, and believing that its perusal will gratify many who had not that pleasure, I have taken the liberty of asking, as a personal favor, that you will allow me to publish it.

Most truly, your friend,

PETER HARVEY.

Rev. A. L. Stone.

Boston, February 12, 1853.

MY DEAR SIR,

I believe I can truly sympathize with you in the great National bereavement, which was to you, in your intimate and affectionate relations to the deceased, so near and personal a loss; and if it shall be to you any expression of such a sympathy, I cheerfully submit to your disposal a copy of the Discourse for which you ask.

Very truly and affectionately, your Friend and Pastor,

A. L. STONE.

Peter Harvey, Esq.

S E R M O N .

ECCLESIASTES, XII. 5.

‘ . . . BECAUSE MAN GOETH TO HIS LONG HOME, AND THE MOURNERS
GO ABOUT THE STREETS.’

THE livery of sorrow which our city has put on, now a week ago; the funereal sadness that shades every face, and hangs like low-drooping clouds over all the haunts of men, the offices of state, the marts of trade, the scenes of public concourse; the emblems of universal mourning that greet the eye at every turn, column and arch draped with sable grief; the flags of all political parties dressed in badges of bereavement; the national banner on ship and tower and dome, floating at half-mast height, as though conscious that the strong right arm which held it aloft on land and sea, before the kingdoms and powers of earth, were stricken now; the echoes of those booming guns, giving out in slow pulsations from all our hills and plains the mighty throbs of the common sorrow; the one burdened feeling of every heart, and THE EVENT that

lies central amid the solemn surroundings of these touching and expressive demonstrations ; suggest the Scripture and the theme of our meditation this hour. God has spoken to the *people* — to the NATIONS. We *may* not, if we would, keep the utterance of that voice, just as divine in *Providence*, as in the *Word*, from the courts of our temples. We cannot close our sanctuary doors against the entrance of such a public grief — as well try to shut the atmosphere without. These *two deaths*, one on either shore of the Atlantic, the one of the mightiest warrior, the other of the greatest statesman of the age, ought to hold us in arrest for awhile, that we may lay to heart the lessons they were commissioned of Heaven to teach.

Amid the impressions of such scenes, our advantage is great and special, for interpreting and understanding the full significance of the line I have taken from sacred writ : ‘Man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets.’

It was wise for the royal preacher whose text was, ‘Vanity of vanities — all is vanity,’ to close his sermon by leading his audience into the presence of Death, and making those dumb lips of the mighty Teacher repeat after him, ‘ALL IS VANITY.’ In the same solemn presence, coming from the midst of busy life, we may learn the lesson of the emptiness of earthly riches, pleasures and honors, and by the closest links of association send our thought forward, — from these perishing temporal things, these fleeting

semblances of time, to the enduring and indestructible realities — to THE LONG FINAL HOME OF MAN.

Our theme may be unfolded by remarking, *First, that this world is not our home.* It is our birthplace, where our eyes first opened to the light of life — where our first articulate cry of human weakness struck the key-note of all earthly histories — where the unfledged spirit was nestled and brooded, waiting till its pinions should be plumed and nerved; but it is not our home. It is our cradle, where our infancy is rocked awhile, and has its fitful sleep, and grows restless for newer toys, and claps its hands at tinselled splendors, and lifts its little arm against the love that is tenderest. It is our childhood's garden spot, where we blow our bubbles, and admire their iris hues, and see them break and end in nothing; where we build our mimic castles, and see them topple over; and launch our mimic skiffs, and see them founder; and shout awhile to the call of merry mates, soon summoned home. It is our school, where we spell out laboriously the alphabet of knowledge; and on our little stage make our bow and speak our piece, and count our ticket of reward a wondrous prize; and climb tall trees for fruit that blushes on the topmost bough, and fall in climbing; or scale the rough cliffs to rob the parent bird, and get more bruises than eggs; and think more of holidays and vacations than of all the wisdom to be mastered. And we may vary the imagery as we will, we cannot make the spot a home. We have here no continuing city, none

