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The Christian's Dying Conflict, Victory and Triumph.

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A SERMON,

DELIVERED IN THE

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

LOUISVILLE, KY.

SABBATH MORNING, MAY 11TH, 1834.

OCCASIONED BY THE DEATH OF THE

✓
REV. GEORGE W. ASHBRIDGE,

(LATE PASTOR OF SAID CHURCH,)

✓
BY JOSHUA T. RUSSELL, A. M.

Louisville:

PRENTICE & JOHNSON, PRINTERS.

1834.

CORRESPONDENCE.

REV. MR. RUSSELL,

Dear Sir,—We, the undersigned representatives of the Session, of the Church and Trustees, and members of the congregation of the First Presbyterian Church in Louisville, would respectfully and earnestly solicit of you a copy of your eloquent sermon, on the character and death of our lamented pastor, the late REV. GEORGE W. ASHBRIDGE.

May 19, 1834.

JOHN P. HARRISON.
WM. GARVIN.
WILLIAM HART.

MESSRS. J. P. HARRISON, WM. GARVIN, AND WILLIAM HART:

Gentlemen:

In compliance with your earnest solicitation as representatives of the session, Trustees and Congregation, of the first Presbyterian Church, in Louisville, I herewith submit to your disposal, a copy of the discourse, occasioned by the lamented death of your late beloved Pastor. It was hastily written, and designed only for the EAR and HEART of a deeply interested and sympathising audience. My own judgment is decidedly opposed to the publication, but I cannot feel myself justified in positively withholding from considerations merely personal, even this humble tribute to the worth and virtue of my dear departed friend and brother, when it is seriously desired and requested by a highly respected and bereaved congregation.

Very respectfully, your's, &c.

JOSHUA T. RUSSELL.

MADISON, MAY 23, 1834.

DISCOURSE:

PHILIPPIANS 1. 21.—“*To Die is Gain.*”

The glories of a victory are generally and justly proportioned to the toils and perils of the conflict by which it is obtained; and in order to form a proper estimate of the splendors of the former, we must have a clear perception of the difficulties of the latter. The final and severest conflict of the christian is with the relentless tyrant death, emphatically styled, “the King of Terrors.” Although the appalling dangers of this conflict fully warrant the expectation, that a decisive victory would be crowned with peculiar honors, and ensure to the successful combatant an eternal triumph, yet in the apprehended near approach of this gigantic foe, most men prove cowards—shrink from the painful struggle and yield the palm, uncontested. From this warfare, however, there is no discharge. All men *must fight and conquer*, or ignominiously perish in chains of bondage. But, still, on the part of a great portion of mankind, there is a singular reluctance, even to equip themselves for the day of battle, lest, by their very armor, they should be too frequently reminded of the dreaded conflict, and rather than form the bold resolve of conquest, they hastily surrender, barter away their spiritual liberty, continue “all their life time subject to bondage through fear of death;” and die at last, like slaves, in voluntary servitude. Many a war-worn veteran, whose body has been marked with honorable wounds, who never left the field of blood without a laurel, falls vanquished and dismayed before this powerful enemy. The frequency of such defeats must be attributed solely to a want of proper armour, and the active preparations required for the combat. Arrayed in the panoply of God, beneath the banner of the cross of Jesus, all might march to certain, glorious victory. Thus marshalled, unnumbered thousands already have met and engaged this potent foe; and the splendors of their victory and triumph have uniformly corresponded with the boldness and perils of the enterprise. So fought, and conquered, and triumphed, the apostle to the Gentiles; and he seems, when penning the words of the text, to have caught the very spirit of his beatified predecessors, and under its hallowed influence, to have adopted the language of bold defiance and anticipated triumph—“*To die is gain.*” As if *eternity* itself were too short, he appropriates part of *time*, and, before the victory is won, begins on earth to sing the triumphal chorus.

To illustrate and justify the manly sentiment and emphatic language of the Apostle, in the text, and to apply it to the present

affecting occasion, will be the object of the following discourse.

In accordance with this design I shall attempt a brief description—

I. Of the christian's dying conflict.

II. Of his victory and triumph.

I. Then, the christian's dying conflict.—

To aid your minds in forming some just apprehensions of its fearful nature and appalling terrors, observe 1st, That this is the last fierce struggle of the immortal soul, *for life eternal*.

