

**DISCOURSE**

**COMMEMORATIVE OF THE LATE**

**HON. AMBROSE SPENCER.,**

**BY WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.**

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COMMEMORATIVE OF THE LATE

HON. AMBROSE SPENCER,

LATE

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BY WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.

MINISTER OF THE SAID CHURCH.



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## DISCOURSE.

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### II. SAMUEL III, 38.

*“Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?”*

The illustrious personage here referred to is Abner, the uncle of King Saul, and, for some time, a general in his army. After Saul's death, his son Ishbosheth succeeded to the throne, and Abner still zealously supported the interests of his house in opposition to David; but in most of their skirmishes, (for their hostile meetings amounted to nothing more,) he suffered a defeat. While the two armies were encamped near each other in the neighborhood of Gibeon, Abner barbarously challenged Joab, one of David's generals, to put forward twelve men from his ranks, to meet an equal number of his own in deadly conflict. The challenge was accepted; the fight ensued; and every one of them was slain by the sword of his fellow. A general battle took place immediately after, in which Abner was defeated and put to flight; and being hotly pursued by Asahel, one of David's thirty heroes, and being unable to dissuade him from his pursuit, he turned upon him and thrust his spear into his side, so that

he fell dead on the spot. He was, however, still pursued by Joab and Abishai, and would, in all probability, have suffered another yet more terrible discomfiture, but for the earnest appeal that he made to the mercy of his pursuers.

Shortly after this, Abner having become incensed against Ishbosheth, by reason of a charge of unworthy conduct which he had brought against him, solemnly vowed unto the Lord that he would "translate the kingdom from the house of Saul, and set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah." And forthwith he entered into a correspondence with David, and actually had a private meeting with him, with a view to the accomplishment of his purpose. When Joab came to be informed of this, he had no confidence in Abner's sincerity, and expressed to David, his uncle, the full conviction that he was only playing the spy upon his movements; and he immediately so far took the matter into his own hands, as to despatch to Abner a messenger, with a request that he would return for the purpose of some farther communication with the king. Abner, unsuspecting of any evil design, complied with the request; and the moment that he appeared in Joab's presence, the wretch, without asking any explanation, or preferring any charge, coolly let out his heart's blood. It was an offering no doubt partly to revenge and partly to ambition; for while he looked upon Abner as the murderer of his brother, he was not without apprehension that he might become a formidable rival to himself.

When the tidings were communicated to David, he expressed the strongest disapprobation, and even the bitterest anguish. He ordained a splendid funeral, and pronounced a lofty eulogy, and actually wept over his grave. It was on this occasion that he gave utterance to his feelings in the striking language of our text: "Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?"

There is a sense in which all men are great; for that which hath reason and immortality, compared with whatever is irrational and evanescent, gathers a degree of importance that outruns all finite comprehension. When human nature is viewed in this light, there is not a form of it so humble but that I can, with a good conscience, reverently bow before it. I may discover marks of weakness and insignificance and even debasement, but so long as I can trace out that which I know must have come by the inspiration of the Almighty, I dare not say that there is not greatness there. Nevertheless, when we use this term in application to men, we more frequently compare them with others of their own species than with the inferior orders of existence. We say that a man is rendered great among his fellows, by his superior intellect, or his superior acquirements, or his superior courage, or by some providential arrangement of circumstances securing his earthly elevation; and the noblest type of human greatness never exists but in connection with the sanctifying influences of Christianity. There are a few men scattered through society whose superi-

ority is universally acknowledged. Some are lights of the church; some are pillars of the state; some win their laurels upon the battle field; some shine as the revealers of nature's secrets. You may call them great any where, and nobody will dispute you. But there is not one of them so great, but that, like the illustrious man referred to in the text, at some period or other, and by some instrumentality or other, he dies. And *when* such an one dies,—*such* an one especially,—it becometh us all to remember that the voice of the Lord is in it. Lend me your attention then, while, in accordance with the spirit of the text, and in response to the claims of the occasion, I endeavour to lead you into a brief train of reflection on

