

# ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT THE

Funeral of General Marcy Gregg,

IN THE

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, COLUMBIA, S. C..

DECEMBER 20, 1862.

By B. M. PALMER, D. D.

COLUMBIA, S. C.:

SOUTHERN GUARDIAN STEAM-POWER PRESS.

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ADDRESS.

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We meet this day in the house of God to mourn—to mourn for ourselves, and for the State, the mother that has borne us all! When Death comes in at the window, and steals away its victim from some private circle, a whole community will yield obedience to the law of Christian sympathy, and weep with those that weep. But to-day the State, like the Spartan mother of old, receives through us one of her noblest sons upon his shield, and pours out her grief upon his venerated form. Alas, our bereaved mother! How often of late has she strained her dead sons to her bosom, in the last embrace, and then turned aside, like Rachael, to weep, “refusing to be comforted, because they are not!” Where is the family amongst us that does not whisper its secret grief around the evening hearth? And where the village cemetery whose sacred inclosure does not shelter some patriot’s grave? Her martyred sons sleep everywhere upon her soil; upon the mountain’s grassy slope, beneath the peaceful watching of the silent stars, to where the ocean fringes the earth with its foam, and chants with its deep bass the low, funereal dirge! But here, to-day, in the centre of them all, with his sword beneath his head, we bury the gallant chieftain who led the strife in which they bravely fell. What language can rise to the solemn majesty of this assembly, or speak with the pathos which belongs to unuttered sorrow! Were I to follow the impulse of my own heart, I would cover my head, and sit a silent mourner beside that bier, rather than be the voice to utter

the wail which now rends every breast throughout this commonwealth.

He whom we now bear to the tomb is worthy of the reverence of these imposing obsequies; nor do I fear that words of praise will breed in your minds, as with one of doubtful virtue, suspicion of his merit. If there be one word which, more than another, covers the breadth of his character, it is the word *manliness*. He was a true man, in the full assemblage of virtues which crowd into that short, expressive term. Courage, honesty, and strength, were tempered with the softer graces of gentleness and love;

“Elements

So mixed in him, that nature might stand up  
And say to all the world, this was a MAN.”

Inheriting a more than Roman virtue from his honored sire, it grew in him to such robustness and symmetry as to command the homage of universal reverence. To say that he was incapable of falsehood, in any of the forms in which it is acted among men, would present but the coarse profile of his immaculate truthfulness. The historian must say of him more than this; that he could not stoop even to those minor indirections which creep unwittingly into human intercourse, and which are almost sanctioned by the usage of society. His simple word was the gauge of honor, and was always accepted as his surest pledge. His innate sense of right, which could not inflict a wilful wrong, looked with a cultivated resentment upon the wrong perpetrated by another; and as the arbiter of many a dispute, the honor of a friend was confided to a guardian whose jealousy would not suffer it to be tarnished with a stain. That positiveness of character which marks the independent and vigorous thinker, lost the roughness of its edge in the blandness of address which made him at all times the polished and courtly gentleman. Self-contained and reticent, he was hedged about by a reserve through which no one was bold

enough rudely to break, but which never degenerated into morose and repulsive austerity. It was but the guard with which every man of true self-respect fences around his own personality, and which knew how to let itself down in the genial flow of confidential intercourse. I may not, before this public assembly, lift the veil of domestic life, and reveal the tenderness of a strong man's love: which, not weaving ties of its own, twined itself around the venerable mother, who, by a timely release, is just spared the anguish of weeping over his bier; and around endeared sisters, who to-day mourn with a sorrow which sisters are seldom called to feel. Be it enough to say, that he belonged to that select class of the brave and true, whose hands are strong in the great battle of life, but who love with a woman's heart at home. In this rare union of gentleness with force, he became a type of the Southern gentleman; and fathers proudly pointed their sons to his model, as they gazed upon a character so massive in its strength, with such an undertone of honesty and truth, and so tempered with urbanity.

Too grave and earnest in his nature to be seduced by the low, material pleasures of the world, he sought refreshment amidst professional labors, in the retirement of his home, and in the pursuits of a scholar. In the seclusion of his study, surrounded by the great immortals who survive in books, he not only found companions congenial to his taste, but drank in the wisdom of the past, and secretly elaborated the principles upon which he foresaw the destinies of his country must one day turn. Indifferent to the prizes of ordinary political ambition—perhaps in some measure precluded by the stern jealousy of a profession which admits no rivalry in its successful prosecution; and possibly unfitted for the machinations of party by the rigor of his character, which could not bend to compromise—he moved but little upon the stage of party politics, and was seldom commingled in its transient issues. Yet, in every great crisis, when in national assemblies the assertion of some great



