



REV. H. C. ALEXANDER, D. D., LL. D.

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## I. LITERARY.

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HENRY CARRINGTON ALEXANDER.

By RICHARD McILWAINE.

THE subject of this sketch was born at Princeton, N. J., of Virginia parents, on the 27th of September, 1835. His father was Rev. Dr. James Waddel Alexander, at one time the first pastor of "Village Church," Charlotte Court House, Va.; then pastor at Trenton, N. J.; then professor of Latin and the *Belles Lettres* in the College of New Jersey; then pastor of the Duane-Street Church in New York; afterwards professor of Church History and Polity in Princeton Seminary, and died as pastor of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian church, New York. His mother was a daughter of Dr. George Cabell, of Richmond, and a niece of judge (and governor) William Cabell, of the same city, and of Mr. Joseph C. Cabell, of Nelson, the friend of Thomas Jefferson and his colaborer in founding the University of Virginia. His grandfather was the Rev. Dr. Archibald Alexander, the theological teacher and author; once President of Hampden-Sidney College in Virginia; afterwards a pastor in Philadelphia, and one of the two original professors at Princeton Theological Seminary, where he performed the great work of his life. His grandmother (Mrs. Dr. A. Alexander) was the daughter of Rev. James Waddel, of Hanover Presbytery, widely known as the blind preacher, whose eloquence is commemorated in "The British Spy" of William Wirt. His paternal grandparents were both of Scotch Irish extraction, their families having emigrated first to Pennsylvania and afterwards to Rockbridge county, Virginia.

Dr. Alexander's early instruction was received from his parents and his grandfather. After going to successive schools,

## A SERMON.\*

By REV. H. C. ALEXANDER, D. D., LL. D.

“Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.”—Amos IV: 12.

THE rays of the newly risen sun had begun to glance upon the turrets and pinnacles of a great and populous but wicked eastern city, and upon the irrigated surface of a smiling village which, as it glistened in the beams of the morning, lay spread out beyond the city gates “even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar.” The more industrious inhabitants of this beautiful but licentious city, were probably beginning to be astir in its streets, when an astonishing and appalling change suddenly took place in its condition. A fearful cry smote upon the hearts of the terrified sinners that crowded its doomed mansions, ere in a moment they were overwhelmed by a catastrophe which converted that splendid but riotous capital, and that gay plain, into an awful ruin. It is probable that the maid-servant was already grinding at the mill. It is possible that some fair damsel, with thoughts bent only on her pleasure, was sitting at her lattice, gazing upon the dewy landscape as it sparkled in the early sunshine, and perhaps striking upon the dulcimer or tabret. The next instant, “the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven. And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground.”

Fearful retribution! “Surely thou didst set them in slippery places; thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou wakest, thou didst despise their image.”

The punishment was terrible indeed, but just, and had been long delayed. This people was overthrown for its sins. “Is not destruction to the wicked? and a strange punishment to the workers of iniquity?” Thus is it ever with the ungodly, either here or hereafter. “Terrors shall make him afraid on every side, and shall drive him to his feet. \* \* \* \* Destruction shall be ready at his side. \* \* \* \* His confi-

\* The last Sermon preached in the Seminary chapel in his capacity as Professor of the Seminary. Published by request of the student body.

dence shall be rooted out of his tabernacle, and it shall bring him to the king of terrors \* \* \* \* brimstone shall be scattered upon his habitation \* \* \* \* He shall be driven from the light into darkness, and chased out of the world. Think not, vain man, to escape his vengeance! "The Lord trieth the righteous; but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth. Upon the wicked he shall rain quick burning coals, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest; this shall be the portion of their cup."

But this wicked city had not been without its holy intercessors. On the same morning that the Lord opened the windows of heaven upon Sodom, an aged man, whose singular piety has entitled him to the appellation of the "Friend of God," rose from his slumbers, which had perhaps been perturbed by his anxiety, went forth from his distant tent upon the plain of Mamre, and cast earnest glances toward the region of the vale of Ziddim. He had been wrestling in supplications with Jehovah, who had revealed to him his purpose to destroy the apostate cities, and he had extracted from Him the promise that the presence of ten righteous men within its walls should be the safeguard of Sodom. He had also unawares entertained the angels at his tent door who were the appointed executioners of the Divine anger. The result of his examination was not reassuring. "And Abraham gat up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the Lord: and he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and behold, and lo the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace."