The entire life of the genuine christian is but a long protracted, spiritual warfare. At one time he is forced to engage in unequal combat with the combined energies of an apostate world. The alluring pageantry of wealth and grandeur, the fascinating charms of gaiety and sensual indulgence, and the splendid trappings of royalty and magnificence are spread before him in the glowing colors of deceptive fancy, to entice him from the paths of wisdom, and rob him of his spiritual enjoyments. If these prove ineffectual, the world assumes a threatening attitude, and attempts either by shame or violence to shake his fortitude, and undermine the foundation of his hope. For this purpose it employs the taunting jeer of infidelity, the cruel finger of scorn; sometimes the terrors of the prison, the gibbet, and the stake. All these with the patience and courage of a martyr he must resist steadfastly, even unto death. At another time, the christian is compelled to take up arms against himself; to suppress some dangerous insurrection among the unsanctified passions of his own bosom, to check the risings of pride, anger, malice, or revenge, to bridle wild ambition and restrain unhallowed lust—again, he is assaulted by the enraged and subtle powers of darkness. Arrows from the pit, barbed by the Prince of hell and surcharged with deadly poison, gather around his soul and threaten him with instant ruin; but, by a dexterous use of the shield of faith, he must quench the fiery darts of the wicked, and with the sword of the spirit he must break through and scatter all the embattled legions of his enemies. After numberless engagements with various and formidable foes of this description, the christian warrior arrives at length, with furrowed cheek and withering limb, covered with many a wound and bleeding at every pore, on the confines of the "dark valley" to meet in his extremity, and to engage, single-handed with death; the last, the most powerful, desperate, and relentless of all his foes. And here, he must either give or receive the decisive blow. On the issue of this conflict, heaven, or hell depends. If successful now, he rises and receives a crown of unfading and eternal glory—but, if he fall—the glories of all past achievements perish with him, and he sinks to everlasting infamy and woe. Oh, dread, decisive moment! Who can glance at such a scene without unutterable emotions? The world on rapid pinions recedes from his view; the veil of time is parted; and eternity, eternity—with all its vastness and solemnity—bursts with terrible

effulgence on his panting spirit to dazzle and overwhelm him. See! on the narrow verge he stands—he moves—he breaks—it crumbles—and falling, he must disarm the sceptred Tyrant of Kings and Conquerors—or be forever chained to his triumphal car! But, II. Observe the gloom through which the victor passes, the tender relations he dissolves, and the many fearful pangs he endures.

The christian's path to conquest leads directly through the "valley of the shadow of death." Before him lie the yawning grave—the cheerless, silent, lonely home of the dead; the mattock and the spade—and gathering worms, waiting for their prey, and preparing to banquet on his wasting body. And, oh! the solemn stillness which reigns around his death-bed! Silence profound! certain presage of approaching dissolution, disturbed by nothing but the feeble groans of the dying—or the half suppressed sighs of friends afflicted! And, who can conceive the horror of those scenes, which may in this fearful town be crowding upon the disturbed imagination, even of the expiring christian. In breathless silence he listens to the faint tinglings of the dreaded death-watch. He sees, as it were, before him, the coffin and the shroud, and he hears, or seems to hear the lingering echo of his own funeral knell. And, here, in the very midst of darkness and gloom, through which the eye of faith alone can penetrate, surrounded by terrific shadows which nothing but the full orb of righteousness can chase away—here, his overwhelming sorrows are to be enhanced by the sudden dissolution of all the tender ties, which bind him to terrestrial objects. Does he sustain the relation of a child to fond and affectionate parents? The dying conflict terminates the happiness enjoyed in this relation. The child's entreaty—the father's sighs—the mother's tears, are unavailing. While all around are weeping, death alone, stands unaffected by, with arm uplifted to inflict the fatal blow. He strikes—and with the heart-strings of his convulsed victim, he breaks the silken cord which bound him to the parent. Is he a parent or a wedded partner? The tenderness and charities of these relations will only serve to increase the bitterness and anguish of the dying conflict. The overpowering charms of Jesus, unfolded to his eye of faith, invite him up to heaven but NATURE still recoils—and shudders at the thought of dissolution! She lingers even on the brink of heaven, to catch the sighs and groans, and bitter wailings of the widow and the orphan, as they gather about the wasting form—and look for the last time upon the features they loved, now pale and distorted, and convulsed in death. But the soul of the christian must even now triumph over all the tender sympathies of natural affection. He cannot go reluctantly to heaven. His faith, with the strength of vision, must fix steadfastly upon an object which shall occupy and ravish the heart, and draw it away willingly from the dearest earthly friends, and the loveliest material forms. And what, my

brethren, what but a supernatural vision of Jehovah Jesus—the complacent smiles of a present Saviour? What, but sensible companionship, and communion with attendant angels, participation in their rising felicity, and a real, rich, and delightful foretaste of the bliss of heaven, can sustain him in this conflict?

