

Woman's Sphere of Usefulness.

A DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED AT THE

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

ON THE OCCASION OF THE DEATH OF

Mrs. Mary E. Ostrom,

September 11, 1859.

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THIS MEMORIAL

OF A

“Helper in Christ Jesus,”

IS GIVEN TO THE PRESS AT THE REQUEST OF ITS

SUBJECT'S ASSOCIATES IN THE SUNDAY SCHOOL,

AND WITH THE

CONCURRENT DESIRE OF HER FAMILY FRIENDS.

SHOULD IT

COMFORT THE LATTER AND QUICKEN AND ENCOURAGE THE FORMER,

AND INCITE OTHER CHRISTIANS, AND ESPECIALLY

“Honorable Women” to Imitate her whom it Commemorates,

THE AUTHOR'S "LABOR OF LOVE"

WOULD BE

ABUNDANTLY REWARDED,

AND HIS GRIEF AT HIS BEREAVEMENT,

WOULD BE GREATLY ALLEVIATED.

DISCOURSE.

ROMANS XVI. 3, 4.

MY HELPERS IN CHRIST JESUS, * * * UNTO WHOM NOT ONLY I GIVE THANKS,
BUT ALL THE CHURCHES OF THE GENTILES.

THE sexes are designed for different spheres. There may be apparent exceptions to the rule, or approaches to them. Individuals may develop capabilities apart from the class to which they belong, and it might be difficult to catalogue employments, and assign to man what is exclusively appropriate to him, and to woman what is exclusively appropriate to her; still the distinction in the nature and organization of the two, unequivocally denotes that a peculiar province is designed for each.

Now it is alike our duty and our interest to conform to the divine arrangements. If separate spheres for the sexes have been defined by God, we both sin and suffer in attempting to combine or confuse them. Especially is wrong done to woman in putting her out of place and employing her on fields where she ceases to be herself, and loses the traits that distinguish her. Every

movement she makes is in conflict with nature, and while doomed to defeat and ruin in the end, as the struggle proceeds, she is shamed and pained by the unsexing she endures.

“They little understand the true nature of woman,” Hannah More wrote, “who would lift her from the appointed duties of her allotted station, to fill with fantastic dignity, a loftier, but less appropriate niche. Nor do they understand her true happiness, who seek to annihilate distinctions from which she derives advantage, and to attempt innovations which would depreciate her real worth. The most elaborate definition of ideal rights, and the most hardy measures for attaining them, are of less value in the eyes of a truly amiable woman, than that meek and quiet spirit, which, in the sight of God, is of great price.”

One of woman's highest rights, it has been well observed, is *the right to be a woman*; to act herself; to respect her nature; to preserve the delicacy which her frame requires and which her sensibilities demand. It is cruelty to exact toil of her, for which her body is too frail, and to thrust her into scenes from which her modesty shrinks, and where her powers cannot freely act.

She may claim exemption from rough and rugged labor; from following the plow and felling the forest; from quarrying and mining; from carpentry and masonry; from railway work and ocean and river navigation. With equal justice may she claim exemption from the publicity of the platform and pulpit, and from the conflicts of the hustings, the senate-house and the forum. The gentleness and modesty of her spirit should be regarded, as much as the delicacy of her frame.

But while it is a mistake, and worse than a mistake, to crowd the sexes into a single, undistinguishable sphere, and to associate them, not only in the pursuits of literature, science and art, but also in the marts of trade, the scenes of politics and popular agitation, the courts of justice and the halls of legislation, it is equally a mistake, and worse than a mistake, to confine woman strictly within the domestic circle, and to allow her no earnest, effective employment, and especially no agency of usefulness, outside the sanctuary of home. She may be principally designed for the invaluable offices she performs in the family; she may ordinarily accomplish the most as a daughter and sister, a wife and

mother ; but she feels aspirations beyond, which none must dare to repress, and she possesses capabilities for service beyond, which none must dare to restrain. While faithful to her kindred, she is eminently fitted to do good at large, and she may engage in this without the least sacrifice of character, and without leaving her domain. If she may not "cry, nor lift up, nor cause her voice to be heard in the streets" and amid great congregations, through the Press she may whisper to the world. If she may not "teach and usurp authority over the man," in the public assembly, in the school and surrounded by a class, she may discipline and improve the mind, and "raise the genius and mend the heart." If she may not practice on the body politic in the chambers of magistracy and in the halls of legislation, Agnocide-like, she may be the physician of her sex ; and with the spirit of a true Sister of Charity, she may glide through the walls of hospitals, and steal into the hovels of penury, and minister at the beds of sickness and pain.

All generations of the past have furnished notable examples of female beneficence to the community, and these cases are too numerous

to be considered abnormal. They are not wonders to be surprised at, but developments to be admired.

Especially have the last two centuries abounded in women, whose talents have found fitting scope on the widest arena. To say nothing of those with whom ambition, or a merely constitutional benevolence, may have been the controlling power, how vast has been, not only the influence, but the direct agency, of such teachers as Mrs. Graham and Mary Lyons! of such writers as Hannah More and Charlotte Elizabeth! and of such angels of mercy as Mrs. Fry and Florence Nightingale!

And we have a clearer indication than even her capacity and achievement afford, of a wider range for woman than the hearthstone bounds. The Saviour welcomed her to it. He accepted female services. "Certain women which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary, called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, and Joanna, the wife of Chusa, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, ministered to him of their substance." And it was no single or occasional office they performed. They waited constantly on the Saviour, and

even accompanied him on his journeys. They left their homes and went with him to Jerusalem, when his decease was to be accomplished there. They attended him on Calvary, for "many women were there, beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him, among which was Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children." And their devotion to him continued after his death. When Joseph of Arimathea brought his body to be buried, "there was Mary Magdalene and the other Mary sitting over against the sepulchre." And when it was laid in the tomb and made secure there, they "returned and prepared spices and ointments, and rested the Sabbath day, according to the commandment." And "in the end of the Sabbath, very early in the morning, when it was yet dark," they hastened to the sepulchre to perform the anointing for which they had prepared. And how signally were their loving assiduities approved and rewarded! They were the first to be apprised of the resurrection, and the first to be accosted by the risen Saviour.