What an alternation! The lake Asphaltite now stagnates in its deathly channel over all that once fertile territory, which at that period abounded in leaping brooks and laughing springs of water, and which as it reposed in its voluptuous beauty, day by day gave back a flashing response to the morning sunbeam; the sea of death, upon whose corrugated banks the fisher dare not now spread his net, and heaped about whose southern margin huge masses of bitumen and salt proclaim forever to the world the being, the power, and the memorable indignation of Almighty God! Indeed the bottom of the lake and the surface of the whole region exhibit marks of volcanic or preternatural disturbances, "the whole land thereof" being now, as in the days of Moses, "brimstone, and salt, and burning, that it is not sown nor beareth, nor any grass

groweth therein." Such, my hearers, was the awful "overthrow of Sodom, and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim, which the Lord overthrew in his anger, and in his wrath." The evidence of unnatural and tumultuary movements in that valley at a time far distant from the present generations, has excited and must continue to excite, much curious inquiry among thoughtful minds. The nations of the future will repeat the solemn interrogatory of the past: "Even *all* nations shall say, Wherefore hath the Lord done this unto this land? *what meaneth the heat of this great anger?*"

My impenitent hearer, do you wish an answer to this question, such as you can never forget? Do you wish to have it branded into your soul as in characters of fire? Then go to the site, once so delectable and alluring, of these buried—inundated—towns, and gaze upon the memorials of a desolation more utter and more silent than that of Thebes or Baalbec! Go to that land-locked sea upon whose sluggish and melancholy waters broods in horrid stillness the dark-winged *Azrael*, the fabled *Angel of Death*! Men pore over the monuments of Egypt and Nineveh, and sometimes vainly attempt to decipher their hieroglyphic inscriptions. But here is an inscription which the veriest child can read. It is written all over these monuments of ruin and death. "And this is the writing that is written": \* \* \* \* "The anger of the Lord was kindled against this land, to bring upon it all the curses that are written" on these rocks and on this sea; "and the Lord rooted them out of their land in anger, and in wrath, and in great indignation, as it is this day." The doom of Sodom was but a forerunner of the doom of Babylon. It was weighed in the balances and was found wanting.

But the prayers of faithful Abraham had not failed to enter into the ears of the Lord God of Sabbaoth. The friend for whom, even more than for the city, he had interceded, had been spared, and made a signal attestation to the Divine forbearance. For "it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God *remembered* Abraham, and sent *Lot* out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot dwelt."

The circumstances which attended this deliverance were most impressive. The two strangers who had found shelter and hospitality at the hands of Abraham, and again at the hands of Lot, but had been very scurvily dealt with by the cor-

rupt inhabitants of the city; the footsore wanderers (as they had been regarded), who yet when the emergency called for it, perhaps by a sudden radiation from their persons of their true celestial splendor, had given the men of Sodom a foretaste of what was in store for them by striking with blindness the men of Belial who were besieging the door of the house "so that they wearied themselves to find the door of the house": these mighty personages now rose up to discharge their commission, and, as the sun appeared above the horizon, were eager to be gone, and to be about their errand of righteous retribution. But one more task remained, before the vials of calamity could be poured out. Lot and his careless household must be saved. This required some roughness and even force. When a child or a sleeping and unconscious adult has fallen into the fire, violence must be resorted to if need be to arouse to a full sense of the danger and rescue the imperilled object from destruction. The unfortunate sufferer must be *snatched* with haste and vehemence from the flames. So it was on this stupefying occasion. "And when the morning arose, then the angels *hastened Lot*, saying, 'Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city.' *And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the Lord being merciful to him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city.*" *Saved! Saved!* he might now cry aloud in the first transport of deliverance, though it were but "*scarcely saved.*" Lot and his little company were "as a firebrand plucked out of the burning."