political truth was imperatively demanded, the eyes of the State always turned upon General Gregg as the champion equal to the task. More than once, with a courage superior even to that he displayed in arms, has he affirmed principles in these national convocations, which were any thing but a passport to public favor, and which shut down upon him the gates of political preferment. It was his sublime mission, in short, to stand sentinel over the master-principle of State supremacy, the corner-stone upon which rests, with us, the whole fabric of constitutional republican liberty. Through long years he maintained his silent watch, like some reformer of olden time, content with recording his protest in days of defection and apostacy; knowing that truth will experience a resurrection, and come forth from the record, to be once more a power in the hearts of men. Thus he stood upon the tower of observation, calmly waiting for the historic moment when the revolutionary sword should again cut the cords of political bondage, and set his country free. No sooner did the State unfurl the banner of her sovereignty to the breeze, than he leaped from his retirement, to bear it on to triumph against the fanatical crusaders who threatened to tread it in the dust. The first to lead the sons of Carolina upon the battle-plains of Virginia, his unimpeachable courage was marked by the coolness and self-possession which had signalized his whole previous career, and infused into his troops an enthusiasm equal to his own. His military skill and intrepid bearing soon promoted him from the colonelcy of a regiment to the command of a brigade; and by the fireside of many a soldier it will be told, in future days, how, amidst the shower of leaden hail, he brought his regiments one by one coolly into line, and flaunted defiance against the foe. At last, in his fourteenth battle, he fell, upon the hills of Fredericksburg, and, like the gallant Wolfe upon the heights of Abraham, in the arms of victory.

It is given to no man, my friends, to evade the shaft of death; but only the good and great know how to render death sublime. It is always glorious when it places its seal of attest upon the principles of a noble life-time. Then it comes like the chorus to a chant, into which is breathed the very soul of song. An epic unity runs through the career of General Gregg, whose stern consistency demanded a heroic death. His dying message to the State, transmitted to his Excellency the Governor, gives the key which makes his life a perfect poem: "If I am to die now, I give my life cheerfully for the independence of South Carolina." Let the touching words in which the true patriot renders back his life's trust to his country, be engraved upon his tomb! And Providence itself, as if mindful to preserve the poetic harmonies of such a career, permits us to bear his body to the grave on no other day but this second anniversary of his State's secession from the old Federal Union. On this very day, two years ago, his hand signed the immortal instrument which made South Carolina a free and independent Commonwealth; and now, with his flag for his winding-sheet, we lay him down upon his mother's bosom, to a soldier's rest. Who shall say that we have not here a true and perfect epic?

"A song for the death-day of the brave—  
A song of pride!  
For him that went to a hero's grave,  
With the sword his bride."

But "I am here to bury Cæsar, not to praise him." There are two lessons which I would seek, by the impressive solemnities of this hour, to enforce. The first is, *our country is endeared to us by every bereavement we sustain.* This death binds with a new sanction to our heart the cause to which he fell so cheerfully a martyr. The privations and hardships we undergo are nothing, when weighed against the precious blood which has been shed to purchase freedom to our land. The wandering exile will bear with



equanimity the painful remembrance of his dismantled home, when he looks upon the broken families whose sons either sleep upon Virginia's sacred soil, or have been brought back to make more real the loss which can not be repaired. But should every thing be lost, and the base foot of an insolent invader tread upon our high and beautiful places, we will rally around the tombs of our dead, and fight the last battle of freedom over their honored dust. If there is not a home within this Confederacy but has a treasured grave, let its sacred relics be the pledge of undying resistance to our country's foe. Never shall he be suffered to erase our inscriptions of love upon their tombs, and write the word 'rebel' upon their sacred dust. Beside this bier we take the irrevocable oath to die upon his grave, ere it shall be thus desecrated. Sleep, honored patriot, in thy peaceful bed, till the resurrection-morn: for thousands of hearts, beating with love of liberty equal to thine own, here record the sacramental vow to redeem their country, or to emulate thy death.

The second lesson is of sublimer import, for *a voice sounds from the eternal world, and warns the nation to trust in the living God.* The patriotic ardor with which this Commonwealth now guards its attribute of sovereignty, should teach us to respect the holy jealousy with which, in all history, God has vindicated His awful supremacy. And the world will derive little profit from the dreadful struggle in which we are embarked, if it is not taught to "praise and honor Him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom from generation to generation." If He strikes down our princes and nobles, it is not to lead us to despair, but to a loftier faith in His goodness and power. Our Johnson and our Bee—our Glover, Marshall, Means; and now, at last, our Gregg—are laid low in death! Who shall lead our forces to the battle, and be strong for us in the day of conflict? "Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth." And

when the day of peace shall dawn, with its trials, more searching, perhaps, than those of war, who shall be wise for us in that work of construction, and shape the character of our young and pliant nation? Alas! compatriots, I mourn to-day more the *statesman* than the warrior! I looked through the night, now so dark about us, to the auspicious day when Senators should once more sit in their peaceful halls: and in the prophetic vision, I saw him who now sleeps before us a princely leader, legislating for a grateful land. Had he not the higher attributes of an accomplished statesman? Clear in his conceptions, vigorous in argument, tenacious in his purpose, fearless of reproach, unswerving in integrity, honest as the light of heaven, and bland as the summer air—who among the living so completely filled up the measure of the Roman poet's eulogy,