The epistles make frequent mention of women, who, outside their homes, contributed to the

establishment and extension of the Redeemer's cause. They speak of "Phœbe, a servant of the church at Cenchrea," and of Priscilla, a teacher of the eloquent Apollos, and the Apostle's "helper in Christ Jesus;" and of Mary, "who bestowed much labor upon" him; and of Tryphena and Tryphosa, who "labored in the Lord," and of "those women who labored with Paul in the Gospel."

Indeed, females have held public stations in the church. There were "*prophetesses*," like Deborah and Huldah under the Theocracy; and "*deaconesses*" under the New Dispensation, like Phoebe, a "servant," as our version has it, but more literally rendered, "a deaconess of the church at Cenchrea."

No official position is offered to woman now in an ecclesiastical organization, and yet there was never an age when she enjoyed such facilities for serving the church and the world.

The Printing Press is at her command, and in more or less stately volumes, and in magazines, and in newspapers, she may address larger numbers than the voice can possibly reach; and her peculiarities put her, in certain respects, beyond

all competition here. In letter-writing, in representations of life and manners, in simple memoirs, in moral tales, in books for the young, she may easily hold the pre-eminence; and what use of the pen can be more worthy of the highest ambition and of the greatest powers? Never were there so many readers as at the present day, and never was there so much reading; and the taste of the public particularly craves what woman is particularly adapted to furnish.

The School opens its doors and invites woman in. While so much of a favorite among the younger pupils of both sexes, as almost to monopolize the instruction of them, she finds no less congenial and successful employment in female seminaries for the most advanced scholars; and who can be accomplishing more than she who shapes plastic youth, and forms the wives and mothers of the land.

Penitentiaries and hospitals and asylums likewise give free ingress to woman, and she is received there with the right to inspect and improve the management of the officers, as well as to commiserate and alleviate the condition of the inmates. Who charges Miss Dix and Miss Nightingale with overstepping their sphere,

and what a testimony it is to the fitness of the sex for the task they perform, that a Royal Commission consults with the one about the retreats for the wounded and sick, and that President and King and Pope give audience to the other about the treatment of the insane.

A wide field also stretches out before woman, for general religious instruction. Her disposition inclines her to this, and her gifts adapt her to it. She is "apt to teach," constitutionally compassionate and kind, susceptible to spiritual truth, and, "last at the cross and first at the sepulchre," glowing with the ardor of her affection in love for the Saviour, and clinging to him with the indissolubleness of her attachments, and losing herself in him in the unsparingness of her sacrifices. She becomes a Christian, humanly speaking, more easy than man; and she is more earnest in feeling and more zealous in service, and the soul's wants and woes meet a readier and better response from her. What she can do, she is more sure to do, and to do well.

Thus inclined and qualified to impart divine truth, what opportunities for it are presented in the systematic distribution of tracts, in the

stated visitation of families, and in Sabbath and Industrial schools. These are of modern date, and unsurpassed in their efficiency for usefulness and in the extent they reach.

And the class from whom it has been hitherto supposed, and quite naturally too, that woman was entirely debarred, have proved the scholars particularly accessible to her. The most degraded and ruffianly pay her respect and heed her words. A little more than half a century since, Elizabeth Fry ventured into the midst of the worst and vilest of the Newgate convicts. They crowded about her in the wildest disorder at first, but the benignity of her face and the softness of her speech, soon controlled their rudeness and gained their hearts and ears. "I do not come," she said, "without being commissioned. This book," showing a Bible, "has led me to you. I will do every thing for you I can; but you must help me." She repeated her visits, until "what had been a receptacle of vice, became an asylum of repentance and a school of industry."

Mrs. Fry especially devoted herself to the outcasts of her own sex. Subsequent experiment demonstrated that quite as potent is the

influence of woman with the most criminal of men. Not only is she safe in their corridors and cells, but she is welcomed and revered there.* Her delicate mien and soft notes subdue and win, where her father or brother or husband would harden and repel.

And it is not only when rude men are under restraint and in suffering, that woman most readily approaches them. In the enjoyment of liberty and health, they treat her with more than decorum, and listen to her instructions. Miss Marsh's undertaking with the Crystal Palace laborers, composed of the wildest of the English, Scotch and Irish nationalities, is as notable as Mrs. Fry's with the Newgate convicts; and her simple, beautiful and thrilling description of it in "English Hearts and English Hands," while worthy of being universally read on its own account, leaves no room for doubt that woman is the Gospel's best expounder and advocate with untamed, reckless men. Without presuming upon anything to disturb the keenest sensitiveness to clerical prerogatives and female delicacy, this Spirit-commissioned messenger of Christ, freely addressed uncouth workmen at

* See Appendix, Note A.

their lodging-houses, and taught them in little circles, and not only turned many of their number to the Saviour, but gained a control over the whole, to which they submitted during the transports of liquor and passion, and when the police utterly failed to keep them at bay.

Wonderfully increased as are the facilities for usefulness in our day, woman, even more than man, is favored in this regard. The field she may traverse consistently with her nature and compatibly with her powers, is greatly extended; the departments she may enter are greatly multiplied. She can feel nothing like restriction and restraint. There is scope enough for her, whatever the vastness of her aspirations, and a province for her, whatever the peculiarity of her talents.

And a responsibility is thus devolved upon woman, that taxes her utmost energies. She is solemnly and imperatively called to do all she can. Far more guilt is involved in her being a dawdler, or plaything, or pet, than in any previous generation could have attached to her sex. A seriousness and earnestness and vigor befit her life, that never so well suited it before.

She must not dare to be merely caressed and admired. She must not even consent to be flitted about and waited on in society, while she is industrious at home. In the community, as well as in the family, she must comport with the dignity of her being. While beautiful and fragrant with blossoms, she must mature into fruit. Her usefulness must constitute her worth. Not passive, or subordinate as an ornament and luxury, she must put forth her energies; make full proof of her powers.