An ineffectual effort had been previously made to bring off certain others from the devoted city. The angels had not failed to ask if there were not others, men who were connected with his house by marriage, whom Lot felt an interest in, and longed to rescue; and they had charged him to convey his wife and his children and these his connections, and whatever else he wished to preserve from destruction, to some point beyond the city walls, "For," said these inexorable beings, "we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the Lord; and the Lord hath sent us to destroy it." This transaction, and the one immediately following it, took place some time after the hour for retiring, but before the dawn. Lot was not slow to inform his fellow townsmen of the fate that impended over them if they remained in the city,

but his ungodly companions laughed in his face, and went on in their schemes of diabolical sin and madness, with unconcerned apathy. "And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons in law, which married his daughters, and said, 'Up, get you out of this place: for the Lord will destroy this city.' *But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons in law.* They did not believe a word he said. They hardly thought he could be in earnest. They were like the men before the flood who mocked at the prophecies of Noah, and who were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage 'until the day that Noah entered into the ark and the flood came and destroyed them all.'" Thus ever fools make a mock at sin! But there is one sitting in the heavens who will mock when their fear cometh. What painful emotions must have filled the breast of "that righteous man" as he bade them adieu forever! He was no doubt in some measure attached to the people, as he certainly was to the place; for, though "in seeing and hearing he had vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds," and abominable practices, yet they were his neighbors, were many of them no doubt persons of amiable feeling, and some of them probably treated him with consideration or, at least, with outward respect and kindness. These two were especially endeared to him as his own sons by marriage, and their death would leave his daughters widows. Their inevitable damnation now stared him in the face. But the affectionate compulsion of the angels did not cease at the *gates* of Sodom. The same sweet but powerful constraint was imposed upon them after they had left the walls. "And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that He said, Escape for thy life: look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed." The change here from the plural to the singular number is very remarkable and suggestive. And when Lot, reluctant to withdraw so far from his accustomed associations, and fearing that some new harm might assail him in the unfrequented country, though acknowledging with devout gratitude that his deliverer had "magnified his mercy" in "saving his life," yet earnestly sought permission to sojourn in the little city of Zoar; the celestial one, with sublime condescension, replied, "See I have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow this city, for the which thou hast spoken"; but still renewed his peremptory importunity and cried, with a

sort of heavenly impatience, "Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do anything till thou be come thither."

There is something in the change in the mode of address employed by Lot, and in the air of authority assumed by the last speaker, which would seem to intimate that the glorious Being who had vouchsafed to commune with Abraham at his tent door, and who had heard his prayer, had now joined the party. Of this, however, there is no absolute certainty. There is something very mysterious about the whole narrative. There were at first *three* men, then only *two*, then apparently *three* again. If this was indeed Jehovah who now talked with Lot (and it is remarkable that he is not expressly called an angel, as the "*two* men" are), the question must at once occur to every mind, where was this third mysterious personage during the interval occupied by the stay of the angels in Sodom? It would appear, if this be the true view of the passage, that he had remained without the walls, not choosing to submit to the gross indignity which he knew was to be visited upon his celestial Servants; or it may be that, "seeing the city he wept over it," and retired a little space that he might not see it die. It is even possible that God mourned the fate of Sodom, as he did that of Ephraim and Jerusalem.

It was on this journey to Zoar that Lot's wife, who was probably a native of the devoted city, disobeyed the injunction, "looked back" upon the proud dwelling places of her fathers, and "became a pillar of salt." She was transfixed in stony death; and thus perhaps remains this day, a monument at once of the longsuffering and the wrath of God. "REMEMBER LOT'S WIFE"!

It was in this surprising manner, my hearers, that God " \* \* \* \* turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly, and delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked." Let us "comfort one another with these words": \* \* \* \* "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished."

"Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell severity; but toward thee goodness, if thou continue in (his) goodness: otherwise thou also shall be cut off"!



All that has been said in the previous part of this discourse is germane to the legitimate exposition of the text. The two tremendous judgments of the Jewish history, the flood of waters and the flood of flames, were ever after their occurrence the standing types and recognized precursors of judgments yet to come, and especially of the last great day of retribution in which not a group of cities merely but the *world*, is to be deluged with devouring fire. Thus in this chapter the prophet Amos, after going over a catalogue of fearful visitations, such as famine, drought, destructive insects, and frightful pestilences, visitations which had left them no better than before, and with apparent allusion to another and more recent calamity, viz., a terrible earthquake which had signalized the reign of king Uzziah, thunders in the ears of apostate Israel the awful and inflexible decree of heaven: "I have overthrown (some) of you as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah: and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: yet have ye not returned unto me saith the Lord. Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel"!