abiding-place. The present is a scene of trial, of training, and culture and discipline ; we grapple with many a difficult problem, we essay many a perilous adventure ; plan and toil and sometimes win, and oftener are baffled, then the—end. This life is to our true range of being, but as the fountain to the stream, the place where it rises. The stream cannot linger by the mountain-spring, where it first bubbles up ; it flows on down the valleys, and away across the plains, and returning no more, loses itself in the great sea. So earth is our natal spot, our cradle, our elemental school, the scene of youthful pastimes, and youthful competition and boyish triumphs ; but the stream of life flows on, deepening and widening, the fountain is left behind forever—out there is the ocean. Is this so simple and obvious a truth ? Look around, and see if you can make it by the sight of the eye a reality ! How we plan ! how we toil ! how we build ! how we store house and garner, ‘much goods for many years !’ We rear the walls of our mansions, massive and strong, that they may endure ; forgetting how soon this frail tabernacle of clay will crumble down. We plant trees of shade, whose stages of growth are centuries, forgetting how soon we shall enter the shade of the valley. We fill nursery and orchard with fruit-bearing scions, whose golden bounty shall never ripen for us, but drop into the lap of our grand-children. We spend the noon of our strength in heaping up riches, as though after that life of toil we could take out a new lease and

enter upon a life of ease and enjoyment. All these walks of busy labor around us express, not our sense of the frailty and brevity of life, but seem to look forward as to patriarchal years. And even if that amazing lifetime of the fathers of the race were to be reproduced, and men were to live a thousand years as before the flood, still from the lips of an age so venerable should we hear the confession, ‘*Few, few, and evil are the days of the years of our pilgrimage.*’ And there is no more touching record of human mortality, than that same chapter of the first book of Moses, at the close of each hoary lifetime, a lifetime which six times repeated would have reached from creation to the present hour; at the close of each, the lives of Adam and Seth and Enos and Jared, and Methuselah himself, adding this brief epitaph, ‘*And he died,*’ ‘*and he died!*’

Secondly. As this world is not our home, *that home is ETERNITY.* Our Scripture speaks of man’s ‘*LONG home.*’ The language in the original is even more impressive than in our common tongue, ‘*Man goeth to his home OF AGES.*’ It is the word by which the ancient Hebrew measured and exhausted *Eternity.* Wonderful word! Thought beyond the grasping of our finite! How it stirs the deathless nature within us! Born never to die! To look upon ‘the wreck of matter and the crush of worlds,’ the scenes of the resurrection and of the judgment, the unfolding histories of retribution, the finished periods of many a system of starry orbs populous with the subjects of

the divine government, schools of nurture to the numberless candidates for immortality — to count the vast revolving cycles of duration, each accomplishing some distinct purpose of the great Sovereign, and yet feel no subtraction from that amazing vitality of our spirits never to be expended! Our minds reel on the dizzy heights of such a conception; and returning within themselves, repeat solemnly and wonderingly, ‘This is my nature — yonder Eternity is my heritage — within its boundless spaces is my home, — *my long, my final home!*’ On the borders of the grave it shall be ours to repeat words which are become memorable now, — ‘*I still live;*’ and when the outward tabernacle is shattered, the viewless spirit mounting on long-fettered pinions shall say again, though mortal ears lose the utterance, ‘*I still live;*’ and in the distant ages, unmeasured by seasons and centuries, again express the consciousness of such an ever vital being, ‘I still live’ — ‘I shall live forever.’ No man can make such meditations the frequent guests of his thoughts, without being warned and profited by them, comforted, elevated and ennobled, and helped to a juster estimate both of things earthly and fading, and things heavenly and eternal, — the littleness of all that concerns the body, which is dust, the price and worth of the soul, dowered with immortality!