Let not woman, by any means, live for the public alone, and still less let her live before the public alone. Home is her peculiar sphere, and the members of the family her peculiar care. Household duties must be first discharged, and well discharged. But general usefulness consists with domestic faithfulness. Solomon's description of the virtuous woman comprehends the two. "She looketh to the ways of her household. The heart of her husband doth safely trust her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. Her children rise up and call her blessed. She giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens. She eateth not the bread of idleness." Here is the industrious, thrifty house-

wife. But, besides this, "she stretcheth out her hands to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy, and in her tongue is the law of kindness." She is a good neighbor, while she is a good wife and mother and mistress. She is a blessing alike to the community and to the family.

The words from which I have been discoursing, and the subject on which I have been dwelling, were most happily illustrated in one from whom we have just been called to part; and I doubt not that you applied the text to her the moment it was announced, and that you kept applying the truth to her as it was developed. Mrs. OSTRUM* was truly feminine in her disposition and tastes, and kept closely within her sphere; and yet, with all the meaning the words can express, she "was a helper in Christ Jesus, for whom not only I give thanks, but the whole church." With acute sensibilities and a shrinking delicacy, she combined the most enterprising spirit. While a model of domestic graces and an example of fealty to domestic duties, her compassionate and benevolent heart

* See Appendix, Note B.

sympathized with the race, and she labored to do good abroad as if this were her only work. None could be more intent on general usefulness, and more engaged in it; and yet she was always a woman,—a woman in sentiment, a woman in position, a woman in demeanor. She never put her sex aside, and never forgot it. She was herself, while she was a benefactress.

She had a vigorous and active mind, an ardent temperament, a kind and affectionate disposition, and a resolute will. Her fine advantages at home, at school and in society, were well improved; and through her intelligence and mental discipline,* her refined manners and tastes, she was fitted, not only to enjoy, but to adorn and charm the most cultivated circles, and to exert the widest and happiest influence.

As a daughter, a sister, a wife, the glow of her nature flamed forth. Measuring the intensity of her love for kindred by ordinary standards, we might have called it idolatrous. It *was* passionate, yet uniform; not a paroxysm, but a burning affection.

* See Appendix, Note C.

Many of you knew her in a relation in which I never saw her, but she herself was the sufficient pledge of her devotion as a wife ; and the manner in which she cherished her husband's* memory and showed him respect, was so delicate, so sensible, so christian, as to inspire universal admiration.

Her sentiments towards her brothers and sisters deserve note for their peculiarity as much as for their degree. They were a mingling of the maternal and sisterly. They combined the tenderness and solicitude of the mother, with the love and deference and admiration of the youngest for the oldest brother or sister.

As a daughter, I will not venture to describe her.† No words I can command, would express the truth. In the offices she rendered her venerated father, the maternal, the conjugal, and the filial seemed to meet.

She embraced the Saviour at an early age, and yielded to him as her Lord. Her religion assumed from the first, the general form which her future developed. To compress its descrip-

* See Appendix, Note D.

† Appendix, Note E.

tion into the briefest space, it may be designated by the two terms,—*Principle* and *Beneficence*.

Ardent as she constitutionally was, and one of the class to be subject to impulses and swayed by feeling, no person could live more by law,—could inquire more constantly and impartially and thoroughly for the right, and more tenaciously adhere to it. “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” was the question she habitually proposed, and by which she was habitually controlled. Her own gratification, her own advantage, the opinions of others, were subordinated to the divine will, and this once ascertained, she pursued it, come what might to herself, and whatever others might think and feel and say and do. And under this dominancy of principle, she made sacrifices, and particularly sacrifices of social interests and enjoyments, which though voluntary, were martyr-like; and which, much as they have been wondered at, few understood and appreciated. From the beginning to the close of her discipleship, she complied with the terms prescribed: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me.” It mattered not to her that others trod an easier path, and might be

disposed to chide her for unnecessary sacrifice : without courting loss and suffering, and without any inclination towards penance, she went forward in the way in which her Exemplar led and to which her Master called, despite its ruggedness and despite its thorns.

It was quite as steadily her aim to do good, as to do right. She as freely spent herself for usefulness, as for principle. There was no summons of benevolence to which she did not promptly respond, and no appropriate and accessible department of beneficence in which she did not zealously and perseveringly labor.

The Poor found her a friend indeed, and one that showed herself their friend, not only in the pecuniary charities she dispensed, but in the visits to their homes she made, and in the personal attentions she bestowed.

As a Manager of our Orphan Asylum, she shrunk from no service she could render, and faithfully attended for years to the duties of her post, although it may have better suited her aptitudes and tastes to minister to the suffering and needy in less official methods.

She gave the soul its just precedence, and labored most for the communication of spiritual good. This was the special mission on which she entered in girlhood, and which she prosecuted with growing earnestness, until disease arrested her course.

As opportunity offered, she sought to turn sinners from the error of their ways; but not content with occasions that casually occurred, she steadily employed systematic and regularly recurring agencies.

Month after month, for a long series of years, she passed around an appointed circuit in the distribution of tracts; and this she did, not perfunctorily, but with the purpose to effect all of which the means was capable; and by her stated attendance at the meetings of the distributors, and her conference with them, she encouraged and stimulated her associates in the work.

It was, however, as a Sabbath School Teacher, that her pre-eminence most conspicuously appeared. In connection with four other young ladies, two of whom survive her,* she established in this city, forty-three years ago, the first Sab-

* Appendix, Note F.

bath School organized west of Schenectady ; and with the exception of one or two brief intervals, she continued actively engaged in it until her last illness. And here, and in other schools with which she was connected, she exhibited gifts for teaching, and achieved a success in it, to which few parallels are known. It was always difficult to obtain a place in her class, and she was always embarrassed to keep her class down at a manageable size. Who that has beheld it, will ever forget the beautiful sight of her scholars, circled about her in successive rows, some on benches, some on chairs, and others on stools, literally sitting at her feet, ranging in years from the youth just passing into womanhood, to the matron of advanced years, each with attentive ears and animated, and often flooded eyes ! And of the long series who passed under her instruction, very few were taught for any considerable space, without forming a saving acquaintance with Christ. We would not estimate her usefulness by the number known to have been hopefully converted through her agency, and we have not the data by which accuracy could be ensured ; but making the statement as an inference somewhat, it is supposed that as many as an

hundred of her pupils must have become the professed disciples of the Lord.

