

THE DYING CHRISTIAN'S  
ESTIMATE OF HEAVEN.

A DISCOURSE

IN MEMORY OF THE LATE

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REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

DELIVERED

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BY JOHN NIEL McLEOD, D. D.,

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## DISCOURSE

“ For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better.”—PHILIPPIANS i : 23.

It is not often that a living man appoints the preacher of his own funeral sermon. And it is rarer still that any one does this, when the mortal body is actually in the grasp of death, and the soul is about to take its flight to the world of spirits. Nor is it easy to submit to an analysis the state of mind which is indicated by a deed like this. Presuming that sanity exists, and that Christian faith has control of the powers, it shows that the soul is at peace with God, and so confident of its safety, that it can give even some of its last precious moments on earth, to consider and determine who shall speak of it to survivors. As no man has returned to earth to say what he thought and how he felt when actually stepping across the threshold of time ; and as no living man has had the actual experience of these things, we can only conjecture how it might be. Certainly, however, we may without presumption say, that when this and similar things are done at the close of a well-spent religious life, they indicate a triumphant faith, and a measure of composure in view of eternity, which few comparatively enjoy. Such, undoubtedly, was the mental state of the beloved brother in Christ, for whose departure from among us we mourn, and to whose worth we devote at least the memories of this hour.

*Prepared by the staff of the PCA Historical Center, St. Louis, MO. 07/03/08.*

Dr. Black sent from his death-bed the request to us to preach his funeral sermon, if any were preached at all. He did it just as he was stepping into eternity. He was of perfectly sane and tranquil mind. He had often discharged a similar duty for others. We have sometimes conversed together on the subject, in the sanctuary of private friendship ; and it was mutually understood between us that the survivor would render the mournful service to the other. Often have we thought of what his partial friendship might say of ourselves after we had gone, but never of what our pen would record to the honor of his memory. But he has gone before us, though our junior. Memory did its work with him when the last moments came. All his house was set in order, and while his feet were entering the Jordan of death, he turned his eye back for a moment, and almost paused to say, “ True friend, death shall not long separate us; I go before you, preach my funeral sermon.” We therefore execute to-day a sacred commission from the sainted dead; a bequest of love made in full view of glory ; a solemn and yet cheerful appointment from lips on which the finger of death was laid already. Nay, rather we bring before you, while we would retire, the dying man and minister of Jesus Christ, and entreat you to hear himself, as he preaches his own funeral sermon from the words, “I have a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better.”

This was one of Dr. Black’s last utterances, and it was made in a most affecting connection. “ Andrew, (said his brother, Rev. R. J. Black, of Philadelphia, as he stood beside his bed but a short time before his departure,) I fear you are soon to be taken from us, but it is better it should be so.” “ O yes,” replied the dying man, “ it is better; to depart and be with Christ, is far better.” And shortly after, as if he had

been meditating with delight on the joyful topic, he added, as he fixed his eye upon his wife, to whom he was deeply attached, “ I did not think a week ago that I would have to leave you so soon, but it is better.”

When Paul uttered these words he was in a dilemma : “ a strait betwixt two.” His mind was balanced on a question he did not wish to decide himself. Whether to remain a little longer in the world and labor in the public service of Jesus Christ, or to pass to heaven and take hold of the crown of immortality at once, was a problem of such immense interest that he would not trust himself to determine it, even if he had the option. He therefore wisely left its determination in better hands. He awaited God’s decision. And so do all believers, in proportion as they have like precious faith with Paul. The question of living or dying; the time, the mode, the circumstances, they leave to the adjustment of Infinite Love. But when the decision is made, and the divine commandment is to depart, they acquiesce with holy joy. They merge their own will in God’s, and they are persuaded that to depart and be with Christ is far better. To this attainment in a blessed Christian experience, our beloved brother had reached. And therefore could he say, as he did, “ I desire to live, but I am perfectly willing to die.” As God’s will was that he should depart, his soul was filled with a holy consciousness that this would be “ far better.”

Leaving the other great thoughts of this statement, we expand this a little—*Heaven is far better than earth*. It is so absolutely and universally. Even under its original constitution, and before the entrance of sin, this earth, we presume, was inferior to heaven. With all its ineffable beauty and fine adaptations to the great creature bearing God’s image, that was to dwell within it, it could not equal the home of holy

angels, and the peculiar residence of God himself. There was, no doubt, a glory covering the garden of Eden, as the residence of unfallen man, that no spot of earth, now existing, can at all approximate; but this was inexpressibly behind, in its degrees of glory, the celestial paradise to which it pointed from the beginning. What was that wonderful vegetable the Tree of Life, in the earthly paradise, though it was the main gem in the casket, when compared with the real Tree of Life, the Mediatorial Person, even then existing in the divine arrangement of love, in the celestial garden? Heaven is far better than our earth, even before it felt the blight of sin.