#### THE DEATH OF THE GREAT.

1. The death of the great strikingly illustrates the supremacy and independence of God.

It is a signal proof of the perversion of the human faculties that a forgetfulness of God, an insensibility to his presence and even his existence, is often cherished by those very teachings and influences which should preserve an unceasing remembrance of him. Consider, for instance, the uniformity of the divine administration, as it appears both in nature and providence. Wherefore is it that those bright orbs above us have been, for so many ages, wheeling their course through immensity, with un-deviating regularity; and that the planet which we inhabit is the theatre of an economy so fixed that

almost every thing in respect to it is subject to minute calculation; — wherefore, I ask, is this wonderful exhibition of design and contrivance, but to keep man continually mindful of the Creator's wisdom and goodness; and yet out of this very feature of the divine administration, man frames an argument for cherishing the spirit at least, if not the principles, of atheism. Now it must be acknowledged that it is no anomaly in the course of events for men to die, — even for great men to die. On the contrary, this is just as much a part of the established order of things, as it is that the sun should shine by day and the moon and the stars by night. Nevertheless, there is that in the death of a great man, which is eminently fitted to administer a rebuke to those who would cast God out of their thoughts. They have been accustomed to contemplate him as among the more gifted and favoured of his race. They have identified him with various plans in aid of the improvement and elevation of society. Perhaps they have lived within the immediate range of his benign influence, and have been accustomed to listen to his words of wisdom from day to day. And when he dies, a chasm ensues, of which they can not be insensible. Whether they have only admired him for his greatness or also loved him for his benefactions, his death is fitted to make an impression on their minds far deeper and more enduring than the death of an ordinary man. And that must be an iron insensibility that shall keep them, in these circumstances,

from thinking of God. Who but the Infinite, the Supreme, raised him up, and allotted to him his sphere of action, and at his pleasure numbered him with the dead? Surely here has been an agency that tells most impressively of an Almighty Agent. It were strange that mortals should forget God's supremacy any where: it would seem impossible that they should forget it around the tombs of the great.

But if the death of eminent men illustrates the supremacy of God, not less does it illustrate his independence; and the one results necessarily from the other. When man has formed an instrument exactly fitted to the accomplishment of some important purpose, he preserves and cherishes it with the utmost care; and with the loss of it he would perhaps identify, in expectation, the certain failure of his purpose. The reason is that man is a being of limited faculties; and the fact that he has succeeded in one thing conveys no assurance that he shall be able to succeed in another. But with the Infinite it is not so. As he is boundless in his resources, he can never be straitened for means wherewith to accomplish his ends. Here he brings forward one of eminent gifts and virtues; and in the midst of his vigor and usefulness changes his countenance and sends him away. There he preserves the life of a great man to old age; but he is taken away at last, when it would seem to us that he had lost nothing of his wisdom and little of his power; and that both might have been kept in requisition



still longer for the benefit of the race. But He is not dependant upon this or that or any instrument for the accomplishment of his purposes; his omnipotence secures to him perfect independence of all. And we ought to be thankful rather than to complain, if, in his wisdom and goodness, He is pleased to remove the great and good whom He has employed a while on earth to a higher sphere, that others may enter into their earthly labours, and also be trained up for nobler services and a glorious reward.

2. The death of the great puts man, at his best state, in humiliating contrast with his Maker.

We sometimes see man in his *lowest* state; perhaps originally imbecile, and scarcely at all improved by culture; perhaps debased by sensuality and branded by society as a drone or a curse. But this humble, pitiable type of humanity we will pass over, and limit our views to some noble specimen; to a man of splendid intellect, and generous aspirations; a man whose voice has been power, whose thoughts have become the property of the world, and whose memory posterity will account it a privilege to embalm. You have admired his greatness in life: come now and contemplate him in the weakness, the helplessness, the humiliation of death. Perhaps the king of terrors has thrown out his signals to announce his approach. The heart and the flesh may have begun to fail; the memory may have lost its power to retain; the clear and strong operations of the intellect may have given place to the

febleness of infancy or the ravings of delirium; the days and nights may be one continuous round of restlessness and prostration and pain, until, at length, the last pulsation announces that the shadows of the night of death are there. And after that, you may see him in his grave clothes, you may see him in his coffin, and if you will, you may see him, after corruption and the worm have set up their dominion over him. You knew him once as "a prince and a great man;" but see how death has sported with all that greatness!

And what is man,—what is even the greatest of men, in the presence of his Maker? "Man dieth and wasteth away;" but God is "the King eternal and immortal." Man dieth leaving his purposes unaccomplished; but God "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." Man goeth into corruption and darkness; God dwelleth forever in the "light inaccessible." If I have been tempted to be proud of my nature, when I have felt the beamings of some glorious intellect in all its goodness and prime, surely I have been relieved from the temptation when I have seen the same intellect sinking in imbecility and finally passing away in death, and at the same time have lifted my eyes upward to Him who is the "Creator of the ends of the earth," and who "fainteth not, neither is weary."