For some time past, she had been rapidly maturing for heaven, though we thought she was only increasing her loveliness and usefulness on earth. She glowed with new zeal and labored with new vigor; and when, more than two years since, the work of grace began, with which our church, in common with our city and our country, has been blessed, she entered into it with an ardor that we might have presumed would consume her. Necessity seemed to be laid on her, and she could not spare herself.

Still more clearly did a modification of her piety indicate her ripening for the garner on high. It became more predominantly evangelical. There was a larger infusion of Jesus into it. Privilege took the priority of service. The Gospel became, primarily and principally, an overflowing reservoir of gratuitous blessings and joys, rather than a system of reasonable, yet difficult duties. She made it the order of Christ's offices—"my Saviour and my Master," and not "my Master and my Saviour." Instead of trusting Jesus as her Saviour because she obeyed him as her Master, she obeyed him as

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her Master because she trusted him as her Saviour. Faith assumed the primacy in which the Gospel installs it. She counted upon all that divine grace has procured, and availed herself of it, because it is offered as a matter of grace, "without money and without price;" and partaking of this, she asked, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits unto me?" Gratitude and love took their proper place as her prime constraint. She did not first fasten her eye on duty, and by its obligations, press herself to its fulfillment, and then look to the Saviour; but she first fastened her eye on the Saviour, and implicitly confiding in him and freely enjoying him, turning to duty, his love so constrained her, that she could not refrain from its fulfillment. Duty was not only approved of on its own account, and submitted to because of its bonds, but it was relished for the Saviour's sake. She ceased to be driven, and was thenceforward drawn. The yoke was removed and the goad withheld. "Delivered from the bondage of the law," she "entered into the glorious liberty of the children of God;" and the freedom thus obtained, gave new cheerfulness to her spirit, and new charms to her disposition, and new benignity to her mien.

About seventeen months since, indications of her fatal disease appeared;* and it is an expression of the disinterestedness and heroism of her nature, that, convinced that there was no cure for her, and that severe and protracted suffering awaited her, to spare the feelings of her friends, she never disclosed, until within a few weeks, what was torturing and slowly destroying her. With the tokens of death distinctly inscribed upon her, and increasingly enfeebled and distressed, she prosecuted her useful activities in the various fields where they had been previously put forth, until the middle of June, when no strength remained to sustain her.

On being first confined to the house, she mourned, with characteristic humility, that she had accomplished so little; and her only regret at being kept at home, seemed to be, that her ability for benevolent exertion abroad was spent.

Not apprised of the malady that had seized her, we supposed that she was only prostrated from overwrought energies, and that a short relaxation would recruit her for at least a portion of her wonted labor. She knew better, and

* Appendix, Note G.

so it proved. Day by day she failed; and for ten or eleven weeks past, she kept her bed.

As death approached, her attention was naturally more turned towards herself. Exercised as her spiritual senses had been, she was keen, of course, in the detection of sin, and clear and comprehensive in recognizing its evil and desert; and for a time, her faith somewhat wavered. She did not question her love for the Saviour, and her entire devotement to him, but she lamented the indistinctness of her perception of him, and her want of sensible comfort from him. She soon, however, turned off from looking after signs and living on frames, and kept her eye steadily on Jesus, and rested content with his promises and work. Peace, then, came to her soul, and at last it was like a river.

Even after all solicitude about her spiritual interests was allayed, she felt anxiety about the article of death, and about the intervening sufferings through which she might be called to pass. She feared that her patience might fail her, or her submissiveness; and she shrank from the gloom through which she must be borne in her translation from earth.

For some time after she was confined to her bed, her pain, that had been often severe before, became excruciating; and almost to the last, she was subject to much distressing nausea. In the midst of these sufferings, she could only utter brief pleas, generally in the words of Scripture, for Divine support. Speaking of the Rev. Dr. John's remark, in his great agony before death, "It is all sunny the other side of Jordan," she said: "If not sunny, it is peaceful with me. I feel that Jesus is my Saviour, and God my reconciled, loving Father, and it is all peace; but it is dark between." She often repeated the stanza:

"When I tread the verge of Jordan,
 Bid my anxious fears subside;
 Death of death, and hell's destruction,
 Land me safe on Canaan's side:
 Songs of praises
 I will ever give to Thee."

Her sufferings were greatly alleviated, and towards the last, her acute pain entirely ceased; and yet, before they were relieved, her dread of them passed away. "Wearisome days are appointed unto me," she once observed; "I never appreciated that before. They are *appointed* unto me! What a comforting thought!"

Death, too, was disrobed of its terrors. Referring to her remark, that the passage out of life was dark, she said the next day to her niece, to whom she had addressed it, "God has helped me to-day! *You understand!* God has helped me to-day!"

As long as her strength could bear it, a passage was read to her from the little volume, "Daily Food," and on the 27th of August, the verse occurred, "Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ." She requested that it might be read over to her, and then exclaimed, "Thanks! thanks! What a glorious victory! What a wonderful Saviour! Almighty! Almighty!" And in the night, she turned to her niece and said, "Repeat that verse to me again, 'Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ.'"

At a subsequent date, she asked a physician who was feeling her pulse, "How near am I to heaven?" and as the physician who regularly attended her was administering a cordial, she said, "Why not let the lamp go out?" and on several occasions, as she recovered from fainting, she whispered in tones of disappointment, "Back again where I was!"

She became exultant even ; and when it was difficult to speak more than a word, she would ejaculate, "Praise ! praise !" And last Sunday morning, when it was supposed that her dissolution had begun, she said, "Rejoice, rejoice, when I am gone ! Sing aloud !" And this she sent as her dying message to her beloved Sabbath School.

After recovering from the transient uneasiness in regard to her own spiritual state, to which I have referred ; and after she had cast all her care about her bodily pains, and about death clouds and throes, upon Him who careth for us, her master passion returned. She expressed an intensity of interest in her impenitent friends, that absorbed all concern for herself. To some of them she addressed the tenderest and most earnest appeals, and she would take no denial from them, and would admit of no delay.

