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Address at the funeral of
Hon. John K. Kane.

By Charles W. Shields.





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ADDRESS AT THE FUNERAL
OF THE
HON. JOHN K. KANE,

AT FERN-ROCK, PHILADELPHIA, FEBRUARY 24, 1858.

BY

CHARLES W. SHIELDS,
††
PASTOR OF THE SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

ADDRESS.

FAMILIAR AS we are with confessions of human ignorance and helplessness, it is only in some actual sorrow that these facts of our condition impress us with the force of reality. The ordinary developments of Providence but seldom suggest the penitential common-places which we parade on religious occasions. Though really no less inscrutable than the most enigmatical events that ever befall us, yet we perversely deal with them as their authors and masters, and in the very presence of Infinite Wisdom deport ourselves as confi-

dently as if admitted to its most secret counsels.

Sudden calamity rends the veil of this proud illusion and forces us back in conscious, helpless dependence upon the all-ruling Deity. A sore bereavement utterly dissipates our wonted complacency, turns all ordinary wisdom into folly, and leaves us no alternative but simple resignation to the will of God.

When an object of many fond affections, a centre of many clustering hopes and sympathies, and an upholder of widely-extended and varied relations, in the midst of health, usefulness, and duty, is swiftly prostrated by disease and death—like some riven oak, involving in its fall, together

with its own foliage and the tendrils clinging around its boughs, the interlacing branches of the neighboring forest—we can only stand contemplating the melancholy ruin with bewilderment and grief. We know not how to order our feelings. The foundations appear to be giving way beneath us; life looks strange and visionary; and the very joy of nature seems gairish and cruel.

These moments, my friends, are sacred to sorrow. We visit this house of mourning and join this bereaved circle on an errand of sympathy and consolation. I respect the proprieties of the occasion.

Solemn lessons indeed there are in the startling event which has called us to-

gether, of the utter vanity of all human prospects. How like some wild, distempered dream this whole reality! How terribly abrupt this transition from the honors, the duties, and the endearments of life, to the nameless horrors of the grave! What a rebuke upon that habitual heedlessness in which we live! O strange infatuation, which leads us to stake immortal interests upon the uncertainties of a moment! Overshadowed by such a monitory dispensation, we do well indeed to pause and weigh the great questions of duty, destiny, and eternity.

Yet the mere moral of the bereavement need not, surely, absorb or exhaust our sensibility. No: there are griefs and

sympathies around me which have a right to some solacing expression. I would I could do them but simple justice.

You do not, however, expect any elaborate portraiture or studied eulogy in connection with these solemnities.

Of the public life and services of the deceased; of the distinguished political stations he has occupied, the eminent professional abilities and attainments with which he has dignified them, and the industry and zeal he has brought to the discharge of their duties; of his contributions, in time, influence, and counsel, to our different civic associations for the promotion of Art, of Science, of Letters, and of Charity; of his varied scholar-

ship, his literary tastes and acquirements, his familiarity with the ancient and modern classics, and his own exact and elegant diction both in colloquial and written composition; of his discriminating intellect, severe analytic power, astuteness in argument, and tact in affairs; of the uniform dignity and amenity which marked his deportment in all these varied spheres and relations;—of such and other features of his public career his public associates will make fitting acknowledgment.

These are not the topics which occupy our present sympathies. Here, in this circle of kindred and friends, it is the private character—that aspect of an offi-

cial personage always more or less concealed and sometimes distorted in the popular fancy—it is, in a word, the *man himself* who invites and absorbs our contemplation.

And how the very image which rises before you, while I speak—that personal presence, expressive only of thorough culture and refinement, with those genial and courtly manners, so full of delicate tact and kindness, yet sustained with such reserved self-possession—how this very image, now present to your thought, renders verbal delineation at once inadequate and unnecessary! There was in his habitual demeanor a native grace and civility which shone through all forms and con-

ventionalities with original brightness, and made the heartfelt compliment only the more grateful for its disguise of playful raillerie.

But no mere enfeebled good nature or indiscriminating amiability was this his most obvious characteristic. It found its becoming support in a sentiment of personal dignity which nothing could assail, and was invigorated by a tenacious adherence to opinion, logic, and principle, that would admit neither of concession nor of compromise. Thus he consistently mingled gentleness with firmness, and carried into the severest conflicts of feeling a blended deference and dignity that disarmed controversy of rudeness and still

held captive a personal friend in the political foe. His was in fact that rare magnanimity which is as incapable of inflicting as of inviting any assault upon the generous sensibilities, and, like delicacy in woman, is its own protection, making it impossible for anything vile to live in its presence.

Behind and above these more exterior qualities, however, were others, always their legitimate crown and complement in every noble character. Like that most accomplished courtier of his time, whose "knee bent not more loyally to his queen, than reverently to his God," he could not understand why gentleness, firmness and fearlessness before man should divest him

of reverence, gratitude and faith in the presence of his Maker. Content to be a philosopher in everything else, in religion he would be a child.

Nor was this the mere secret discipleship that sometimes seeks to seclude itself in the closet and at the fire-side. He openly gave his name, influence, and labors to the cause his heart had espoused; and in the church, of which he was a leading member and officer, has left lamented vacancies* no

* JUDGE KANE was a communicant in the Second Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia, and President of its Board of Trustees. He was also a member of various of the ecclesiastical Boards and Corporations of the Church. In these relations his personal and professional services were frequently and freely bestowed.

less than in the worldly spheres through which Providence ordered his more conspicuous pathway;—forming in this (I trust I may be pardoned the allusion: it is made in perfect consistency with profound respect and admiration toward any who may feel its pertinence),—forming in this an exception to the course of too many of the public men, who, in other respects, have received the deserved applause of the country. Was it not simply in keeping with the generosity I have been commending—(to place this transcendent interest on no higher ground)—that he did not countenance the paltry compromise of adjourning to the flurried hour of death a service for which the longest life were

only too short, nor add another to the eminent examples, who have entailed upon survivors the perplexing task of extracting consolation and praise from the fragmentary and dubious expressions of a death-bed repentance.

Certainly I should not have felt so wholly unembarrassed in the praises I have heartfully bestowed, were it not that, in that character which we contemplate, the graces of the gentleman and the accomplishments of the scholar were crowned with the virtues of the Christian.

There is another sphere, and other and dearer relations—here under this roof and within the seclusion of this home-circle, where he moved a constant contributor

and recipient of the fondest attentions—
into which I cannot trust myself to intrude
with any description. I could do justice
neither to their feeling nor to yours. I
will only assure them for all of our fervent
and prayerful sympathy.

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