But our earth is now under the curse. It is the disturbed habitation of a rebellious and convict race. A lost world, where sin reigns unto death, and the marks of whose material and moral desolations are furrowed into its whole organization. Yet it was this that Jesus came to seek and save. And it is the peculiar glory of His cross that it was erected here, while the fact itself shows its unspeakable degradation. How terrible must be the crime for which the death of the Son of God in human nature, alone could make atonement, and the defilement, which nothing but His blood could cleanse away? We need not say that heaven is "far better" than this. For earth defiled by sin, and filled with misery, and heaven beautified with perfect holiness and felicity, are too far apart to be brought together in comparison. But further: heaven is far better than earth, even as it now is under the dispensation of mercy. And here are the real points of Paul's decided contrast. It is not between the evil of earth and the good of heaven, but between the good in both. The comparison is mainly religious and spiritual. It is that of the Church on earth and the Church in heaven, and blessed

be God, they are one society, though the membership is in far different conditions. The Church in heaven is simply the Church on earth brought to perfection. The Christian in heaven is the same man he was while undergoing the sanctifying process on earth, only that he is now made perfect in holiness. It was after this our dear brother was reaching, and therefore he felt that heaven was "far better." Let us then still further consider some of the good things of the Church on earth, that we may understand what are the far better things of heaven. And here we say, that the Church on earth has a good organization. An immortal corporation, her membership approved of God, is the actual saintship of the existing generation; her head is Jesus Christ, now exalted to the Father's right hand; her constitution is the Bible, free to all, and her ordinances of instruction, discipline, worship and consolation, the means of grace whereby her membership has communion with the God of heaven. Her organization is that of the temple of the Holy Ghost on earth. God has made it, and therefore it is the best for the condition of things, as now existing. The organization of the Church in heaven would not suit the sinful state of man as he now is, not yet prepared for heaven. The difference is that between the preparatory school for little children, and the university for the matured minds that are qualified to attend it. The organization of the Church on earth is good, but far better is that of the Church in heaven. The heavenly organization. How little we know of it. And yet we may have some glimpses of its glory through the windows which divine revelation has opened. Here is God in the person of the Father, the great immediate object of worship. Here is Jesus the Mediator, the medium of all blessed communication from the Father, to the members of his own mystical body. And here

is the Holy Spirit, sharing in the glory of the Father and the Son, and exerting his proper influence in giving order and harmony to the new creation. Here is the perfected saintship of past generations, and the Bible, in fact, if not in form, understood and enjoyed under the light of the celestial temple. We do not know whether there will be anything in heaven like the means of grace on earth, or as substitutes for them. But we do know that all that is needful to instruct, to improve, and to beautify the soul in fellowship with God, its Maker, and with the other justified spirits before the throne, will be found in the organism of the celestial temple. Heaven is the great place of worship for the intelligent holy universe, and there will be there adoration, and praise, and music, and a communion table covered with the bread and water of life, and the fruit of the Tree of Life, at which the saints of the present dispensation shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in the blessed reunions and recognitions of the Father's kingdom. In all this, the organization of the Church in heaven is far better than that of the Church on earth. Better, as a state of perfect holiness and happiness transcends a mixed state of good and evil. Better, as the full blown, fragrant flower is of more value than the unseen seed beneath the earth's surface, from which it has sprung. Better, as the noontide glory of the meridian sun surpasses the feeble glimmerings of the morning star. Paul loved the organization of the Church on earth, whose ministry he exercised, by whose fellowship he was improved, and through whose ordinances he was rapidly preparing for heaven. But he knew by faith, and it may be by actual vision also, that the organization of the Church in heaven was far better. And so believed our beloved friend, to whose memory we are now doing honor.

But again, in the Church on earth there is good society. Nay, the best society on earth is here. It embraces the sane-

tified character of all past generations. Righteous Abel was a member of the Church on earth, and so were Enoch that was translated, and Abraham the Father of the faithful, and Moses who talked with God, and David the royal Psalmist, and the seraphic Isaiah, and Daniel the man of prayer, and John the divine, and Paul, and the confessors and martyrs of former ages, of whom the world was not worthy, and, O joyful conception ! our own beloved kindred and friends, now saints before the throne. These were all temples of the Holy Ghost while on earth. They all bore the image of God, followed the example of Jesus Christ, shed the benign light of a good example around them, and died in the confident hope of a blessed immortality beyond the grave. There were sanctified men and women in the Church on earth whom Paul was indisposed to leave, even for heaven. And the dying Christian has often declared that one of his severest struggles, in departing this life, was in leaving behind him some fellow believer who had deeply engaged his sanctified affections.