“Justum et tenacem propositi virum  
Non civium ardor prava jubentium,  
Non vultus instantis tyranni,  
Mente quatit solida”?

When such are taken away from the council-board of a nation, even “the mighty man, and the man of war, the judge, and the prophet, and the prudent, and the ancient, the counsellor, and the eloquent orator”—to whom can we turn but to Him by whom kings reign and princes decree justice, and whose heaviest judgment against a people is that “children shall be their princes, and babes shall rule over them”? May this curse, which has fallen so conspicuously upon our foes, never be allotted to us for a portion!

Nor can I omit saying, that no nation was ever called to conduct a great struggle so completely under the shadow of Jehovah's throne. In other ages, the contest for civil and religious freedom has often been renewed; but the sanctity of our war is found in the fact that in its issue the supremacy and prerogatives of the Divine Ruler of the world are distinctly implicated. A bold and infidel fanaticism has undertaken openly to impeach the morality of

God's administration, and with reckless blasphemy denounces as profligate the government of the universe. To the people of our Confederacy the sublime mission is assigned of standing guard for the Divine supremacy. In this we are a spectacle to the world: upon a platform as elevated as our own Alleghanies, we strike for our liberties, and for the rights of God. Grand as the contest is when our firesides and our altars are the stake, it rises into the sublime and awful when the question is whether God shall reign, or take into his privy council the hypocritical and infidel fanatic of the North. The only parallel which I can discover within the compass of history, is the invasion of Judah by Sennacherib, who boasted to Hezekiah, saying, "Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee." To whom God answered, "Because thy rage against me is come up into mine ears, therefore I will put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest." What nation, save Judah alone, ever had such trusts committed to its hands? and what nation ever had such cause to spread its hands unto heaven, and to feel that the battle is not theirs, but God's?

My sad office is not done until I have said one word more. It is a fearful thing to stand beside an open grave, and not dare to lift the veil which separates us from the world beyond. Thanks be to God, that with some measure of hope this veil may be lifted by us to-day! General Gregg, as you all know, made no profession of religion in life. But what one of his peculiar thoughtfulness and reticence may have meditated on these momentous themes, will never be disclosed until the judgment. Certain it is, that men of his intellectual mould are often misjudged, and charged with an indifference to religion, which, in the sight of the omniscient Creator, does them grievous wrong. But he was followed in secret by the powerful intercessions of some who fear and love God. Ah! ye men of the world,

think not lightly of that wonderful providence which binds you up with the pious in the relationships of life, and surrounds you with an atmosphere of holiness which you are compelled to breathe. Often, when no other ground of hope is left, the saints of the most high call to remembrance their own fervent supplications; and, knowing that a covenant God will gather their tears into his bottle, are more content to leave you in His sovereign hands. In this case there is something more. During the period of his military service, General Gregg is known to have borrowed from the library of a venerable minister books bearing upon the vital points of religious faith; and that amidst the bustle and toil of the camp, his earnest mind was engaged in the examination of its most practical claims. After the fatal wound was received, during the six-and-thirty hours of ebbing life—I will not speak of his fortitude, for that might be achieved through the firmness of a Stoic—but he was heard by more than one of his attendants to express the conviction that his peace was made with God: and in his last message of love to one bereaved, the charge was given, not to mourn his death, but to meet him in heaven. Brief and slender words, indeed! but fragrant with consolation to those who must pay to his memory the tribute of their grief. Had he died upon his bed, anxious hearts would doubtless have extracted from his lips a fuller testimony. They would have sought to know whether this cheerful hope proceeded from insensibility to the dreadful demerit of sin, or flowed from quiet trust in a Redeemer's blood. But let those judge who knew his perfect truthfulness, whether, in a dying hour, he was the man to "palter in a double sense;" or whether such a suggestion to surviving relatives can import less than that he stood upon the same ground of hope with them, in a Saviour's pardoning love. Blessed be God for this solace to our woe! And with this voice of benediction, we commit his body to the earth, and his soul to God who gave it.