3. The death of the great deposits with the future the accumulated influence of their life, thereby giving not only perpetuity but a sort of ubiquity to their earthly existence.

When an individual dies, though we believe that he still exists with all his capacities for action and enjoyment in another state, yet we are accustomed to say that he has done with the present world; that he has no longer any share in any thing that is done under the sun. And in one sense certainly this is true: he is no longer personally here, to be an actor in life's scenes, or a partaker of its joys and sorrows. But in another sense he *is* here: he is represented, perpetuated, in the influence of what he has been and what he has done; and that influence operates in an ever widening range and an ever increasing intensity. This remark applies indeed to the humblest individual, whether good or bad; for no man's condition is so insulated, but that he exerts *some* influence; and it belongs to the very nature of influence that it is perpetual. But the remark has a much more striking application to those who are endowed with eminent gifts and who occupy the high places of society. Suppose a man to have been active in framing or in executing his country's laws; or suppose him to have been the originator or the chief patron of some great benevolent institution; or suppose him to have given a favourable impulse and direction to the public mind on any subject deeply involving the public weal; rely on it, such a person, so far as respects his influence on earth, has only just begun to live, when the grave takes him into its charge. He lives not only in the habits of individuals, but in the general structure of society. He lives in the opinions and

feelings and enjoyments of those who never saw his face,—possibly never heard his name. He lives in the energies of other great minds that may have been waked into exercise by the contemplation of his example. And as influence is forever cumulative, the longer he sleeps in the grave, the wider and the more intense is his dominion over the living. Yes, I repeat, though death, in taking away the great, seems sometimes to sport with the hopes of society, and as the case may be, covers a state or even a nation with sackcloth, yet the influence of their worthy or illustrious deeds he spares to the world. He leaves it as a rich fountain of blessing to be a witness for them on earth, after their spirits are in Heaven.

Take an example or two. The brightest star of his age, perhaps I may say of any age, was Paul. And the influence which he had exerted, when he was taken to his reward, transcends the limit of human calculation. But Paul had only begun to fulfil his mission then. He always has been and always will be, one of the master spirits of Christianity. The very air that we breathe in our closets and in our sanctuaries, is consecrated by his presence; and every instrumentality that is put in operation for the renovation of the world, is identified with his great and heroic spirit. Luther was the giant of the Reformation, and the history of his earthly course is the history of a mighty mind and of glorious exploits; but he had only begun his work upon earth when his visible career closed. His

greater work has been accomplished while he has been still in his tomb. And the light and glory that pervade some countries, and the deep heavings of society that are manifested in others, bear witness that his work is still upon the advance. Washington was the presiding genius of our Revolution. The battle field, the senate house, every spot on which he paused, or over which he passed, testified to his greatness; and he who undertakes to tell the story of his life, feels that he needs almost a life to tell it. But who shall chronicle his later deeds? Who shall estimate the amount of good which he has accomplished, is accomplishing continually, by means of these free institutions which he has given us? Who shall say how far his spirit is at work in remodelling the fabric of society in other countries; in overturning the thrones of tyrants, and bidding the oppressed stand erect and breathe the air of civil freedom? Peace to the ashes of our Washington; but God speed his influence in helping forward the great cause of the world's renovation!

4. The death of the great is fitted to quicken the aspirations of the living, and especially of the young, for higher measures of improvement and usefulness.

When a great man dies, notwithstanding he still continues to live in the influence of the past, yet a perceptible chasm ensues in the various circles in which he has moved. If he have been specially a public man, connected with the higher movements of

church or state, the vacancy consequent upon his death is felt to be an important one,—one which can be advantageously filled only by some kindred spirit. Or even if he have occupied no public station, yet if he have been an active labourer for good in some private field,—if he have consecrated the energies of his great mind to the improvement of society while he has been shut up in his closet,—still there should be some fitting occupant for the place that hath known him and shall know him no more. For the influence of the living is necessary not only to guide and give effect to the influence of the dead, not only to sustain the good instrumentalities already in existence, but to originate and sustain others, with a view to widen the sphere as well as to quicken the impulses of an active beneficence. What an argument this with every generous mind, especially with every young man who loves his country or his race, to aim at the highest culture of his faculties, with a view to occupy the places of honourable usefulness, which, from time to time, are vacated by death. The great and the wise are continually passing off the stage, and to whom shall society look, a little while hence, if not to you who are now in the spring time of life, to guide its movements and guard its interests? And besides, does not the example of illustrious men often become both more impressive and more attractive, after they are gone? When the grave has closed upon them, you insensibly lose sight in a great measure of the infirmities by which their

characters may have been marred, while their great and good qualities seem to gather a brighter lustre. And then the grave throws around them an air of sacredness, which seems to enforce their claim upon your regard; and if you turn away from them with indifference, you feel not only that you deal unjustly with their memories, but that you dishonour your own nature. Happy were it for every young man, if he were so imbued with the spirit of right that he could not pass the sepulchre of any eminent patriot or eminent philanthropist, without reverently pausing and forming a new resolution to live for the benefit of his country and of the world.