My third remark is, — *The race is moving to this ‘Home of Eternity.’* Suppose one could stand on some mighty mountain height, that should give to his

sight the whole course of that great valley stream surnamed in the forest tongue, ‘The *father of waters*.’ Far up in the high northern latitudes, he sees it issuing from a little peaceful lake, that sleeps in the yet unbroken solitude. It murmurs quietly along, as if for a stroll of a summer’s day. But it has left the lake behind forever! It receives on either side the bounty of tributary rills; and with a swelling current still flows onward. It leaps down the rocky walls that intercept its course, marking another stage of its returnless advance. From the great mountain chains, a thousand miles remote eastward and westward, come other rolling floods to mingle within its channel; and still he sees them flowing on together in the one main direction. There are windings and turnings in its progress. Now it lingers in the shade of the primeval woods; now it skirts the base of either bluff; now it spreads out its broad expanse in the sunlight; now it rushes through the narrowing gorges of the hills. It sweeps the skirts of great cities, and kisses the emerald margin of the prairies. But with all this loitering and dallying, it is in motion still along the easy valley slopes toward the gulf, — always full, and always emptying itself, — passing away and ever renewed, — its ceaseless brimming tide setting steadily out into the insatiable sea. The scene might fitly represent to him the continuous flow and current of human life out of its cradle fountain into the great ocean of Eternity. From the garden home of man I see the one returnless course of the

race of Adam, onward and onward, down the ages, swelled by the populations of all lands; a dark vast procession, moving down the valley of time, like a flood of many waters, and with hoarse murmurs of meeting surges, and sweeping on to the gulf of oblivion, the great sea of Eternity. Where are the generations of old? Where are the kingdoms and empires of ancient renown? Where are the conquering armies of storied fields? Where are the cities' crowds that shouted huzzas at the victor's return? Where are the orators and bards, the sages and philosophers of historic fame? Where are the tribes of the deserts, whose myriads no lustrum ever counted — the mighty hordes that swarmed along the frozen north of a hemisphere — whose marches devoured every green thing? *Our fathers*, where are they? and the prophets, do they live forever?

‘The golden sun —

The planets — all the infinite host of Heaven
 Are shining on the sad abodes of Death
 Through the still lapse of ages. All that tread
 The globe are but a handful to the tribes
 That slumber in its bosom. Take the wings
 Of morning and the Barcan desert pierce,
 Or lose thyself in the continuous woods,
 Where rolls the Oregon, and hears no sound
 Save his own dashings — yet the dead are there.
 And millions in those solitudes, since first
 The flight of years began, have laid them down
 In their last sleep. The Dead reign there alone!’

Go to the men of grey hairs, and ask them what testimony they can give concerning the ravages of mortality. Stand with one of them in the churchyard of his native village, and watch, and interpret the silent tears that drop along the furrows of his face, as he passes from stone to stone. They who were boys with him in the spring of life; companions of youthful sports and youthful adventures; mates in the old school-house, and in moonlit-pastimes on that village green; the maidens that smiled upon the joyous circles in which he mingled then; they to whom, in those early days, he looked up with reverence and duty, the old men of his childhood's time; all these are sleeping around him there. He wanders alone amid the dimming record of their once familiar names, and pictures again to his eye, as he treads above their dust, the once full life that has there gone down to the grave. He himself, in his solitary age, is the most impressive monument, amid all those humble shafts, of the perishable nature of human ties, the mortality of all the kindreds of earth.