She called on her Christian friends to labor for the impenitent, as if they were snatching them from the fire. When she could speak only in broken sentences, she said, "Don't be afraid ; not afraid ; fight Satan ; stand up for Christ ; don't be afraid !" A few hours before her death, she called her attending friends about her and

begged them to pray for some of the impenitent whom she named. On being assured that they would remember them after her departure, "Oh, no," she replied, "pray for them now, *now*." "Yes, we will," she was told, "and we hope that they will go to Christ." "No, no," she said, "not *hope*; must, must—now, now!" Soon after, she again exclaimed, "They must not wait a day! they may be gone! Not an hour! they may be gone!" Drawing large circles with her finger, she shook her head, meaning that it was by no circuitous route, involving delay, that sinners must go to Christ; and then quickly drawing a straight line, she cried out, "Now, now!" "They down in the dust," she said to her Christian friends, "we up here, and rising to heaven, must draw them up with us." And referring to one for whom she had felt especially anxious, she exclaimed, "Satan must not have him!" and turning her eyes to heaven, "my Saviour shall!"

Such was Mrs. OSTROM's life, and such was her death. Your knowledge of her justifies me in saying that she was a remarkable person; and she will seem much more so, when the lapse of time shall have borne us to a better point of

observation. Thus far, we have been too near her, for a comprehensive view of her. When we shall have been removed far enough from her to take in her full proportions, we will more emphatically pronounce her a remarkable person. We may have known those of greater completeness of character and of more harmonious development; of greater eminence in particular attributes and attainments, and in certain departments of a womanly sphere; of more brilliant and affluent genius; her superiors in mental and esthetic accomplishments; of nicer discrimination and a clearer and deeper insight; readier in adaptation to changing circumstances and sudden emergencies, and to the peculiarities of individuals; but we may doubt whether it has been the lot of any of us to meet one more notable on the whole; more notable for striking, sterling, unusual and difficult traits.

Mrs. OSTROM illustrated some truths and enforces some appeals, which I will briefly express.

As has been already observed, she manifested *the consistency of female delicacy and of exemplariness in the family, with eminent usefulness in the community*. So feminine was she in her sensi-

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bilities ; so instinctively and irresistibly did she shrink from the faintest semblance and from the farthest approach of violence to modesty and principle and taste, as possibly to be thought prudish by the more obtuse ; and such was the diligence with which she served her household, and the neatness and orderliness and comfort in which she kept her home, that if she had aimed at nothing beyond the domestic circle, she could not have attained to more there.

And with all the danger to which she was exposed, of passing beyond her legitimate sphere ; so efficient in works of general benevolence, that more than a woman's part might have been, not only conceded to her, but thrust upon her ; passing through seasons of religious excitement, when a transcending of her province might have been applauded in her, if not demanded of her, who in this congregation—who in this community—ever saw or heard of aught in her, which the most fastidious would consider incompatible with her sex ?

Our departed friend happily illustrated *the consistency of special interest in a particular church, with a deep interest in the Church Uni-*

versal. Her sympathies were broad and catholic. She loved all denominations as members of the body of Christ, and her zeal for the salvation of the soul precluded her proselyting to a sect. During the nearly nine years of my intimacy with her, I never knew her to betray anything like jealousy of a sister church; and she was in as cordial accord with Christians of other names, as with those of her own; and as much in co-operation with the first, for the objects of their common concern, as with the last, for the objects of their particular concern. I venture to affirm, that in no congregation of our city, was she suspected of a sectarian bias, and that those of all our congregations who are engaged in labors for the public good, were as confidential and free with her, as with co-workers of their own ecclesiastical home.

And yet, she felt a peculiar affection for the church to which she belonged. It was especially dear to her heart, and she served it with a special zeal. While she approved of its polity and adopted its creed, she sympathized with its life, and took it to her breast. It was *her* church; the church of her understanding, and the church of her feelings. And it seemed a

holy, as well as a lovely church. Its associations sanctified it. The Divine Providence had so guarded and favored it, and the Divine Spirit had so descended upon and pervaded it, that she looked upon it as consecrated by God and commended to her; and she scrupled not to pour out her affection upon it, and to devote her powers, and influence, and substance to it.

And while ardently loving and unsparingly serving her church, *she embodied the true ideal of a parishioner.*

I will not trust myself to speak freely and fully of her in this relation. I would be charged with extravagance, should I express all she was to me, and just what she was to me. Bidding feeling aside, and speaking calmly and deliberately, I may say that while too independent to call any man master, and too conscientious not to utter her dissent when mistakes were committed and errors broached, she always reluctantly differed from her pastor, and only when her clear convictions compelled it. And if a variance of opinion occurred, it never approached discord; and on no occasion and in no circle did she seek the ascendancy for her views, because they were

hers. She was only anxious for the truth, and not for a triumph for herself; and though entitled to great deference and influence, she showed no disposition to take the lead, and no determination to have her own way—nothing like a dictatorial or domineering spirit. She preferred that others should be gratified rather than herself, and that others, rather than she, should have the sway.

And while she dissented from her pastor only when an intelligently convinced judgment and an imperious conscience allowed no alternative, it was always her pleasure to concur with him; and she showed such a sensitiveness to his feelings and influence, such a dread of wounding his spirit and impairing his power for good, and such a dread of his being pained, and shackled, and weakened by others; she was so considerate and tender in her kindness to him; so constant, and earnest, and wise in her co-operation with him; so solicitous about him as a minister and a man, that memory must utterly fail before he can forget her interest in him and her services to him. Emphatically was she his helper in Christ Jesus, for whom he gives thanks.