5. The death of the great may well heighten our estimate of the powers of the world to come.

It is impossible, constituted as we are in the present world, but that the visible should be, to some extent, our standard of judging of the invisible. The eye of sense can not look beyond the veil; nevertheless our estimate of what exists there, takes its complexion in a degree from what we witness and experience here. The beings with whom we are conversant on earth, after having sojourned here for a little period, pass on to become inhabitants of the world unseen; and though we know that in the transition from one world to another, they undergo a mighty change, yet in all the substantial qualities of their character, we can not doubt that their identity remains. Heaven is the final gathering place of the good; and when we see powerful and cultivated minds, passing off under the sustaining

influence of Christian faith, to a world where every thing will be favourable to their ever increasing exaltation; and especially when we remember that these belong to the humblest race that finds a place among Heaven's inhabitants,—what limit can our conceptions assign to the strength and beauty that will be found in God's upper sanctuary. Ye lights of the world,—Newton and Leighton and Edwards and Butler and Chalmers,—we are lost in the grandeur of your discoveries, or in the depth of your researches, even while you were here seeing through a glass darkly;—but how shall we estimate the greatness of your faculties now that they are unfolding and operating in the light of Heaven;—especially how shall we estimate the intellectual glory of the world in which ye dwell, when we bear in mind that there are myriads of beings there of whom ye may be learners! Language fails, imagination halts and sinks, before the powers of the world to come;—especially the powers of light and glory.

6. In the death of the great, where greatness is crowned with goodness, we see wisdom eminently justified of her children.

The death of every true Christian is a witness for the truth and power of Christianity. No matter though he who is dying be an inmate of the obscurest hovel; no matter though his mind have never been enlightened, except on the one great subject of Christ and his salvation; yet the faith that dislodges fear and brings triumph even to such



a one in the closing hour should be regarded as a certificate for Christianity that ought to make the infidel blush. But it happens in respect to religion as every thing else, that the world are governed by the authority of names; and there are multitudes with whom the most triumphant death-scene of a poor and illiterate man will pass for nothing, because it will be set to the account of ignorance or enthusiasm. But let a man of acknowledged greatness of intellect, especially one whose vocation is in no wise identified with Christianity, and whose voice has often made itself heard to the extremities of the nation on subjects of political import, — let such a one lie down upon his death bed with the spirit of an humble disciple, — let him talk freely and humbly and exultingly of the cross of Christ as his only refuge, and let it be seen that his great mind is reposing there with holy serenity on his passage through the dark valley, — and you may rest assured that his voice will be heard in death with far more attention and reverence than it was in life. Will the scoffer dare to ridicule that as a phantom which such a mind, in the most honest hour, grasped as its very life? Will not the skeptic think it best to review the grounds, on which he has cast away Christianity, when a far greater than he having examined it well, is resting his hope upon it for eternity? Will not the worldly minded man who has thought that religion might be postponed where there was any thing more of the world to be gained, be rebuked out of his delusion by the actings of

that triumphant faith? In many respects the great and the insignificant are on an equality in death; but you may rest assured that the great man who dies peacefully and triumphantly is peculiarly privileged as a witness for his religion. The testimony which he renders, not only acts powerfully upon those who stand around his death bed, but it survives him, treasured in many hearts; and it will work for the honour of his Master long after he has gone to mingle in brighter scenes.

That a great man and a prince hath just fallen, or rather hath found his final resting place, in the midst of *us*, I may say without the fear of contradiction. In connecting with our accustomed religious service a tribute to his memory, I do not forget that he was never, strictly speaking, a member of this congregation, and that he belonged ultimately to a different communion from our own. But still I love to feel that there was a sense in which he was one of *us*. He had near relatives here with whom he often came to mingle in our worship; some of us looked upon him as a devoted and generous friend; and all regarded him with respect and veneration. I acknowledge that, in speaking of him thus publicly, I am obeying the impulses of a strong personal attachment; but, in doing so, I have no fear that I shall offend against your convictions of what is befitting the place or the occasion. His character is the property of the whole community; and I, as a member of the community, have a right to pay to it a passing tribute.