Look at the expiring christian, yet once more! Besides the gloom, the fear, the dread, the parting griefs, which assail and oppress his spirit; see how his body, also, feels the pangs of dissolution! Convulsions shake his frame, unnerve his arm, and prostrate all his powers. A palsy stiffens every limb, a mortal paleness overspreads the cheek; and the pulsations of life become irregular and feeble. The cold sweat of death now gathers on his brow—his eye, upturned and motionless, sinks in its socket—his bosom heaves; his heart-strings break; he groans, he pants, he struggles, he expires. Thus terminates the christian's dying conflict—and yet "TO DIE IS GAIN," as I shall endeavor to convince you, by a very brief description,

II. Of the christian's victory and triumph.

From the view which we have just taken of the difficulties and perils of the conflict, we are led to anticipate a glorious victory, and a magnificent triumph. And, so, indeed, they are, beyond the power of language to describe, or of the imagination to conceive.

In the very moment of apparent defeat, it is, that the christian really obtains a complete and decisive victory. Like a wise and skilful military chieftain, who artfully resigns to the enemy some inferior outposts, for the purpose of consolidating his forces and ensuring the safety of the citadel, the undaunted christian hero cheerfully yields to death, and commits, for a season, to the grave, his material mortal part, and by this partial, temporary sacrifice, secures for the soul immortal blessedness. Victory on the battle-field is never to be expected without peril and sacrifice; and the cheapest sacrifice by which decisive victories are generally purchased is the blood of heroes. It should, therefore, be matter of no surprise or discouragement, that the victory of the christian over earth and hell can never be gained without some painful sacrifices and sufferings. But the partial, momentary sufferings, how unworthy are they to be compared, even with the glory which immediately results from them in the victory obtained, and how much more unworthy to be named in comparison with that "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory," which is yet in reversion for the sons of God, in the everlasting triumph which shall certainly succeed—yes certainly—for to every christian soldier, who continues faithful unto death, the righteous sovereign of the Universe has decreed a glorious triumph. Not like those which were granted to the heroes of antiquity, as the reward of their bloody conquests—triumphs of a day—but, a triumph, which shall continue long—which, indeed, BEGINS in that hallowed moment when the emancipated soul, escaping from its shattered, crumbling prison

house, awakes disembodied in the world of spirits and mingles its notes of praise with angels and the just made perfect in heaven—but shall never, *never* end; a triumph in eternity; in the immediate presence, in the paradise of God; the very place where his "honor dwelleth." There the glories of the soul's triumph shall go forward and increase without interruption until the morning of the resurrection, and the day of final judgment. And, then, both the victory and the triumph of the christian—in his body and in his spirit—shall be openly proclaimed and manifested to an assembled universe. Aroused from the long slumbers of the tomb by the voice of the arch-angel and the trump of God, his dust shall be called and collected from the four winds of heaven; his corruptible shall put on incorruption, his mortal, immortality, and so death itself shall be swallowed up in victory. The spectators of this open, glorious, splendid triumph of the christian shall not be limited, as in ancient triumph, to the inhabitants of a city, a state, or an empire; but they shall embrace the entire population of the numberless worlds and systems of worlds which have been scattered by the Omnipotence of God throughout the immensity of space. Angels and arch-angels, cherubim and seraphim, patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs—all spirits, whether faithful or fallen—all men whether saved or lost—shall be present, living, interested partakers or witnesses of this future triumph of christians; and all shall assent to the equity, and justice, and grace of the final sentence, "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

Consider, also, my hearers, the ineffably august and awful solemnities which will be witnessed on that triumphant day of the saints. This little world will be a theatre too poor and limited and worthless for so sublime a scene. These visible heavens will be rolled together as a worn and useless parchment. These elements will melt with fervent heat. That sun will be blotted from the firmament; and all those brilliant planets and stars, will be loosed from their orbits, and withdraw their shining. Then, the New Jerusalem will descend from God out of heaven, as a bride adorned for her husband, and on the measureless circle of the new created heavens will be placed the great magnificent white throne of judgment. It will be occupied by the ever adorable Trinity in Unity, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost; and encompassed by all the hymning host of the paradise of God. Robed in the inaccessible light and glory of his own uncreated, underived and eternal divinity, the victim of Calvary will then *appear*, to vindicate the character of the redeemed, to manifest the exceeding riches of his grace, and to invest the purchase of his blood with the insignia of royalty. And when their final destiny shall be announced, and their triumph be proclaimed; then shall the highest heavens resound with the grateful hosannahs of the ransomed—"Worthy is the lamb that was slain;" and angels shall swell the chorus, "Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and

thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God forever and ever, amen." In the wide universe of God, not a murmur of dissatisfaction will be heard. The tongue of the accuser will be palsied, the lip of the blasphemer will be sealed, and the congregated enemies of the christian and the christian's God will be compelled to yield their silent assent to the propriety and justice of the sentence which elevates the redeemed to heaven, and consigns the finally impenitent and unbelieving to an eternal hell. But here, I must pause. Could I write with an angel's pen and speak with an angel's tongue, I must continue to write and speak forever, if I would adequately describe the glories of the future coming triumphs of the christian; these glories lie within the veil, beyond the grave; far, far above the reach of senses, the reason, or the imagination of our earth-covered intellects. To be fully understood they must be *seen and enjoyed*, and that, too, forever. But *this world* is the place—the only place—for the dying conflict and the glorious victory of which I have before spoken,—and *these habiliments of mourning* most solemnly remind me, that such a conflict has been endured, and such a victory achieved recently, in the very midst of you, and in the sight and hearing of some whom I now address, by one, greatly beloved, and deeply lamented, who lately occupied this desolate pulpit, and ministered before this shrouded altar. Yes! it must be so! In despite of my very senses, and in dereliction of the high and imperious duty of unmurmuring submission, my erring, faithless heart would fain persuade me to believe, that the scenes with which I am this day surrounded, are only the deeply shaded pictures of a disturbed imagination, and that these sable signs of universal grief are only the effects of a melancholy vision of the night-watches. But, alas, I am not—I cannot be deceived. The widow—the orphan—the great congregation in affliction, are full before me! The sorrowful countenances, the deep-drawn sighs, and the gushing tear-drops of my audience—the oppressive, withering sensations of my own smitten spirit, tell me—that my friend, my brother, my much loved fellow-laborer, has finished his work, been removed from beside me, and taken upward, to his reward. Yes, upward; blessed be God, his soul has been borne upward; but it is my mournful office to tarry, for a little season, behind and below him, to speak to you of his *conflict* and comfort you amidst the griefs it has occasioned—to remind you of his *victory* and to participate with you in the gratitude and confidence which it ought to inspire. But, before I enter more fully upon these absorbing topics, I must place before you a rapid, hasty sketch of the life and character of the revered friend and brother whose recent and sudden removal by death has occasioned these funeral solemnities.

The REV. GEORGE W. ASHBRIDGE was born of respectable parents, in the city of Philadelphia, in the year 1800, where the days of his childhood were passed under the parental roof. His father, who, for several years, commanded a ship engaged in

the East India trade, died when he was only four years old, and consequently, his early education devolved chiefly on his widowed mother, who was a regular member of the Society of Friends. At the age of twelve years, he left his native city, and the fostering care of his endeared relatives, and was committed to the special guardianship and direction of a friend in or near the town of Paris, Ky. About three years after his removal to Paris, his youthful and ardent mind was arrested and impressed on the subject of religion, under the preaching of the venerable Dr. BISHOP; and at the early age of fifteen years, he became a member of the Presbyterian Church. His attention was immediately and seriously directed to the Christian Ministry, and shortly after, having made a public profession of religion, he entered upon a course of Classical studies, which was completed at the Transylvania University, where he graduated in 1820. He then took a full, Theological course, in the Seminary, at Princeton, N. J.; and, in 1823, was licensed to preach the Gospel. Soon after his license, in the humble employment of a Missionary to Florida, he commenced that short, but brilliant career of benevolent action, which terminated only with his last pulsations. After one or two years, spent in Missionary labors, he was settled in the Ministry in Tuscumbia, Ala., and married to the amiable lady who remains among you to lament, but not as one without hope, his sudden exit. His faithful labors in the congregation at Tuscumbia were crowned with encouraging success, and during a gracious season of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, he was permitted to introduce into that infant and feeble Church a considerable number of worthy and useful members, who continue to adorn their profession by a life and conversation becoming the Gospel of Christ. After a residence of between three and four years in that place, where he was extensively useful, and universally esteemed and beloved, he was invited to take charge of the First Church in this city; and on very mature, anxious and prayerful deliberation, he deemed it his duty to accept your urgent invitation. In the year 1831, he became the stated supply of this Church, and in this highly important and responsible station, he continued to labor, with truly commendable zeal and fidelity, as a Minister of the New Testament, until the period of his dissolution.