And once more. *The departure of man to his long home, leaves mourning behind.* The dead who die, die not as the leaves of the forest in the frost of autumn, fluttering unwept to the ground; nor as the old trees sink with the weight of years or snows, or before the wrathful tempest; nor as the waves die on the shore, each unlamented by its fellows. They did not stand isolated and alone; the life of each, exclusive and complete within itself. Such might have been the

constitution of things; each man framed by the Almighty hand from the dust, owning no parentage but that Divine hand, and the bosom of his mother earth; and unallied by domestic and social bonds to the hearts around him. But the dying are 'bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh.' Their life had fibres and tendrils that took hold of other lives; such deep hold, so hard to disengage. When they pass away, there is a violent disruption of the ties whose strong linked cables went out in every direction, and had their riveted fastenings in the very quick of loving souls. At the grave of one, bends a widowed wife, the way beyond, to her sad eye, all desolate of human comforts. At the grave of another, lean together a group of sons and daughters, orphaned of a father's care, a mother's tenderness. Over the little form of some sleeping babe, the slow tears fall from young parents, childless. That blooming maiden was the very light of life to the hearth which is darkened now, and there is henceforth now in that home, no harmony in music, and no fragrance in flowers, and no luxury but in weeping. That stalwart youth was the stay and staff of infirm old age, that droops now, losing such support, more heavily toward the tomb. That strong man was counsellor, teacher, provider, his laboring right arm the only bringer of daily bread to dependent womanhood and a troop of little ones, now entering upon their desperate struggle for the poor right to breathe. And so it goes around all the circle of mankind. For every form arrayed in the white linen

of death's cold bridals, some other form, of husband or wife, of father or mother, of parent or child, of brother or sister, is arrayed in the solemn sable, worn only for that one remediless loss, symbol to every eye of the mourning that one relentless visitor, *Death*, leaves behind. And outside the walls of the stricken household, the range of grief sweeps often a wider circle. Friends and neighbors, not only in their kindly sympathies, but in the conviction of their own personal loss, in the passing away of one who has gone out and come in before them, and given back their salutations for many a year, and reciprocated many a neighborly charity, and sat down by their firesides, and is henceforth to be missed from all the rounds where his life has touched and mingled with theirs — they are mourners too. And sometimes, a wide community, a whole nation, blends its voice of weeping at the tomb of one whom the nation has loved and honored, and looked to in the hour of need, and gloried in as the echo of his world-spread name came gratefully back to her welcoming ear. Such a mourning was that which convulsed the heart of the people, when the revered Father of his Country was borne to Vernon's sacred shade. Such a mourning followed the Patriot of Quincy, the 'old man eloquent,' to the ancestral tomb. Such a mourning sighed through the land, as the tidings went forth that the Sage of Ashland had fallen asleep; and such a mourning with never more heart-tenderness in it, never more warm tears that start unbidden, never a

deeper sense of personal bereavement and affliction, waters now the grass-grown mound in the old 'Winslow Grave Yard,' within which lies, '*all that is mortal*' — the words are from *his* lips — '*all that is mortal*' of the foremost man of his times. And so the truth is again illustrated; not in the privacy of a household grief, not in the retirement of some village sorrow; but in the high places of the land, and on a theatre broad as the country, whose magnificent dimensions are only outspanned by the large heart that folded it entire in his love, that 'Man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets.'

Let us gather now closer within that central scene, around which all these reflections group and cluster. The chimes of midnight have died away on the ear, and the young morning of the Sabbath is ushered in — though the night still holds its reign. It is the chamber of death. There, on that couch of death, lies that form, whose port and presence became so well the mighty crown of greatness it upheld. The marble of death is settling on that broad capacious brow, beneath which wrought and triumphed the grandest intellect of our country's history. The life hues are fading out from those lips, from which have dropped upon us through the times of a generation such great, earnest, massive truths. The voice seems altogether hushed, whose grand and majestic oratory was but the fitting garniture of the regal thoughts

that marched forth in their own kingliness and sceptred power. A dimness creeping up from the shades of the valley veils that deep-set, full-orbed, glorious eye, that flashed its splendors upon senates, and mighty crowds led captive at his will. Powerless lies the hand whose lifted tokens shielded the sailor on the sea — the humblest son of the soil wherever he wandered — and cowed the hearts of despots and tyrants to earth's distant regions. The idol of so many souls — the victor in so many triumphs, more splendid than that of Waterloo, in that wonderful and unparalleled combination of the statesman, the lawyer, the orator, the first man among men, — is on the threshold of the uplifted portals of eternity.