Mrs. OSTROM's example *addresses all who call themselves Christians*. There are two summons it especially gives. It says, in the first place, "*Be not conformed to this world; come ye out, and be ye separate from it.*"

You know "how holily, and justly, and unblamably she behaved" in this respect. With any position, and advantages, and enjoyments there at her command, and fitted to gratify and grace it, she kept almost entirely secluded from general society, because she could not take a place and part there, as now constituted and controlled, without departing, as she thought, from the spirit and principles of the Gospel. She did not arrogate the right to judge for others, and was never censorious towards them; but she could not trust herself in scenes of gaiety and fashion, of extravagance in entertainment and dress, of exciting amusements and late hours. The prevalence of dancing particularly tried her mind. Though innocent in itself, she did not feel guiltless and safe at parties which it turned into balls. With strong social feelings, and highly qualified to adorn social positions and to enhance social pleasures, she made large sacrifices of them, though it was like

putting out an eye or cutting off a hand, rather than suffer evil infection from the world, or countenance sinful conformity to it. "I have tried," she said a few months since, to a dear friend to whom she confided the secrets of her heart; "I have tried to convict myself of ascetism, but cannot succeed. It would have distressed me now, if I had indulged myself more. I beg you, be firm."

And forming your judgment by what you think of her now, let me ask, Was Mrs. Ostrom right or wrong? And if her course best comported with her as a Christian, what becomes you, and which will you take, and in what associations shall surviving friends think of you when death has called you hence?

The example of our deceased friend appeals to Christians, in the second place, to *live to do good*. Religion had the full supremacy over her. In no respect was it secondary and subordinate. Its claims were always met first, and it always held the ground when anything earthly and temporal pressed against it. One of our stated services, for example, was sure to be attended, whatever might occur to draw her elsewhere;

and she would never put the benefit or acceptableness of such a service at risk, by entering scenes, the same evening, uncongenial with it.

Thus possessed and controlled by religion, usefulness was her passion and pursuit. To this her desires, and anxieties, and efforts perpetually tended. She did not turn from it for an instant; she did not weary of it for an instant. So uniform, so persistent was she here, that we came to presume that she could not think of herself, and that still less could she think of the world for herself.

More especially does Mrs. Ostrom's example appeal to her *female friends*. She reconciled womanly modesty with public beneficence, and faithfulness at home with usefulness to the community; and *she calls on you not to be content with what you may do in the family*, if at liberty and competent to do something abroad. Many of you need not be, and should not be confined within the limits by which you have been hitherto bound. There is work for you beyond, and your circumstances and your gifts admit of your engaging in it; and you would be far better and happier, as well as of more

account, if you would enter upon it. Some of you have both the ability and the opportunity to accomplish as much as your departed sister. You may not be capable of it at once, but exercise would discipline you for it. Her industry and perseverance would make it sure. Begin at once, and diligently and patiently proceed; and at her age, you will have equalled her work.

And if not fitted and situated to take her part, another of a different kind, and perhaps of less prominence and magnitude, is assigned to you; and whatever it is, well fulfilled, it is all that is required, and you are sure of the reward. Let it be said when each of you die, "She hath done what she could."

And yet, if it be really the fact, as in rare instances it is, that the domestic circle alone suits and engrosses your powers, do not disparage your work, and envy those to whom a wider field is given. You can accomplish much, and enough too, to enlist the greatest energies. Your immediate action is spent on your household, but through them you may reach the country and the globe. *Be sure* that you can only be a wife, or mother, or daughter, or sister,

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and if you can only be this, *do what you can*, and a glorious mission is achieved, and the Saviour's commendation secured.

“ Who does the best his circumstances allow,
Does well ; acts nobly. Angels could no more.”

More especially, still, are *Sunday School Teachers* addressed. “ *Be not weary in well doing.*” Your vocation continues while life and health last. After nearly a half century's service, your late associate's zeal did not flag, nor her efficiency wane. She ceased at once to teach and to live.

And while she commends “ patient continuance in well doing,” she even more persuasively advocates *thoroughness*. She applied her energies to her work. Particularly did she *study* that she might teach, and as diligently at the last as at the first. She never felt that she had learned enough, or that the knowledge she had acquired would answer her purpose, or that the excitement of the class might supersede the necessity of a previous storing of her mind. *Each lesson was carefully prepared*, and thus she kept her own interest alive, and inspired enthusiasm in her scholars.

And not satisfied with an attentive and engaged class, she sought to save them. Their instruction was only the means she employed for their conversion. During our first conversation after her sickness withdrew her from her class, she said, with deep emotion, "One of them yet remains to be openly and decidedly consecrated to Christ," as if the end for which she taught could not be compassed until every one under her tuition had become an avowed Christian, and as if it was the bitterest of her disappointments that a single scholar in her class failed of an acquaintance with the Saviour.

Most of all are they addressed, *whom this Teacher taught*. Few have been favored like you. Pre-eminent gifts and graces have been devoted to you. Yours has been the best instruction that could be enjoyed. Not only has truth been clearly unfolded to you, but a living example illustrated it before you and enforced it upon you. Solemn responsibilities are devolved upon you, and a powerful attraction presented to you. You ought to be eminently holy and eminently useful; and in the freshness of your recollection of her, as well as in the freshness of your grief for her, firmly resolve that, with

God's help, you will imitate your teacher, while you remember her instructions. Take up and put on the mantle she dropped as she ascended on high. Assume her spirituality and beneficence. Let her live and be multiplied in her scholars. Dearly did she love you;* indefatigably did she serve you. *Repay her by copying her.*

The removal of eminently useful Christians, is the promotion of surviving Christians. God is calling you, my friends, to take the places made vacant among us. He commissions you for higher posts in the church. He confers new honor and new responsibility upon you. There is more for you to achieve; a nobler and wider sphere for you to fill.

And you need not fear to obey the call. Much as may be the advance, and incompetent for it as you may feel, the Master, from whom the summons comes, will qualify you for it. If you have not the requisite resources, he will give them to you; and if these are dormant in you, unrecognized by your consciousness, he will awake them; and if their elements are there, he

* Appendix, Note H.

will develop their fullness. Go confidently forward, not limiting your aim by what you feel is in yourselves, but only by the orders you receive and by the promises you have. God is sufficient for you, and He will support and prosper you.