In presenting to your view, a brief outline of the general character of our departed brother, it may be profitable to call back to your recollection his many excellencies and virtues;

1. As a man, a husband, and a father.

In the organization and finish of his bodily frame, the God of nature had done much, to distinguish him from most of his fellows. His person was tall, well-formed and manly. His features were remarkably regular, comely, and beautiful. The expression of his countenance was highly animated, benevolent and prepossessing. His dark, penetrating eye revealed even to the passing stranger the vigor of his intellect; and the smile which

generally played upon his lip, gave assurance to all who approached him of the integrity and kindness of his heart. In his temper and disposition, he was mild, amiable, generous and affectionate, and as a natural result, in his social intercourse, he was frank, lively, ingenuous and unreserved, sometimes even to a fault. In his manners, the simplicity of the child and the polish of the gentleman; the dignity of the divine and the familiarity of friendship undisguised, were admirably and harmoniously blended. In his attachments as a friend, he was discriminating, sincere, ardent and faithful. His feelings and sympathies as a philanthropist and patriot were too strong and palpable to be called in question, or misunderstood, and in his daily charities to the indigent and distressed, he gave conclusive proofs of his generous love of country, and unbounded love of man. These great, general principles of his moral character were intimately combined, justly proportioned, and consistently developed in all the particular relations which he sustained to any of his fellow beings, as a citizen, a neighbor, a brother, a son, a husband, or a father, and in discharging the various and important duties resulting from these relations, he was strictly conscientious, regular and exemplary; but time will permit us to dwell, and that only for a moment, on the manner in which he performed the duties of the last named and most endearing of all earthly relationships, those of a husband and father. As he was not permitted, in the mysterious Providence of God, to reach even the *meridian* of a life which is generally limited to three score years and ten, his attachments as a father had not yet arisen to that full maturity of strength, with which the man of hoary hairs, bowed down with infirmities, is bound to the generous bosom of a full-grown, dutiful and only son—and yet, he was a *father*, and the *elder* of his babes had learned, and barely learned to articulate that endearing epithet, but, the *import* of the term, she knows not, nor will she ever understand it, unless, by the grace of God, she shall learn it hereafter in Heaven. Yes, he was a father, tender, watchful, fond and affectionate. At the baptismal font, as a *christian* father, he gave his little ones to God, and placed upon them the seal of his gracious covenant, and doubtless in the closet, as well as at the family altar, he had often renewed his covenant engagements, and with holy importunity and many tears, besought of the God of Abraham rich and eternal blessings for their infant spirits—and although he has now ceased to pray, those blessings which he sought *before-hand* may yet be in reversion for them, and may presently be imparted in rich effusions. But, as a husband! What shall I say of my dear departed brother, in this highest, holiest, noblest, most sacred and most endearing relation which intelligent beings are permitted to sustain to each other upon earth? In all this vast assembly, there is *one desolate heart only*, which knows how to appreciate his worth as a husband—only one—Nor could that lonely, widowed mourner, convey by words to other hearts, the impressions of joy and

hope which thrilled her own, when she used to look upon the engaging form and the speaking countenance of the now sainted man of God, and call him husband—*my husband!* Nor could she tell to others, how tumultuous, and dark, and fathomless were the billows which broke in upon her soul, when that breathless, solemn silence of the death-bed scene which follows the last convulsion of the expiring husband, first conveyed to her agitated soul the melancholy tidings of her lonely widowhood. From the mourning habiliments, and bitter tears of my dear, *afflicted sister*, you must learn all that I *would* say of my *beatified brother*, in his past relations as a husband, if I were able to read and understand and utter the full-tide feelings of agony and grief, which, even now, agonize her desolate heart. But we must not linger further over the distinguished virtues of the man, the father, the husband, for we have yet to speak of his worth—