The history of his life which will no doubt, ere long, under some master hand, expand into at least a volume, I must be contented to compress into a few brief sentences.

Our venerable friend was born at Salisbury, Connecticut, December 13, 1765. He entered Yale College in 1779, and continued there till the commencement of the last year of his course, when, in consequence of the operations of college being disturbed by the war, he transferred his relation to the university at Cambridge, where he graduated with high reputation in 1783. Having pursued the study of the law under two or three highly respectable jurists, he was admitted as a practising attorney in 1786; and shortly after this, became a resident of the neighboring city of Hudson. In 1786 he was appointed clerk of that city. In 1793 he was elected by the county of Columbia a member of the assembly of this state. In 1795 and again in 1798 he was chosen a member of the senate. In 1802 he was appointed Attorney-General. In 1804 he was appointed a Justice, and in 1819 Chief Justice, of our Supreme Court. In 1829 he was chosen a representative of this district to the Congress of the United States. In these several stations he acquitted himself with signal ability; though it was doubtless in a judicial capacity, in which also he was occupied for the longest time, that he gathered his brightest professional laurels.

At the expiration of his term in Congress, he retired from public life, though he still retained the

deepest interest in all the political movements of the country and the world, and sometimes lent a direct personal influence in aid of objects which he regarded as of great national moment. For several years he resided in the neighborhood of the city, devoting himself chiefly to agricultural pursuits; but in 1839 he removed to the village of Lyons, where, with the exception of occasional visits which he made here and elsewhere, he passed the residue of his days. He lived there a fine example of dignity, simplicity and hospitality. He had always a generous welcome for his friends; and many have enjoyed the luxury of walking with him over his pleasant grounds and listening to his edifying conversation. His faculties both physical and intellectual have continued, up to a very recent period without any perceptible abatement of their vigour. There was an elasticity in his movements and a power in his conversation, which obliged us to look away from both to his somewhat furrowed visage, before we could fully realize that he was an old man. But disease, that mighty agent before which the strongest bow, at length marked him as his victim. In the course of the last summer the tidings came to us that his health had begun to decline, and that some were apprehensive that the silver cord might quickly be loosed. For some time we were met with alternate messages of hopefulness and of discouragement; but at length we were constrained to yield to a certain expectation of a fatal issue of his disease. Several of the last months of

his life were marked not only by progressive decay but by intense suffering; and yet until within a few weeks of his death, his mental faculties have retained well nigh their accustomed vigour; in so much that, in one instance, when a near friend ventured to ask his opinion upon a difficult law case, he not only answered most promptly and satisfactorily, but referred him at once to the proper authority; and in another case, when the same friend was conversing with him on the subject of our recent treaty with Mexico, and hesitated in respect to the name of a particular place, the memory of the venerable old man instantly supplied it. There is one, and that the most interesting feature of his illness, of which I shall speak in another connection. Suffice it to say, here, that after an illness of more than nine months, and an actual confinement to his bed of more than five; in the midst of the most exemplary filial attentions and in the bosom of a community who revered him as a sage and a patriarch, he sunk calmly to his final rest.

I must say something now of the *character* of Judge Spencer; and I rejoice that I can speak of it without reserve and without embarrassment. I am well aware that during a large part of his life he was earnestly, hotly engaged in the strife of politics; and it were to be expected that hostility to the measures would sometimes grow into hostility to the man. But thanks to a gracious Providence, party spirit rarely outlives the individual who is the object of it. It generally yields to a withdrawal

from public life, especially in connection with a serene and dignified old age; but it must have gathered a most unwonted intensesness, in order to withstand the withering influence of an association with the grave. I speak in the hearing of those who have differed widely and earnestly from our friend in respect to his political maxims and conduct; but I rejoice to believe that I do not speak to an individual who does not now venerate his memory, and who will not gladly follow me in the brief notices which I am to offer of his extraordinary endowments and qualities.

If I were obliged to give my views of his character within the limits of a single sentence, I should not know how to do it better than by saying that he was great in his whole nature; and that in his original constitution, the intellectual, the moral, the physical, were brought together in admirable proportions. If I mistake not, we may successfully reach an analysis of his character, by referring to the three distinct points of quickness, clearness, strength.