The essential meaning of the text is that *their* "feet had well nigh slipped" in the corrupt companionship of them whose "foot shall slide in due time": that a few had been as by a miracle, and for a time, and for a purpose rescued, where nearly all had most calamitously perished: that the design of this discriminating "goodness" on the part of heaven had been to "lead them to repentance," but that they had failed to improve their final opportunity, and that now all hope of their ultimate reformation and felicity was extinguished. They had refused to bow beneath the most appalling of the Divine judgments, and now that the day of grace was expired, God's "hand was stretched out still." The message that remained for them was short and summary. It is in substance, that of the apocalyptic angel—"Woe—Woe"!—"Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel"!

My impenitent hearers, these words have an application to you, no less than to the desolated but still hardened remnant of those who followed the counsels of Jeroboam. *You too* have seen God's judgments rained down upon your fellows, and it is "of the Lord's mercies," and not because of your peculiar merit, that you too were not consumed. You, too, like Israel, like Lot, have been—are now "as a firebrand plucked

out of the burning." It is not because you were better than they, that you were spared and they were sent down "quick to HADES"! It is because of the mere pleasure—the inscrutable wisdom—the everlasting goodness of Jehovah toward you. "For his merciful kindness is great toward us: and the truth of the Lord endureth forever. Praise ye the Lord." I say nothing at present of that mercy which by an act of amazing and distinguishing favor passed over "the angels which kept not their first estate," and stooped to the salvation of man. Are we not *all* of us, dear brethren, in view of that astounding and glorious mercy, "as a firebrand plucked out of the burning"? Neither do I propose to touch upon that omnipotent goodness by which, as by perpetual acts of new creation, the living race is preserved in being in this world, while so many thousands of our fellow mortals are daily swept by the strong tide of death into the maelstrom that is whirling souls to HELL! The indications of the text are, that I ought rather to speak of more signal Providences than even these, or, at least, Providences which appear more signal to our infirm perceptions, Providences which strike more vividly, and thus make a deeper and more lasting impression upon the sense. And are not you, ye poor, impenitent unbelievers—looking at the matter even in this restricted light—are not you "as a firebrand plucked out of the fire"? Has not God sent successive judgments upon *you* as well as upon Israel? Have not some of you been pursued with war—with commercial disaster—with alarming sickness? Have not you stood by the cypress, and mourned under the willow? Have not you given up dear friends to the clutches of "the king of terrors"? Have not you again and again, in recollection of new griefs, poured your tears as in a shower of agony upon the grassy sod, and murmured penitential prayers and pious vows beside the chiselled column or shadowed obelisk? Have not you again and again wrapped your garments with crape, and secluded yourself for a time in the chamber of desolation? What has become of those short-lived prayers, and those strong religious vows? As well ask, I fear, what has become of the melody that was yesterday breathed upon the wind, or what has become of the wave that was lately plashing on the shore! Your trouble, perhaps, has been in a great measure or entirely removed; you are once more, as the world would say, *yourself*; you are once more light and gay and heartless; but a dreadful fact remains

to be stated: "God's hand is stretched out still"! You have perhaps been wonderfully delivered in your own person. You were perhaps exposed to the contagion, but did not take the disease of which your comrade or neighbor died. Or you were as ill as your neighbor, for a time; but he, or she, has been taken, and you have been left. So when Luther and Alexis were walking in the fields, the bolt of heaven struck down Alexis, and left the great Reformer unscathed. Or you have been at the point of death, and have been wonderfully recovered of your sickness. Or you have stood up with your file upon the field of courage, and have seen the ranks thinned almost to nothing, and yet after all you now survive. Is not the image of the text true to your experience? Have not you been "as a firebrand plucked out of the burning"? You have been "saved, yet so as by fire." "This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes." But what good has it all done? Who has repented? Who has believed? Who has "renounced the hidden things of dishonesty"? Who has made God's word "the man of his counsel"? Who has hearkened to the pleadings of the Spirit? Who has felt the sweet constraint of the love of Jesus? Who has embraced a crucified Redeemer? Who, in short, has abandoned his follies and pollutions, and "returned unto the Lord"? "O God thou knowest," if there have been any! Ah, my hearer, does conscience smite you? Are you beginning to have compunctious visitings? Do you begin to hear the voice of that stern prophet in the very innermost chamber of your heart, as he beckons with ominous finger, and cries out in the sharp accents of truth and authority, "*thou art the man*"? Listen then, like David, to that fearful and yet gracious summons! It may yet be the means of your salvation! There may still be mercy in store for you albeit you *are so unworthy*! God's ways are not our ways. There were many widows in Israel "in the days of Elias," but He turned His back upon them all, and sought out a widow of Serepta, a city near to Sidon, upon whom alone He conferred the blessing. There were many lepers too, in Israel, "in the time of Eliseus the prophet," but he reserved his healing virtue for Naaman the Syrian. The publicans and sinners, who believed, were saved before the unbelieving Scribes and Pharisees. A notorious robber was converted on the cross: These were all "as a firebrand plucked out of the burning." God's method exhibits not only infinite love but endless variety.