We have followed the flight of that soaring mind in the marches of many an argument, whose stepping-stones were set as the continents, in many a burst of eloquence, that swept every spirit with its resistless mastery ; but who can follow it now, as the ranges of the Infinite open around it, and the unseen becomes visible ! Its own proper wings, no longer clogged by clay, the shadowing wings of a great spirit departing, are unfolding — the earth-chords are well nigh sundered ; but the lips move yet once more — the failing heart rallies once again — and the legacy of last words is bequeathed to the watchers. Words that may well be called prophetic of an enduring place in the affections of his countrymen — prophetic of an undying memory in the histories of earth — prophetic, let us hope, of a fadeless immortality.

It is not mine, *now* and *here*, to attempt a rehearsal of the crowding and eventful scenes of that life. It will add no laurel to that illustrious name to dwell upon it now in eulogies. And if I should say, I regret, with a keenness and bitterness of sorrow no one chapter in all our political history could ever inspire, that this hero of my boyhood's worship, and of later years, almost to the last, could not have seen his calling, to stand forth as the noblest Apostle of Freedom to the long-injured African, — to plead with that o'ermastering tongue, in that last strife, as in his long life before, the cause of the enslaved, — to give the truthful conscience of the North a victorious utterance in his own enchaining and conquering speech, — let none of you think I am less a mourner at that grave of Marshfield than you. And in speaking here, in this sad hour, and before your sad hearts, this most sorrowful protest, I do not impeach, as I have never been able to in my own heart, the patriotism, purity, and self-sacrificing devotedness of the motive, that bore in my deep conviction such mournful fruit. I dwell no more on this. I know there are two opinions on this great divisive issue; and many of you as honest and conscientious, I am bound to believe, as those who differ from you, will count the very measure to which I have led my own troubled and afflicted thoughts, one of the crowning glories of that illustrious life. Be it so. We will hold no argument by this open grave. Thank God, this history has so much in which our feelings and convictions know no diversity.

Let us turn again to that closing scene. We look now to see whether the drooping shadow of that one earthly disappointment darkened the dying chamber. We look to see whether that towering intellect was its own sufficient support in the mortal hour; what that imperial mind sought out of itself, and the circle of its honors and triumphs, for comfort then; what testimony those oracular lips gave forth to the verities of the Christian faith. And we find, I think, instead of shadows from earth or from eternity, the light of a Divine presence in that chamber — the colossal spirit weak in this as any sinful child of Adam, leaning upon the merits of Jesus Christ the Saviour and Lord; the mighty tongue framing this simple but ever prevalent prayer — *‘Heavenly Father, forgive my sins, and receive me to thyself, through Christ Jesus.’* And all is so calm, so tranquil, so thoughtful and self-possessed within the horizon of that soul — there enter without distraction so many warm sympathies from the sphere of the earthly friendships and the ties of nature — such large-hearted, unselfish care — such fidelity of provident love for all who had come within the sphere of his cherishing affections, from the wife of his bosom down to the humble and faithful servants whom his own hand had released from the house of bondage; there was such a reverent attachment to the Book of Books, oracles which were to him their own clearest asserters of their divinity; there was such a forsaking of all earthly refuges, when the soul grasped the heavenly in that burst of

speech: — ‘*Thy rod — thy rod and thy staff!*’ — and there are so many testimonies uttering themselves from the privacies of his past life, that the religious element was a more commanding, essential and vital element of his character and being than the world knew — such memorials of his wrestling intercessions with Heaven at the death-beds of loved ones in other days, — that we may hope, I am persuaded, that the serenity of those final hours did indeed breathe the very peace of God; — and that that surpassing and peerless spirit, whose ruin should have been mourned like another ‘Son of the morning, fallen,’ is expatiating already amid the amplitudes of knowledge and felicity, bounded only by the horizon of God’s being.