But far better than this is the society of heaven. There the social state is perfect; and it has this perfection because of the elements of which it is composed. The divine angelic and human elements are all combined in glory. In heaven the human element is sinless. It is dignified by its connections with the exalted Redeemer, and made happy forever in the embraces of His love. There, too, the angelic element prevails. Even the saints on earth can have no sensible communion with holy angels, for there is no medium by which such fellowship could be carried on. But in heaven saints and angels are in contact. They bow before the same altar, sing the same song, study together the mysteries of redemption, walk together the golden pavement of the new Jerusalem, and rejoice in the confirmation they have in holiness

and happiness, through their mutual connection with the Mediatorial throne. Nor is this all; there, is a divine element in the society of the Father's house above. God, the adorable Trinity, is there, constituting at once a perfect society in itself, and communicating its own perfection to the ransomed creature partaking of its nature, sharing in its glory, and made eternally happy in the enjoyment of its love. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so is the society of heaven higher than the society of earth. It is "far better." "I go to better company," said a dying believer once, speaking in the language of Paul. To depart, and enter such company, our dear brother, of whom we are now speaking, felt to be preferable to any longer continuance in this present evil world.

In the Church on earth there are also good employments—employments giving scope to the intellect and affections, and securing to the whole man a happiness of the highest order.

It was these employments that Paul was so indisposed to leave, and that created the holy dilemma that he left to God's own solution. The Church of God on earth is a school, and all its believing members are students of the mysteries of redemption. And here they have full scope for all the intellect they possess. The visible Church is a family, of which God is the father, Jesus the elder brother, and all saints the sons and daughters, in whom dwells the Spirit of adoption. And here is scope for all their affections. The Church on earth is God's instrumentality for subduing the world to himself. And here is scope for the highest powers and opportunities of usefulness to others, and the honor of God the Saviour. In this connection the ministry of reconciliation is exercised, and in this Paul rejoiced. Good employment is

one of the highest sources of human happiness. In heaven this employment is perfect. There is employment for the intellect in studying the divine character and works, with the best possible opportunities ; for there the Lord Christ is himself the teacher. There, there is employment for the affections, for love reigns in every heart; its object is infinite excellence, and it attracts while it dispenses affection. Is the worship of God the highest employment in which the intelligent creature can engage ? Heaven is a Church state, and its worship is ceaseless. It is a rule of God's administrations that the happiness of the creature is in direct proportion to his holiness. In heaven, therefore, the happiness of the saved sinner is complete, for he is perfect in holiness. He drinks of the " rivers of pleasure that are before the face and at the right hand of God forever." To depart and be with Christ in the enjoyment of all this, is " far better" than to be detained, even in the best communion that the imperfect Church on earth affords. To his conviction of this, Dr. Black has left his dying testimony, as the following sketch will show. Heaven is far better than earth. This he is realizing now.

The Rev. Andrew Watson Black, D. D., Professor of " Exegetical, Historical and Evangelistic Theology," in the Theological Seminary of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, was born in the vicinity of the city of Pittsburg, on the 24th of April, 1808. He died on the 10th of September, 1858, having just entered his fifty-first year. He was the second son of the Rev. John Black, D. D., and Elizabeth, daughter of the late Andrew Watson, Esq., one of the earlier residents of Pittsburg, well known and esteemed for his many excellent qualities. Mrs. Black was a woman of vigorous and active mind, sanctified and directed by the grace of God, and though

called away in comparatively early life, she stamped much of her own character upon her children.

Few men were better known or more esteemed than Dr. John Black. As a profound scholar, accurate theologian, ready, able and eloquent preacher, and holy man of God, he commanded universal respect, and has left behind him the blessed memory of a good name. It was thus the high privilege of Dr. Andrew W. Black to be the offspring of parents distinguished for their Christian virtues. He strongly resembled his father, and the resemblance increased as the son advanced in years. Mental character is often hereditary. And although the whole subject of the relation of parents and children is full of mystery, it is also full of encouragement to parental virtue. That I may perpetuate some of my good qualities in my children is a stimulus to my own consistency. But how few think of this. The early years of Dr. Black were spent in a Christian home, and in subjection to its discipline. And we have heard him thank God that he had always been kept from the vices of youth, and had come forth with unscathed virtue from its temptations.