#### QUICKNESS.

The operations of his intellect outstripped the lightning. More would be revealed to him by a single glance at a difficult subject than most minds would gather from a process of diligent and protracted research. Nevertheless his mind would not rest in a conclusion unless he could feel assured that he had actually availed himself of all the light

at his command; and he had the faculty, in an eminent degree, of holding an abstruse subject to his thoughts in patient investigation, until he had fathomed its depths and mastered its difficulties. In respect to nothing, perhaps, was his discernment more remarkable than human character. From a few minutes conversation, even with a stranger, he would generally take an accurate measurement of both his intellectual and moral qualities; and many a man has been weighed in his balance and found wanting in his head or his heart, who has not dreamed of attracting his notice,—much less of being an object of his scrutiny. And there was a corresponding quickness pervading the operations of his moral nature, especially his passions. With a high native sense of honour, he could never brook a mean action; and where he saw or thought he saw anything like this, the depths of his spirit would often be stirred in indignation, in the twinkling of an eye. And the same quality pertained even to the movements of his body. Though there was nothing hurried in his gait, that seemed to say that he was trying to overtake something that had escaped him, yet there was an energy and rapidity of motion that told that he had something to do, and that he was able to do it. As he has walked our streets even in his old age, I have known persons stop and gaze with surprise at the lightness and the vigour of his step, which, however, was chiefly remarkable as being an index to a corresponding vigour of intellect and buoyancy of spirits.

## CLEARNESS.

In respect to the intellect at least, this quality is closely connected with the preceding, and gives it all its value; for it matters little how rapid may be the mind's movements, provided it moves only in a mist. Judge Spencer saw in the light of noonday whatever subject occupied his thoughts. Even if when he first contemplated it, he found it lying in thick darkness, he was sure to hold it to his mind till it was relieved from all perplexity. And what was clear to himself he had the ability of rendering clear to others; and this he did, not by tedious illustration or circumlocution, but by a process so short and direct and simple, that the hearer was often left to marvel that he had not reached the same point from his own independent reflection. I am not aware that he had ever any relish for mere metaphysical or philosophical speculation: he delighted rather to expatiate in the broad field of common sense realities. But if his mind had taken a different turn,—if he had been a philosopher instead of a judge and a statesman, he would have been a model of clearness in his speculations and reasonings. And with this transparency of thought was united an honesty, an integrity of purpose, that could scarcely fail to awaken both confidence and respect. I never heard him charged with dissimulation: I do not believe that he was capable of it. However you might differ from him in his views, you could not resist the impression that he



spoke from the depths of his own convictions. He could keep no terms with even the semblance of duplicity or intrigue; and I doubt whether he ever came in contact with it, but that it met a scathing rebuke. And the inflexible honesty of his spirit imprinted itself upon his countenance; it spoke in his whole air and manner; and you must have kept even out of sight of the man, if you would have harboured a contrary suspicion.

#### STRENGTH.

This no doubt must be regarded as the leading element of his constitution. In his intellect there was such a preponderance of the more solid qualities, as cast whatever of the imaginative he may have possessed, into the shade. He had a strength of judgment that forbade all trifling with his opinion. He had a strength of memory that rendered it difficult to appeal from it with success in respect to any thing that he had ever known. He had the reasoning faculty, the ability to grapple with difficult subjects, and send an adversary to the wall, in a degree of strength that was sometimes exceedingly inconvenient to those who ventured to oppose him. And passing from the intellectual to the moral, we find the same characteristic no less strongly marked. There was a strength of feeling and of purpose that was as irresistible as the mountain torrent. His feelings of affection towards those whom he loved, kept them continually enchained to his heart. His feelings of compassion towards those whom he re-

garded as injured, awoke his great mind into vigorous exercise. His feelings of indignation towards the acknowledged originators or abettors of evil, sometimes burst forth in storm and lightning. Without any thing of ostentatious defiance, there was an independence, a courage, a loftiness of spirit, that even the skilful and the well armed hesitated to assail. And in this respect also his noble form was worthy of the spirit that dwelt in it: strong, manly, majestic, it proclaimed every where the actings of a great mind and a great heart.

After having said thus much of the elements of his character as they were moulded by education and habit, I scarcely need speak of what he was in his various relations. Nevertheless, I can not forbear to say that in the more private and especially the domestic walks of life, he was a model of whatever was exemplary and affectionate. I remember well when his excellent wife, during her last protracted illness, was struggling beneath an overwhelming burden of spiritual depression, — notwithstanding he could not be supposed at the time to have formed the same practical estimate of the case as he would have done at a later period, under the influence of more decided religious feelings, — yet he exhibited, during the whole scene, the most exemplary patience and tenderness, and was always on the alert for some new expedient to mitigate her suffering. In the ordinary intercourse of life he was at once dignified in his condescension and condescending in his dignity. He never crouched to

the great on the one hand or scorned the insignificant on the other. In his more public relations, especially in his judicial character, if a universal and uncontradicted testimony may be relied on, it is not easy to speak of him in terms of exaggerated praise. The quickness and the clearness of his perceptions, his uncompromising integrity, and the strength and fearlessness that pertained to all his decisions, rendered him a great light amidst one of the brightest clusters of judicial talent that have adorned any state or age. His character as a politician I shall leave to politicians to portray; though I may adventure this remark,—that whatever his political opinions may have been, they were held with honesty and defended with power.