And viewed in this light, *the bereavements of the church are blessings to individuals*. They furnish opportunities for development and reward. We remain children as long as our parents continue to provide for us. We must be thrown upon ourselves to become real men. We continue dependent while our supporters last. The withdrawal of our props makes us self-sustaining and helpers. You have been leaning thus far, and now you must begin to stand erect. You have counted on others for specially important services; but they are removed, and you must perform these yourselves. Previously unknown responsibilities are laid upon you, and you must straighten yourselves to uphold them; and under their weight, and with the exercise they give, you will pass from the gristle of childhood into the bone of manhood; and from being "babes in Christ," into "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Though disposed to recoil from it at first, step boldly into

the position before you, and undertake its duties at once. You will be disciplined to efficiency and usefulness ; and when your turn to go hence shall come, there will be sounded the plaudit, "Well done, good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord."

And how urgent are the claims upon us, and how resistless the attractions, to be holy and useful. When we think of the many eminent saints of our number gathered on high ; of what they were on earth, and of what they are in heaven, how the appeal comes home to us, to grow in grace and to do good. It is a privilege, indeed, to belong to a communion that counts such pastors as Bethuel Dodd, President James Carnahan, of Nassau Hall, and Henry Dwight ; and such members as William Williams and his truly congenial consorts, the Mrs. Clarkes, the Merrills, the Doolittles, Mrs. Kirkland, Dr. Asahel Grant, the Nestorian missionary, Mrs. Potter, Walter King, Truman Parmalee, Theron Pond, Mrs. Bagg, Mrs. OSTROM, and the others too numerous to mention, whose names among us are "as ointment poured forth." It is delightful to think that *their church is ours* ; but to the pleasure a responsibility is attached. If, in this

connection, we have much to enjoy, we have much to do. Pre-eminent are the motives with us to effect the most possible in the work of sanctification and beneficence. Oh, let us below be in full sympathy with our associates above! Members of the same body, let us have the same mind; and transmitting the spirit to our successors, and they to theirs, to the latest generation may holiness and usefulness be the distinction of our church.

APPENDIX.

NOTE A.

A LADY of our city has been in the habit of spending half a day each week, when her health and strength permitted, at our jail, conversing with the men and women, reading to them and instructing them. Not only has she been spared indignity, but she has promptly won and uninterruptedly retained deference and attention, gratitude and love. As the prisoners have been set at large, from time to time, they have been quite sure to take with them the Bibles she gave them, though they might leave behind clothing, or other articles of value to them ; and on forgetting them, not a few have been known to return for them.

NOTE B.

MRS. MARY ELVIRA OSTROM, daughter of Thomas Walker, Esq., was born at Worcester, Mass., January 10, 1800 ; removed to this city in March, 1803 ; united with the First Presbyterian church, March, 1814 ; was married to Gen. John H. Ostrom, June 17, 1822 ; and died between three and four o'clock, Monday morning, September 5, 1859 ; and was buried Tuesday afternoon, September 6, 1859.

NOTE C.

There was a rare finish in Mrs. OSTROM's chirography, and it was an appropriate setting for her language and thoughts. She made much use of her pen, and that, too, not only in

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epistolary correspondence, where she was pre-eminent even among her sex for the grace she displayed, but also in more elaborate composition. When the Rev. Dr. Todd was preparing his work on Sabbath Schools, he sent a circular, soliciting information, to a distinguished jurist of our city. This gentleman, though actively engaged in schemes of Christian beneficence, and long a Sunday School teacher and superintendent, placed the circular in Mrs. Ostrom's hands, for a reply. The whole of the part she wrote on the question, "Ought unconverted persons to be employed as teachers in Sabbath Schools?" was published in the book, as a better answer than Dr. T. felt qualified to give, and as the best of scores which he received from all parts of the land.

NOTE D.

The following obituary notice of Gen. Ostrom appeared in one of our city papers, at the time of his death :—

"Another prominent citizen has finished his earthly career. Gen. JOHN H. OSTROM, of this city, died on Sunday morning, at Poughkeepsie, at which place he was arrested by his last sickness, while on his way to the sea-coast for the benefit of his health. His age was 51 years.

"An emigrant from New England to this city in early life, as one of the family of his well known and respected father, Col. David Ostrom, entering upon the profession of the law, without the benefit of a collegiate education, his popular manners, practical good sense and active business habits, at once introduced him into a respectable practice, and to a general and familiar acquaintance with the inhabitants of our then rising village and county, and with their local and municipal concerns. In the latter he was very early employed, and ever continued to take an active interest. He successively occupied the offices of Clerk, Trustee and Assessor of the then village, and after its incorporation as a city, those of a member of the Common Council and Mayor.

"He also filled the office of Clerk of the county for two successive terms, and was the candidate of the political party to which he belonged, and of which he was a most prominent and valued member, for various other stations. In the better days of the militia system, he rose through the various military grades to that of Major General, and subsequently discharged, for several years, the duties of Chief Engineer of the Fire Department in this city.

"Although a decided and earnest politician, and often brought by his various relations in life into serious conflict with those differing from him, it is believed that he has left in the bosom of his opponents, in any field of strife, no treasured resentments or unkind recollections.

"Gen. Ostrom became, some years since, a member and communicant of the First Presbyterian church in this city, to the principles and interests of which he ever continued earnestly devoted, and where his counsels and influence will long be much missed, and their loss deeply deplored.

"In the more private relations of life, he furnished a bright and worthy example in the discharge of the filial, fraternal and marital duties.

"With this brief and hurried notice, we leave his memory to the recollections of those by whom he was known and loved. He has passed from among us while yet in the prime of life, and engaged in the active discharge of its duties. Long will it be before his manly form and cheerful countenance shall cease to be missed in our streets and public assemblies, or another be found to fill his place with equal usefulness and success."

NOTE E.

The family physician speaks with great admiration of Mrs. Ostrom's remarkable attentiveness to her father when he was sick ; of the quickness and yet quietness with which she hastened to his side, when any movement of his, or any signal of

discomfort reached her. No mother could more sedulously watch over her child.

Her father's difficulty of hearing made conversation with him almost impossible during the latter part of her illness, and his feelings seldom allowed him to venture into her room. Some days before her death, when she supposed that her departure was near at hand, she desired to take a final farewell of him, and the scene dissolved every beholder. The venerable father, bathed in tears and overwhelmed with emotion, fell prostrate on the bed, and the daughter fervently embraced and kissed him, and pronounced a benediction upon him. When they had separated, her pastor came to her side, and she repeated an injunction she had previously given, that he should remember her father when she was gone.

