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A D D R E S S

AT THE FUNERAL OF

MRS. SUSAN C. POHLMAN.

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AN  
ADDRESS  
DELIVERED IN THE  
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN EBENEZER CHURCH,  
ALBANY,  
ON OCCASION OF  
THE FUNERAL  
OF  
MRS. SUSAN C. POHLMAN,  
WIFE OF THE  
REV. HENRY N. POHLMAN, D. D.

NOVEMBER 10, 1863.

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BY WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.

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## FUNERAL ADDRESS.

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The Christian's course of preparation for Heaven, though always involving more or less of trial and conflict, is generally, to a great extent, a scene of joyful trust and hope. And why should it not be so? For, in becoming a Christian, his relations to God, and death, and the judgment, and the eternal future, have undergone a mighty change. The rebel has been turned into a loyal subject, an obedient child; the dark valley is found to lie on the borders of Heaven and to open directly into it; the day of final retribution becomes a day of glorious acquittal and reward; and eternity rises before the soul in visions of boundless, matchless rapture. Well may such an one be happy amidst even the most untoward worldly circumstances—happy in wearing the robe of the Redeemer's righteousness; happy in being a temple of the Holy Ghost; happy in the privilege of commanding the resources of

almighty power and unchanging love ; happy in the assurance that the earthly tabernacle shall fall only to make way for the building of God.

The general rule then, no doubt, is that, according to the measure of Christian attainment, will be the measure of Christian enjoyment, in the present life—the faithful, earnest, active disciple has a right to expect, in a proportional degree, the light of God's countenance ; the concurring aids of his gracious Spirit ; and the habitual all-sustaining influence of a hope anchored within the vail. This, I say, is in accordance with the general ordinance of God—but the rule is not without exceptions. There are cases not a few, in which we are forbidden even a doubt that the Spirit has performed his effectual work upon the heart, that yet seem comparatively barren of the legitimate consolations of the good hope through grace ; cases in which the individual, though walking humbly with God, yet walks in deep darkness, and continues to do so during a large part of his Christian pilgrimage. But mark that same Christian, as he approaches the end of his course, and witness the glorious transformation of which he has now become the subject. That great enemy, Death, which has been frowning upon him in the distance all his

days, suddenly appears dressed in robes of light, waiting to do for him the friendly office of opening the gate of Heaven. The eye seems entranced as if with visions of glory; the ear begins to catch the melodies of angels; the countenance becomes illuminated by the reflection of objects from the other side of the dark boundary; and that hitherto heavy laden and desponding soul is getting ready for its upward flight, in the full assurance of faith, and proclaiming "Victory, Victory," through the Lamb that was slain.

Let us dwell, for a moment, upon the case which I have now supposed, in reference to the *agency* which determines it, and the *lessons* which it teaches.

In regard to the former, I remark that it is *the sovereign agency of God*. It *must* be so, because God orders all things according to the counsel of his own will. But if we analyze this thought a little, we shall find that the agency has a three-fold relation—namely, to Nature, Providence, and Grace.

The case of which I speak is, no doubt, in most instances at least, very nearly related to the natural temperament, the original constitution of the mind. There is a predisposition, in many minds,

to look upon the dark side of every thing; and it were to be expected that this should extend to the estimate of one's own spiritual condition. But *God* gave to the mind this peculiar individual constitution, and He has ordained the results which are necessarily secured by it. So, too, this is often the direct product of adverse circumstances;—of waves of trouble rising and beating upon the soul in a protracted and terrible succession—but who but God orders these circumstances, directs these swelling billows, so that the heart shall thus bend, and perhaps break, under the mighty burden? And, finally, is not God's grace most manifest, not only in keeping the principle of piety alive in the passage through the deep waters, and even rendering the process of suffering a process of purification, but in scattering the night clouds at last, and filling the soul with heavenly triumph, as an earnest of what awaits it on the other side of the dark valley? Yes, my friends, I repeat, it is God's sovereign agency that is here to be acknowledged. The God that made thee, the God that orders thine earthly lot, the God that has access by his grace to thine inmost heart—He it is, Christian, that makes hope spring forth out of all this darkness, and crowns the days of thy mourning with joy.

Such is the agency—now what are the *lessons*? In other words, what are some of the purposes which God designs to answer by permitting some of his saints to walk in deep waters till they get near the verge of Heaven, and then pouring upon them all the blessings of the covenant?

1. He teaches us, in the first place, that *He is not straitened in respect to the means of fitting his people for Heaven*. True, indeed, He leads them all in the same general path—it is through faith, and repentance, and obedience, and self-denial, that they are all borne onward to their immortal rest; but still each one has his own distinctive experience—each is subjected to a providential discipline in some respects peculiar. God accommodates the spiritual training of each to his peculiar characteristics of mind and heart; here appealing more directly to one set of principles, and there to another; here making large use of the rod to purify and exalt, and there accomplishing the same end by a gentler process; in one case, keeping the heart elevated in constant and often rapturous communion with Heaven, in another, keeping it bowed under the burden of doubt and despondency, with only a few feeble rays from his own reconciled countenance. But how delightful the reflection





that whether the path seem plain or obscure, whether difficult or unembarrassed, the same gracious hand is at work, and the same blessed result is in the way of being wrought out; and in each case not only is the result sure, but the best possible means are used for its accomplishment. Surely we can well afford to stay ourselves upon the assurance that, in the concern of our final triumph, matchless grace blends with almighty power and infinite wisdom.