2. As a christian, and a minister of the Gospel—

From the age of fifteen years, when our deceased brother first consecrated himself to God, and united with his visible church upon earth, up to the very hour of his translation to the church triumphant in Heaven, he was enabled, by divine grace, to which he ever loved to acknowledge himself a peculiar debtor, steadily to persevere in a life of practical godliness. Although he was often heard to lament and mourn over the remaining corruption of his own heart, over his unbelief and unfruitfulness, yet, in the estimation of those who knew him best, he was a consistent, growing christian, and the uniform tenor of his life and conversation was such as became a Minister of Jesus Christ. His piety was pure, enlightened and energetic, and exhibited itself far less in professions of zeal, than in acts of obedience. Unquestionably his love to the Saviour was glowing, and ardent, for such affection only would have accorded with the temperament of his soul; and I am satisfied, also, that his repentance was genuine, and oft repeated in secret, and his faith firm and vigorous, and yet, as a christian, he was distinguished, most of all, for his *kind* and *benevolent*, and *holy actions*. He loved, in humble imitation of his divine exemplar, to be "*going about doing good*," and verily he seemed to regard it as his "*meat*," and his "*drink*," to do the will of God his heavenly Father. *Benevolent action* seemed to constitute the very element of his soul as a christian, and it was this, especially, which distinguished and adorned his course as a Minister. The preaching of the Gospel was obviously his appropriate work. He was "*apt to teach*," a workman that needed not to be ashamed, "*thoroughly furnished*," and he gave full proof of having been "*called of God as Aaron was*." He preached the Gospel faithfully and in its simplicity—"in season, out of season—publicly and from house to house;" and in this delightful "*labor of love*," his whole soul was engaged and occupied. He conscientiously adhered to the "*form of sound words*" recommended by an inspired Apostle, and in the expression of his religious opinions, both in private and in public, while he scrupulously respect-

ed the rights and liberties of others, he freely and fearlessly exercised his own; nor did he ever hesitate to avow and vindicate his esteem and veneration for the distinguishing doctrines of the Reformation, as collected and exhibited in the standards of the Presbyterian Church.

The style and manner of his ministrations in the sacred desk were highly popular and persuasive. His compositions were pure, chaste, classical, nervous—generally rich in thought, in arrangement methodical and perspicuous, and not unfrequently ornamented with chastened figures, and appropriate classical allusions and illustrations. The intonations of his voice were various, smooth, sweet and melodious. His gesticulations were natural, easy, and graceful—and his address was solemn, animated, fervent and impressive.

Thus invested, as our beloved brother was, with talents and gifts and graces of a high and commanding character, and consecrated as they all were by piety so unquestionable and elevated, he could not, he did not fail to secure the attention, the admiration, the affection of those who enjoyed his Ministry. His usefulness however, as a Minister, was by no means confined to the pulpit. In the deliberative councils of the church, his efforts and his influence were powerful and salutary; and in defending, patronizing and recommending to others her Literary, Theological, and benenolent Institutions, his energy, liberality, and perseverance were, in the highest degree, commendable and worthy of imitation. But after all, my dear hearers, it was in the very midst of his own beloved flock,—in your social circles, by your fire-sides, when engaged in the all important, peculiar, and appropriate offices of a *Pastor, a spiritual Shepherd*, that our lamented brother presented the most perfect developements of the tender, generous, amiable, elevated sympathies and affections of his guileless, sanctified heart. In the praying circles of the saints, it was his constant practice to be present; and he seemed to regard it as his delightful privilege to participate deeply in their hopes and fears, in their sorrows and joys, in their supplications, and thanksgivings. For the *tender lambs* of his flock, he provided, in rich abundance, the “sincere milk of the word;” and this was regularly imparted to them in the Sabbath School, and in catechetical and bible classes. If his watchful eye ever discovered, in the distant wilderness, a tempted, disconsolate and deserted wanderer from the fold, like a vigilant and compassionate Shepherd, he sought and pursued him in the vale, and on the mountain top; and, when the lost was found, he kindly bore him homeward, with songs of thanksgiving to his God. His anxieties, his cares, his footsteps, were in every place, where the people of his charge were to be found, whether they were in affluence or poverty—in prosperity or in adversity—in health or in sickness—in happiness or in woe. He was the counsellor of the young, the supporter of the aged, the advocate of the oppressed, the friend of the widow, the protector of the orphan, the bene-

factor of the poor, the comforter of the afflicted, the willing messenger of mercy, and hope and salvation to the sick and the dying. Yes, my hearers, it was probably about the sick beds of a family now before me,—then in deep distress in consequence of the ravages of an infectious disease, and the incursions of death—it was there, I say, in the place of danger, in the chamber of disease and affliction, by his frequent visits, and by his unwearied attentions, that he laid the foundation for his own sudden and lamented dissolution. But why *lamented*? *Why!* People of his recent and beloved charge! we *lament*, not for the *dead*, but for the *living*—not for your *ascended Pastor*,—but for *you*, the bereaved members of his flock. For a christian “to die, is gain;”—and such gain is his who lately ministered before this holy altar, for he was a christian—an “Israelite indeed, in whom there was no guile.”—Yes, for *him* “to die is gain.” To assure ourselves of this, let us revert, in conclusion, to *his dying conflict*, and *his final victory* over nature, earth, the grave, death and hell.