“Of some he hath compassion, making a difference: and others he saves,” as he saved Lot and his household, “with fear” and with rough affliction, as the apostle Jude says, “pulling them out of the fire.” But if you will not heed these repeated warnings, you can only look for unmitigated sorrow in eternity!

Ah, thou poor, guilty, saddened, and I trust it may be truly awakened sinner, didst thou but know that God is yearning for thy salvation—that he doth not desire the death of any—that he is waiting to be gracious—that he is ready to weep over you, as the father of the returning prodigal wept over him, when, while the poor, miserable, guilty exile “was yet a great way off,” he “saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him”! Hear him, as he stands weeping over Jerusalem, “O that thou hadst known, even thou in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace! But *now*, they are hid from thine eyes.” Hear him as he stands weeping over rebellious Ephraim: “How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? (how) shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Adamah, how shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together! I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim, for I am God and not man: the Holy One in the midst of thee, and I will not enter the city”! These are indeed precious, precious words, and there are thousands like them. But remember what God said of the generation of Noah: “And God said, my Spirit *shall not always* strive with man”! There is a day of retribution coming after all, and its calamities can only be averted by a timely repentance. “For in the hands of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red: and it is full of mixture: and he poureth out of the same: but the dregs thereof all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out and drink them”! “Behold,” then, “ye despisers and wonder and perish”! “It will be more tolerable,” my impenitent, unprofitable hearer, “it will be more tolerable,” I fear, “for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for you”! Ye too, I fear, may be “salted for the fire.” Ye too, *I know*, unless you speedily repent, and “return unto the Lord,” will be “cast into the lake of fire, which burneth with fire and brimstone”; and the smoke of *your* torment shall not be like that which rose in smouldering volumes for a little time before the eyes of Abraham, and then vanished away, but

shall roll up in perpetual torrents, darkening the very face of heaven, ascending forever from the pit of a bottomless perdition! That pit, my hearers, is already digged for the wicked. The unfathomable gulf between this earth and hell is daily traversed by wailing furies that are already damned. For them there is nothing in the future, as in the present, but "tribulation and wrath, indignation and anguish"—nothing but "a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversary." "He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be destroyed and that without remedy."

But let us turn to brighter scenes. Let us feast our eyes with the seraphic spectacle of heaven. See ye yon glad throng who with triumphant shouts have cut their way through the valiant sentinels of the upper kingdom? Hark how the welkin rings with the joyful tidings of their victory! "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." These all have "come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

"Once they were mourning here below,  
And wet their couch with tears.

\* \* \* \* \*

I asked them whence their victory came;  
They with united breath  
Ascribed their conquests to the Lamb,  
Their triumph to his death."

They are "as a firebrand plucked out of the burning." Satan desired to have them, but the Lord had prayed for them. But, blessed be the God of our salvation, the tempter is foiled—is foiled! Of each of these it may now be sung, as the sound is borne onward by the "harpers harping with their harps," "Is not this a brand plucked out of the burning"? The saved sinner after all his conflicts is now clothed in garments white and clean, and joins in the ever-growing tribute, "To him that hath loved us, and given himself for us, and hath made us kings and priests to God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

But, my impenitent friend, answer me this one question, "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear"? And if judgment begin at the house of God, "what shall the end be of them that obey not

the gospel of God"? "I have overthrown some of you as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a fire-brand plucked from the burning: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord. Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel."