I have thus given you a rapid, but so far as I could a faithful, sketch of the character of our venerated friend, as it has been exhibited during the greater part of his life; but I bless the Giver of all good that I am not obliged to stop here, leaving out that which constitutes the most substantial element of ultimate greatness; I mean a practical and public recognition of the high claims of Christianity. It was not till he had retired from the more active scenes of life, (and in this respect I do not commend him as a model,—for every one should give himself to the service of his Creator and Redeemer from the very commencement of his existence),—it was not till he had become disconnected, in a great measure, with the public service, that he seems to have been brought into the attitude of

decided and earnest inquiry on the most momentous of all subjects; and then, under the faithful ministrations of an excellent Episcopal clergyman<sup>1</sup> for whom he ever afterwards entertained the most grateful and affectionate regard, his mind was brought, as he believed, to repose in the gracious provisions and promises of the gospel. In a letter bearing date, September 16th 1841, he writes thus to his daughter: "I propose on the next sabbath to approach the communion table, and partake of that ordinance instituted by our blessed Saviour, as an evidence of our belief in Him, and of our sincere and heartfelt repentance for our sins. God grant me his spirit that I may do so with a sincere heart and the most devout feelings. I anticipate that this annunciation will impart to you the greatest satisfaction and joy." In accordance with this communication, he joined the Episcopal church at Lyons and remained in constant and devout communion with it to the close of life.

In my personal intercourse with him during the period that has elapsed since he became a communicant, I have noticed with great pleasure the frequent and earnest movements of his mind towards subjects connected with the progress of Christ's kingdom; and on one occasion at least he referred with the deepest interest, but with great apparent humility, to the happy change of which he believed himself to have been the subject. His attendance on public worship, so long as his health would per-

<sup>1</sup> Rev. S. Cook, now Rector of St. Paul's Church, New Haven.

mit, was most exemplary; and during the period of his long confinement, he has been not a little quickened and sustained by having the communion administered to him in his own chamber. He built an altar to the Lord in his family, and regularly bowed the knee in an offering of domestic prayer and praise. But I confess that the most beautiful incident that I have heard of in connection with his Christian life, has respect to the deep interest which he felt in regard to the spiritual welfare of some of his oldest friends. There were two individuals<sup>1</sup> especially, towards whom his respect and affection had been the regular growth of nearly a whole life, with whom he had mingled much not only in private intercourse but in public service,—both of them, like himself, men of intellectual might and of distinguished name,—in relation to whose higher interests he felt such intense anxiety, that he ventured to address to each of them a letter, suggesting the importance of giving their thoughts more particularly to this greatest of all concerns. Both letters were received with gratitude and pondered with earnest attention; and both were answered in a way that gave to our friend the most intense satisfaction. The result was that both these eminent individuals, before their death, were followers of his example, in making a public profession of their faith in the Saviour. God alone knoweth the heart; but there is something exquisitely touching and delightful in the thought, that

<sup>1</sup> Gen. Armstrong and Chancellor Kent.

of three illustrious minds, the very patriarchs of society, — one should be the guide, the others should be the followers, to the cross of Christ.

Of his last illness I can speak only from the testimony of friends who ministered to him; but from all that I have heard, I can not doubt that he furnished a lovely and edifying example of the genuine Christian spirit. In a letter to his daughter, written at an early period of his illness, and before his case had become specially alarming, he says,—“I enjoy great serenity of mind, and can contemplate divine things with unspeakable satisfaction;” and this seems to have been a faithful description of the state of his mind during the residue of his life. Though he ~~was~~ was not indifferent to passing events, and especially to the great interests of his country, for whose prosperity his heart was always beating in strong pulsations, yet it was evident that he was chiefly engrossed by those spiritual exercises which bring man nearest to his Maker, and which constitute the appropriate preparation for an introduction to his immediate presence. Though his sufferings were intense, they were mingled with unqualified submission, with expressions of humble trust and hope, such as take away the terror of the death bed; or if his patience sometimes temporarily yielded to paroxysms of bodily agony, it was followed by the most affecting exhibition of humility and penitence. It was his earnest desire to depart and be with Christ; and so long as his mind could grasp any thing, the thoughts of Christ and of heavenly

glory seemed, in a great degree, to occupy it. His friends who were so often witnesses to the breathings of his spirit in devotion, and who finally saw his majestic frame sink under the power of the destroyer, felt a joyful confidence that the one entered into the rest of Heaven to mingle with saints and seraphs, the other into the rest of the grave to await a glorious resurrection.