2. The case of which I am speaking, *renders more conspicuous and impressive the triumph of Divine grace.* It results from the very constitution of our nature that we are strongly affected by contrasts. The sun never appears so glorious as in the act of bursting from a black cloud. The sabbath seems more peaceful and precious, when considered as a rest from the toil and the tumult of the week that has preceded it. The blessing of peace, as it had been continued to us, with slight interruptions, during the whole of our national existence, had come to be regarded with comparative indifference, and barely had a recognized place on the list of our mercies; but let peace resume her domain now, and be contemplated in contrast with the bloody storm that has preceded, and she

would stand forth as one of Heaven's brightest angels, and the arms of the whole nation would be open to welcome her, and the voice of the whole nation would sound forth her praises. And thus it is with the triumph of Divine grace—where the Christian has been for a long time walking in darkness, and the joys of communion with Christ have been at best feeble and interrupted,—let there come, in his last days or hours, a flood of Divine illumination pouring over his soul, and thereby proclaiming that he is at the gate of Heaven; and not only to himself but to those who look on, there is conveyed an idea of the grandeur of Christ's redeeming work, far more impressive by reason of the sad experience by which this joyful demonstration was preceded. What a contrast between that darkness that has just passed away, and this light that so exalts and entrances! Who can adequately celebrate the praises of that grace that has wrought the mighty change!

3. The case of the Christian whose night is thus turned into day, furnishes a striking illustration of *the principle of compensation* as forming part of the economy of Divine grace. You see this principle exhibited, on the grandest scale, in the great cardinal fact of the death of Christ, as taken in connec-

tion with its wonderful results. Jesus endured the agony of the cross; and this was the foundation of his mediatorial triumph—it was as a reward for that wonderful sacrifice that the multitude of redeemed souls were given to Him, and all things were put under his feet. Another example of the same principle we see in the fact that the measure of service, under the Divine administration, determines the measure of reward; for though the reward which every Christian receives is matter of pure grace, yet it is conferred in consideration of the amount of service actually rendered, in connection with the number of talents antecedently bestowed. And so in regard to disappointments, and bereavements, and other temporal afflictions to which the Christian is subjected—they are often a sore trial both to nature and to grace; but, after all, they open a rich channel of blessing into the soul; and, unless it be the Christian's own fault, this sowing in tears will be followed by a harvest of joy. Analogous to these several cases is that which I am endeavouring to illustrate—for all that darkness and despondency that has been brooding over the soul so long, do we not witness the beginning of a gracious compensation, to have its full legitimate development in the next world?

Is not that light to be set over against that darkness; not on the ground of any thing having been withheld from the believer to which he was justly entitled, but simply in accordance with one feature of that gracious arrangement, by which God prepares his people for Heaven.

4. I observe, once more, that the case of the desponding Christian, finally awaking to life and joy, is fitted at once to *promote humility* and to *encourage confidence*.

Ye who are inclined to congratulate yourselves that your mountain stands strong, behold that Christian, on whom you distinctly recognize the image of the Master shining out amidst all the darkness—behold him, perhaps suffering from some physical malady which has found its way, as a cause of depression, to his mind; perhaps walking in a cloud which the adversary has contrived to bring around him—from *some* cause, the evidences of his adoption are obscured, and an awful gloom rests upon the future. And is it so that Christ's own ransomed ones, those who are far on their way to Heaven, are yet such imperfect saints that they can not grasp God's gracious promises, and must be kept in bondage to doubt and fear till they are within a single step of Heaven—then

surely, Christian, it becometh thee to walk humbly, in view not only of what some of thy fellow disciples are, but of what thou art thyself liable to become: be humble that thou art a poor weak Christian at best, and hast no strength but what comes down to thee from above. And what an argument is here for renewed confidence in the Saviour; confidence in his power and grace to remove any obstacle, to meet any emergency! Are the shadows of spiritual night already gathering over thy soul; and dost thou become faint-hearted at the thought of encountering the monster at the end of thy course—but remember that thou hast nothing to fear if thou art in communion with the Conqueror of death. Look at that humble Christian, coming out of thick darkness to put on his immortal robes; testifying, as he moves along through the valley of death, to the faithfulness of the Lord his Shepherd; and be not afraid but that thou too, if thou art faithful, shalt be cared for, and feel the everlasting arm around thee, in the hour of thy greatest need.