NOTE F.

The following is an extract from the Report of the School, prepared by Mrs. OSTROM, in 1856, at its fortieth anniversary :

“Just forty years ago (October, 1856), the first Sabbath School was organized, in what was then the village of Utica. It *originated* (at the suggestion of a young lady from Troy), with five young ladies, who with nearly one hundred others, had about that time made a public profession of religion, the result of a revival, under the ministry of the Rev. Henry Dwight, now of Geneva.

“MISS ELIZABETH BLOODGOOD.

“MISS ALIDA M. VAN RENSSELAER (afterwards Mrs. Charles H. Carroll).

“MISS CATHARINE W. BREESE (now Mrs. Griswold).

“MISS SARAH A. MALCOLM (now Mrs. Ball).

“MISS MARY E. WALKER (now Mrs. Ostrom), the only one remaining in the city.

"The school was commenced in the wing of the building No. 26 Hotel street, which remains to the present day entirely unaltered in its exterior. It is believed this was the first Sabbath School west of Schenectady ; and at that early day, it was a question eliciting much discussion among Christians, both ministers and laymen, whether teaching children to read was a proper employment for the sacred hours of the Sabbath.

"The excellent pastor, and many of his people, while not openly opposing, gave no encouragement to our enterprise, which they regarded as the fruit of youthful, if not indiscreet zeal, which would soon exhaust itself, without producing any very bad results. But God, "who sees the end from the beginning," was here (through a feeble instrumentality) planting the mustard seed destined to become a noble tree, which has sheltered beneath its spreading branches multitudes now in glory, and multitudes more who will rejoice through a long eternity, that they have been gathered within the fold of the Sabbath School. It was a motley group, of from twenty-five to thirty boys and girls, who assembled on that memorable Sabbath morning, in that humble school-room. The fortnight previous had been spent by the teachers in visiting the streets, where the lowest dregs of society found their wretched homes. With some clothing provided, the children were induced to promise attendance. They were made comparatively decent in their appearance, although even then, the school would find its counterpart in the ragged mission schools of the present day. It is well remembered, that in a class of large, ungoverned lads, one of their number appended a profane oath to a rude remark addressed to his female teacher. The only materials which had been secured for teaching, were a few Testaments and catechisms, and a set of Lancasterian lesson cards, which had been pasted upon large boards, so that one would answer to teach an entire class at the same time.

"In a short time, another school for colored children and adults (a large proportion of the latter class), was held on Sabbath evening, in the same place, and taught by the same teachers. In this school, an aged and simple-hearted disciple of Christ, over sixty years of age, succeeded, beginning with

the alphabet, to learn to read in the Testament. The process would be regarded by many as a tedious one. But poor Judy, after spelling and repeating each separate word, would then put all the words together, until the truth contained in the verse was comprehended, when the joy and satisfaction which would beam in her face, might be envied by some accomplished students of the Bible. When the teacher, feeling that a longer time had been given to Judy than was her due, would propose to leave her, with a pleading tone, she would exclaim, in her own simple but expressive language, 'Oh, let me read a little longer ; *it goes so good !*' The hours for commencing the school, both winter and summer, were eight o'clock in the morning, the afternoon session immediately after divine service, and the colored school in the evening. In winter, the days being short, the teachers seldom went home, but spent the twilight intermission in the school-room, awaiting their colored pupils. After a few months, the school was divided, the boys being removed to another room, and taught by gentlemen. The colored class was also placed under other teachers. For some time none but the poor were admitted as scholars. The schools were held for a time (after leaving the first room) on Catharine street. The female department occupied a small school-house, which was destroyed by fire, when they removed to the court-house. Finally, the schools connected with the First Church took possession of the session-room on Hotel street, which has recently given place to the residence of Mr. Benedict. From this place, we removed to the basement rooms in the Brick Church on Washington street, destroyed by fire in the winter of 1851. At that time (with a few meager exceptions), the Sabbath School records were destroyed, and with them information of great interest and importance. The male and female departments continued separate until 1838, when, by a vote of a large majority of the teachers, the two schools were united, and an infant class took possession of the vacated room."

NOTE G.

Daniel P. Bissell, M. D., her attending physician has furnished the following statement of the nature and course of his patient's disease :

" Mrs. Ostrom had, until recently, generally enjoyed good health. A small tumor appeared in her right breast some time during the Spring of 1858. As this developed itself, it assumed a *scirrhous* character, and soon softened, giving rise to two small openings near its center, from which imperfectly formed matter escaped, and continued to discharge, in small quantities, during the remainder of her life. Soon after her health and strength began to fail, and her whole system to feel the enervating and depressing effects of the insidious disease which was secretly destroying it. In May, 1859, she was attacked with severe neuralgic pains in the right side of the neck, face and head, and also in the left limb, from the hip to the ankle. These pains increased in severity until the 16th of June, when, for the first time, she sought medical advice. About this time she began to experience some difficulty in swallowing solid food ; and soon after nausea and vomiting ensued, whenever food or drink of any kind was taken into the stomach. It now became evident that cancerous deposits existed in portions of the esophagus and stomach, as well as in the breast ; and every subsequent day served to confirm the opinion which was entertained as to the nature of the disease and its fatal tendency. The difficulty of swallowing, the vomiting, etc., increased to such an extent, that for many days before her death, she was only able to take a *very small* quantity of liquids. And after lingering eighty days, during which time she was confined to the bed, she died of exhaustion, on the morning of the 5th of September, 1859."

NOTE H.

The sainted Hewitson indited the following lines, during his last illness, and addressed them to his congregation. Altering a word in the last stanza, from "preach" to "teach," Mrs. OSTROM sent them to her class :

" No more I help that vineyard's growth,
Though not detained by drowsy sloth,
My feeble frame's crushed like the moth :
God's will be done.

" No more I reap that harvest field,
Its sheaves to others may it yield,
My call to hasten home is sealed :
God's will be done.

" Shall I then teach the word no more,
Are all these pleasant labors o'er,
And I so near to glory's shore ?
God's will be done."