Three weeks ago, this morning, in the character of God’s ambassador, the beloved ASHERIDGE stood before you in this sacred desk, and unconsciously indeed, both to you and to himself, but nevertheless truly, delivered to his assembled congregation, his valedictory address, his last official message from God. He was then apparently in perfect health. His manly form was finely nerved and vigorous, and the current of life flowed onward, with lively, energetic and rapid career. When he passed out from before the altar, with lighted countenance and steady step, the melancholy thought occurred to no one, that the man of God was to tread these earthly courts no more forever!—that the people of his charge, as he cheerfully mingled among them by the way, were receiving from their spiritual shepherd, his last greetings of friendship and affection! No! it could not have been imagined, and yet it was even so. The elements of mortal disease and sudden dissolution were then secretly effecting the work of destruction within him, although he knew it not. On the Tuesday evening following, he became conscious of some slight disease in his system, and his rest during the night was somewhat interrupted. The next day, his illness, which had before been regarded merely as the effect of a slight cold, contracted by the fatigues and exposures of a communion season, attended in a neighboring congregation the preceding week, assumed a serious aspect; and on Thursday, it began to develope itself in the form of scarlet fever, and awakened some concern in his vigilant physician. On Friday and Saturday, the power and malignity of the disease were greatly increased; and the anxieties of his devoted companion became painfully alarming. A council of physicians was called, and the melancholy but irresistible conclusion of the hasty conference was, that the speedy dissolution of their revered patient was inevitable. The clock had struck ten on Saturday evening—and less than *twenty hours* of probation remained—when, urged by the fond partner of his bo-

som, who had discovered his danger, and sought from God fortitude and grace to meet the painful crisis, his physician* approached his bed side, and tenderly, with palpitating heart and tearful eye, and quivering lip, communicated the certain, fearful, startling intelligence, that the *hour of dying was at hand*. This was the first intimation of immediate danger. The tidings fell upon his ear like a sudden death-knell!—but, they failed to awaken either grief or fear, or even painful agitation. For a single moment, in eloquent silence, he paused!—and, in the impressive stillness of that fleeting moment, loosened all the ties which bound him to earth, and made a final transfer of his thoughts, his affections, his whole soul, to Heaven!—and then—fixing his animated eye upon the friend who had just communicated the intelligence of his approaching dissolution, and grasping his hand with the eagerness and love of a dying saint, he said—“Tell me, doctor, tell me truly—*how long can I last?*” “Possibly, till to-morrow—not longer,” was the solemn reply. “Now,” said the man of God to three friends,|| who were bending over his couch at the moment—“*Pray,*”—“*each of you offer a plain, short prayer to God.*” When this was done as he had requested, and the third praying brother had uttered his Amen—he broke forth himself in audible, eloquent and impassioned tones—and in a brief, fervent, elevated invocation, he besought for his congregation—for his friends—for his infant children—for his bosom companion—for his own departing soul, the grace and benediction of his covenant-keeping God—“*from my sins and from my duties, oh my God, I flee—to the perfect, finished righteousness and atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ.*”—“*Into thy hands, blessed Saviour, I commit my body and my spirit.*” Such were some of the very words of his prayer! And, ah! how widely different from the address of Adrian, the Roman Emperor, when dying, to his soul—“*Whither my soul! whither art thou going?*”—how different from that of another mighty monarch expiring in despair—“*Millions of treasure, for an inch of time!*”

His prayer being finished, he called for his beloved wife, and she stood before him. Affectionately pressing her hand in his own, with tearless eye and unfaltering voice, as a husband and a father treading upon the confines of Heaven, and rapidly rising to society in which earthly relations are superseded by the more endearing bonds which hold saints and cherubims in fellowship, he calmly, earnestly and with chastened ardor, addressed his still youthful companion—the mother of his infants. He spoke to her bleeding heart words of encouragement, comfort and consolation. He assured her of his own peace of mind—his hope in Christ—his joy in God,—his willingness, nay, his irrepressible anxiety to die and be with Jesus—and of his sweet anticipation of meeting her again in Heaven. He charged her to walk with God, to be humble, diligent, prayerful, faithful unto death,—and to train up his children in the “nurture and admonition of the