Our errand to the house of God this afternoon points back to a desolate dwelling and forward to an open grave—nay, it tells that the shepherd of this flock has been smitten; and I am sure that

the blow which has fallen so heavily upon him, vibrates in a note of sadness all over his congregation, as well as through a large circle of friends in this community. Mrs. POHLMAN, connected, as she was, with a highly respectable family in New Jersey, enjoyed early advantages for intellectual and moral development which told upon her whole subsequent life. She was constituted with great equanimity and amiableness of temper, with excellent common sense, and a judgment that was rarely, if ever, at fault. She was especially fond of the quietude of domestic life; and while she had always a cordial welcome for her friends, and a helping hand for any good object which it was in her way to promote, it was manifestly in her own home that she found her purest enjoyment, and her chosen theatre for doing good. As a wife and mother, her devotion knew no limit short of that which religion itself imposes;—a fact to which there are bleeding hearts before me, now rendering the saddest, amplest testimony. Her Christian character, modified no doubt by her natural constitution, was marked not only by the absence of every thing like ostentation, but by something approaching to reserve—her demonstrations of faith and love were much more in acts than in words.

The Bible was her daily companion, insomuch that, during the latter part of her life, other books seemed comparatively distasteful to her. But the most remarkable feature of her Christian life was that which has given complexion to the remarks which I have now addressed to you—I mean the deep self-distrust with which she had always viewed her own Christian experience until she had come within sight of the gate of death, and then her suddenly emerging from the cloud, and leaving the world almost in the glory of a translation. She had often uttered her lamentations in view of the weakness of her faith, and the dubious character, as she imagined, of all her graces. When, for instance, she had heard others speak of their high enjoyment in commemorating their Redeemer's death, she was disposed to construe the absence of the same experience in herself as reflecting doubtfully at least upon both her character and prospects. Above all, she was habitually in bondage to the fear of death, and could never think of her passage through the dark valley without a shudder. This, so far as her nearest friends knew, continued down to the last night that she spent upon earth. Then it was that she awoke out of sleep to bear the grateful testimony to her weeping

friends that her doubts and apprehensions were all gone; that her questionable evidences had brightened into a full assurance; that in her Saviour's gracious presence every want of her departing spirit was amply provided for. The language of triumph was upon her lips until they ceased to move. And now that timid disciple, having conquered the enemy she had feared so much and so long, has gone up, as if in a chariot of glory, to make her home with the angels, and join in their ministrations around the throne.

I could not pause at a point where I could more fittingly than here exhort this group of mourning relatives to receive the baptism of Divine consolation. You, my dear brother, whose heart the iron has pierced most deeply, do not need that I should remind you that with your tears of bitter sorrow should mingle tears of devout thankfulness. Sad as is the epoch in your domestic life, you can not think of the manifold blessings that have crowned this endearing relation; you can not dwell upon that anxious and burdened life, closing amidst the joy unspeakable and full of glory; you can not let either your faith or your imagination do its office in respect to the scenes in which you believe the loved and the lamented has already become a



sharer—I say, you can not let your thoughts run in either of these channels, but comfort and blessing will follow in the train. I proffer you the tenderest sympathy in view of your bereavement; but I thank God that your mourning is qualified and softened by the light from above. May the current of sorrow that has been let in upon your soul, be as a fresh infusion of strength and love and blessing. May the new and hallowed relation that is now constituted between you and the scenes and objects within the vail, prove a benediction not only to yourself but to all who come within the range of your ministry, or the influence of your daily life.

And to you whom this dispensation of Providence leaves motherless, what better word of counsel can I offer, than that you should open your minds and hearts to the lessons that are coming forth to you to-day, from amidst these funeral solemnities, and from yonder grave about to receive its precious deposit. Let all that was pure in your mother's counsels and example impress itself indelibly upon your heart. And now that she has passed the vail, you may still think of her as charging you, by the glory to which she has attained, to keep yourselves in readiness to

follow her up to her heavenly home. Believe me, the best tribute you can pay to her memory is to make her death the occasion of helping you onward to share with her the blessings of an immortal life.

To the congregation usually worshipping here, the solemnities of the hour are deeply monitory. It is far from being an ordinary funeral occasion that has convened you—the coffin which has been brought hither contains the remains not merely of one who has been accustomed, for many years, to sit with you here under the preaching of the word, but of one who stood first as a human helper to him through whose lips God's messages of mercy have been proclaimed to you. I counsel you first to let this event arouse you, one and all, to the utmost diligence in life's great work; so that whenever the end of your mortal life shall come, you can feel a joyful confidence that it will prove the beginning of a glorious life that shall know no end. And I was going to add, as a parting word, that you should do what you can to lighten the burden of your pastor's grief by every appropriate expression of sympathy; but this your countenances tell me I need not say. May God give him grace to dispense the word with increasing power,

from having been in the furnace; and give you grace to listen to it with a higher degree of docility, and self-application, and spiritual profit, from having been the witnesses of his triumphant faith. In the day when the Saviour shall make up his jewels, may there be found some, many, among them, who shall look back to the solemnities of this hour, as having either given them their first impulse, or greatly accelerated their course, towards the better world.

24 JUL 18