And gathering up now our closing lessons from this signal voice of Providence — *Let it hush for a little the eager turmoil of party strife.* God has come into the midst of these contentions to overawe our spirits. He makes us hear his august tread — he touches the actors with his hand — he disappoints human hopes, and deranges human plans. Shall we be so clamorous, in his presence, with our party cries, our rallying words? Let us be still — and do reverence!

Our dependence on man is rebuked. We have leaned — the whole nation has leaned — upon that giant arm more than we knew, till it fell palsied by one mightier. Every American has felt that the honor of this great Republic was safe in the guardianship of that strong and vigilant care. We feared

nothing from any adversary, whether cunning in diplomacy, or resolute in self-interest, or bold in the right of the stronger. Over the seas, however the gale might blow and the billows foam, we have all felt we should have safe voyage in the majestic ship of state, while that skilful pilot-hand held the wheel. And what now? what but this? God is the God of nations; he allots destinies; he lifteth up and casteth down; he is our refuge and our fortress; he only maketh us to dwell in safety. To him let us commit this great venture of the world's sole and last hope for the stability of free institutions.

And in the history of this consummate greatness, *let every youthful aspirant for an honorable and useful life, take courage and hope.* Let him look away to that humble farm-house in that secluded village among the hills of the Granite State; let him see that dark-eyed, frail-looking farmer's boy, plodding his way through those northern snows, for three or four privileged months of the year, to the migratory, often distant village school; let him look in upon him in the winter evenings, coming by the dim light—the ruddy fire lending the page a brighter glow than the tallow taper—the columns of the Spectator, borne home from the village library; and from that lowly beginning let him step to the magnificent contrast, of a greatness scarcely second to any in human annals; and amid whatever obscurity, and hardship, and adverse early fortune, bend him more resolutely to his task—hope lighting him on from the future.

And yet I hasten to evolve in this very connection, our next lesson, *the emptiness of all earthly stations and honors*. To be nobly, eminently useful, useful in a broad public sphere, if God please, this is a legitimate ambition. But to strive for earthly distinctions for their own sake, is the very weakness of folly. What comfort can the gloss of such greatness administer in the solemn room, where human help gives over its last fruitless art? What is of price then and there in the soul's just judgment? What are all sceptres, for the hand lying nerveless in death's pale languor? What are all diadems, for the brow death's frost is chilling? What are all huzzas, for the ear listening for death's last whisper? What is all royal purple, for the frame so soon to be shrouded in death's white livery? My friends, what had been the honors of the Presidential Chair to that faintly, fluttering heart, feeling after the rod of the Divine presence and comfort? Nay, if that merely civil eminence had been won, there would have lacked in our hearts something of that deep unspeakable tenderness with which now and henceforward his memory shall be cherished; a tenderness that constantly unmans us, and expresses itself, struggle as we will, in tears right from the heart's purest fountain.

What we do need in dying — and this is our final thought — *is acceptance with God in the beloved*. The preciousness of this assurance in that death-chamber at Marshfield, is the confessed and attested conviction of every record of the closing scene. It is echoed,

and re-echoed by all the voices of the press. It has not been the utterance of churches and pulpits; but of men of every faith, and of no faith, the land over. After such a confession, can these men ever again feather a shaft of malice or ridicule at the simple doctrine of the cross — the humbling, but so consoling truths of Christianity. Is there here and out of their own lips, no unanswerable argument for the one thing which is the soul's great, primal, last need, in setting forward to meet its God and Judge?

Oh, men, and fathers, and brethren! let your timely vital union to Christ, seal your hope and stablish your heart for that unannounced coming, — whose swift silent approach, like the tread of a thief in the night, must ere long flash its surprise upon you all!



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