Lord.” He then fervently commended and committed her and the pledges of their mutual love to his covenant-keeping God, the widow’s Judge, the father of the fatherless—impressed upon her lip his parting salutation, and bade her an affectionate and final *farewell!* This done—he rested for a moment—and then, at the hour of midnight, he requested messengers to be despatched in different directions to summon to his chamber a number of the members of his Church and congregation, whose eternal interests were pressing heavily upon his benevolent heart, and as they were at length collected around him, and one by one drew near his dying pillow, he took each in turn, by the hand,—and whether he were old or young, saint or sinner, gay or serious, volatile or thoughtful, he gave to every one an appropriate address, rich with instruction, glowing with affection, and pre-eminently adapted to the peculiar views, sentiments, habits, trials, hopes, fears, and perils of each.

Thus the hours of his *last night* were fully occupied in holy, pious, solemn exhortations, designed for the spiritual good of the friends he was about to leave behind him—nor was his anxious soul even then satisfied—but he solemnly dictated a number of special messages, to be delivered after his death to absent acquaintances and friends.

Contrast, for a moment, my hearers, this affecting exhibition of undissembled piety, with the death-bed scene of one of the wisest and most distinguished, and most virtuous of the ancient sages. Of the philosopher it is recorded, that his last hours were spent in undisturbed tranquillity, and in lively, familiar converse with his friends, on literary and moral subjects, and on the *probable* immortality of the soul; and while all around him were overcome with grief and bathed in tears, he calmly called for the poisonous cup which had been decreed to him, drank it without emotion, and ordering a trifling sacrifice to be made by his friends to Æsculapius, quietly expired. And *why* did the heathen sage thus die undismayed and peacefully? Why, my hearers? Simply because immortality itself was to him wholly problematical—and of the solemn retribution of eternity—judgment—heaven and hell, he knew nothing. But, to the living faith, and strengthened vision of our dear, departed brother, all these absorbing scenes were *present*, as sober, certain, everlasting realities!—and yet, he rose above the dread or fear of them—nay, he longed, he panted, he prayed, to meet them; he rejoiced in their near approach—he triumphed over them—and having achieved the victory, his last moments were spent in encouraging the saints, and pouring the tidings of salvation upon the ears of the perishing! *Socrates* died indeed, like a philosopher, longing after immortality, but *ASH-BRIDGE* like a christian, aspiring and ascending to the paradise of God!

By the labors of the night, the remaining energies of the man of God were exhausted—his breathing and pulsations ceased,—and for a season it was thought that his spirit had risen silently,

and without a struggle to its place of rest. But as the light of another Sabbath sun fell gently upon his pallid countenance, he was once more aroused to intelligence and action. For a short time, the current of life returned with renewed vigor, and inspired a feeble hope in the bosom of surrounding friends, that he might, as it were by miracle, yet be preserved. Powerful remedies were eagerly applied, and importunate supplications were renewed in the closet, in the social circle, and in the house of God—but all in vain! It was soon ascertained that friendship and affection had erred in judgment respecting the purpose of God.

The *victory* of the dying saint had not yet been completed, and he was not fully ripe for his *triumph* in heaven. The new strength which he had received was not natural, but super-human; imparted probably by some kind, ministering spirit from above, to enable him to *finish* both the conflict and the victory, in a way still more honorable to religion, and animating to the saints of God, than had yet been anticipated. From the disclosures which have been made by his afflicted companion since his death, it appears, that he had long since chosen the holy Sabbath, as the day for entering upon his final rest, and he had frequently made it a matter of special and fervent prayer to God, that this irrepressible desire of his soul might be gratified. His prayer was heard and answered, and he no sooner felt the risings of supernatural strength within him than he started from his temporary slumbers, and began to utter, in psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs, the praises of Jehovah Jesus, and the holy triumphs of his almost beatified soul. It was, indeed, the Sabbath; his last Sabbath; his chosen dying day; a glorious emblem; a precious antepast of heaven—and he spent it just as it became a dying minister of Jesus.

During nearly the whole of the day his intellect was regular and unclouded; and until about three o'clock in the afternoon, he was almost incessantly employed in prayer, praise and songs of victory and triumph. And then, as death drew yet a little nearer, and was beginning to throw a paralysis over his rational and moral and physical energies, he was heard, first in feeble, and then in more audible tones, to exclaim, and it was the last distinct articulation which fell from his lip, while he remained in full possession of his reason—"Home—home—I am going home."—Amen.