When I look round and see how the graves of the eminent have lately been multiplying, I can not resist the impression that God is calling upon the country at large, in a tone of no ordinary impressiveness, to put herself in the attitude of humiliation, in acknowledgement of his mighty hand. It was but the other day that the illustrious Kent was taken; a man endeared to all who knew him, by his private virtues, and venerated every where as among the judicial lights of the age. And while the great and universal sensation produced by his death had yet scarcely begun to subside, the tidings went forth from the heart of the nation, that the venerable Adams was not, — for death had smitten *him* also; that he had died with his armour on, full of years and of honours. And passing by others of distinguished name whom the grave has since claimed, Spencer has now followed in their track; than whom, — I say it advisedly, — the nation has rarely had a greater man to lose. I look over society, and am constrained to ask in relation to those noble minds, that illumined the last age, — “Where are they?” I search the College catalogue,

and with few exceptions, I find associated with their names the ominous star pointing to the grave. In the class of which our lamented friend was a graduate, the name of the venerable Otis still lingers, as among the living;<sup>1</sup> and here and there in our own walks, we meet with one of these noble relics and witnesses of the past; but they stand like solitary survivors of a thick forest, which the woodman's axe has spared. Blessings rest upon their heads while they live, and Heaven receive their spirits when they die! But I say again, let the nation learn wisdom at the graves of her mighty dead. Let there be something more than form, — let there be spirit and power, in her mourning. Let the virtues of the departed be reproduced in those who survive, and again in those who are hereafter to be; and may each passing generation excel in wisdom and strength and purity, all that preceded it.

And now who will not say, in view of our meditations, that Practical Christianity, — Christianity in the heart and in the life, constitutes the crowning attribute of a noble character. I venerate a lofty intellect; for I recognize in it a bright spark of the divinity. I admire a generous and heroic spirit, that wakes instinctively to the claims of friendship or patriotism or philanthropy. I would not take a laurel from the brow of the statesman or the judge, that has been earned by an honest devotion to the public weal. Let the energies and graces that are the product of nature and education, as well as the

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Otis has deceased since this discourse was delivered.



distinctions of society which may be consequent upon them, — all pass for what they are worth; but let nothing of this kind venture to intrude itself into a comparison with that incomparably higher dignity and excellence which living Christianity imparts to its votaries. This makes man the admiration of angels, and fits him to be their companion. This secures to him the indwelling of God in his own bosom. This puts Heaven's mark upon him while he is yet a sojourner in this dark and stormy world. This preserves in his mind an abiding, practical consciousness of his glorious destination. Oh when this vision of spiritual greatness and purity and immortality comes up before me, I am ready to say, Only let me be a true disciple of Christ, and then take your choice whether a palace or a hovel shall be my earthly dwelling place!

Is there any brighter form in which Christianity is ever seen, than as the quickener and the helper of a powerful intellect and of venerable old age? To see a mind before whose profound and mighty workings the world are accustomed to bow,—itself bowing in an attitude of humble discipleship at the Saviour's feet;—its regenerate faculties moving under a heavenly impulse and brightening into increasing vigour and purity;—Oh is there not something here to aid our conceptions of the greatness and the glory of the third Heavens? And especially when you see Christianity in communion with such a mind amidst the infirmities of old age,—the period when the almond tree flourishes and the

daughters of music are brought low;—when you see how it connects itself as a principle of strength with weakness, and as a fountain of light with darkness;—and especially when you notice its operations in kindling rapture in the eye, as it beholds the star of immortal life rising out of the shadows of the tomb,—I ask, with confidence, in what language will you show forth the praises of all glorious Christianity? Venerable old men, ye are emphatically lights in the world! Blessed are ye who mourn for such; for God comforts you with unwonted consolation. Blessed are we who have witnessed such examples; for they are among the rarest lessons of truth and virtue and wisdom. Who would not say, I would not live alway, — but would go, whenever God calls, to join the communion of illustrious minds.