His literary education was pursued under the eye of his father, and for some time in the academy of that eminent classical scholar, Rev. Dr. Robert Bruce, of Pittsburg. Here he grew up in company with several persons who subsequently became distinguished in various walks of public life, and whose friendship and respect he continued to command. After the establishment of the Western University of Pennsylvania, in which his father was for years a professor, he entered its classes, and was graduated in 1825. Through the entire course, he was recognized as one of the superior minds of the institution, and in subsequent years he retained his interest in his alma mater. At his death he was the President of the Board of Trustees, and had, on one occasion,

the Principalship in his offer. To be a life-long resident of the same community, with the public eye continually upon the character, is a trial of no little severity. And to pass through the ordeal with increasing respectability, is good evidence of superior mental attainments.

“ How long have you been pastor of the Beekman street Chapel ?” asked the late Chancellor Kent of Dr. Milnor, of this city. “ Twenty-five years, sir,” was the answer. “Twenty-five years, sir!” exclaimed the Chancellor; “ I have a profound respect for any public man that stays twenty-five years in one place.” The high place Dr. Black enjoyed in the public esteem of the community in which he was born, and the universal lamentation which his sudden removal occasioned, are palpable evidences of his worth.

After leaving the University, Dr. Black was formally recognized as a student of theology, under the care of the Reformed Presbytery of Pittsburg, and entered with vigor on his immediate preparations for the ministry. While thus engaged, an event occurred which produced a strong impression on his mind, and deepened his religious convictions. It was the death of his brother next older than himself, and his bosom friend, engaging all his affections.

Mr. John Black was no ordinary character. Intellectual, ardent, candid, and honorable, though at the same time sensitive and retiring, he had given himself to the service of Jesus Christ with all his heart. His religious experience was unusually ripe for his years, and his strong desire was to preach the Gospel. But this was not to be allowed him. After graduating with distinction from the University in the month of June, 1825, he commenced the study of theology in the Seminary of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. But death had marked

him as its own. He appeared in the pulpit, and delivered a discourse from Luke 24, 26: "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to have entered into glory?" It was a piece of trial assigned him by the Presbytery, and it proved to be his last discourse. He however received at the time license to preach the Gospel, but was never able to use it. He died of consumption in the house of Rev. Dr. Wylie, of Philadelphia, on the fifteenth of August, 1828, in the twenty-third year of his age.

God often overrules the death of his saints, especially if there be anything very marked in their character, for great good to survivors. Both the subject and the author of this memorial, have to thank God for the blessed effects of the early removal of their dear friend, upon their own Christian character. We think we yet hear his voice, as it said to us clearly and distinctly from the bed of death, more than, thirty years ago: "You remain in the Church militant to fight the battle, I go to the reward without engaging in the conflict."

While relatives and friends are mourning beside the death bed of the departing child of God, and the heart is breaking under the terrible anticipations of the coming bereavement, they know not how full of everlasting blessing that hour and its realities may be to them. Dr. Black always looked back to the last scenes of his brother's life with joy, and was conscious that the piety of his own heart was greatly improved thereby. In the winter of 1828, Dr. Black was licensed to preach the Gospel by the Reformed Presbytery of Pittsburg; and having traveled, during the interval, through the West and South, he was ordained, on his return, and installed Pastor of the congregations of Shenango and Neshannock, Pennsylvania. This took place on the 18th of January, 1832.

*The Dying Christian's Estimate of Heaven*, by John Niel McLeod (1858).

The field upon which he now entered was extensive and laborious. New stations for preaching were springing up continually, and calling for increased exertion. The Church under his ministry was much enlarged, and there are now several congregations with their Pastors in the region where for some years he labored alone. Nor was he occupied with his own pastoral duties only. He took an interest in all that concerned the welfare of the community in which he lived, and was prominent in establishing and sustaining institutions of various descriptions, designed for the public benefit. He was one of the founders of the Mercer County Missionary Society, established on the principle of a union of effort among Presbyterians of the different names, to sustain a missionary among the heathen, and for some years acted as its Corresponding Secretary. Every good cause received his support from the pulpit and the platform, and being, from the commencement of his public life, a ready and acceptable speaker, his services in this character were frequently in demand.

On the 1st of January, 1835, Dr. Black was united in marriage to Margaret, youngest daughter of John Roseburgh, Esq., of Pittsburg. The blessing of God rested on their union. A home of sanctified affection was established. It was a centre of joyful attraction to Dr. Black, for the remainder of his life on earth. In its bosom he died; and the influence of his Christian instruction and example still lives, to console and guide its inmates in their irreparable bereavement. The wife and mother is sustained by the blessed hopes of the Gospel. Before his death, the father had the pleasure of seeing his eldest daughter, Mrs. Dr. Woods, making a public profession of religion, and since his departure, his eldest son and second daughter, both of whom are

in very early life, have declared themselves on the side of Jesus Christ, by coming to the communion table.

By the excessive labors of his first pastoral charge, Dr. Black's health became seriously impaired. He resigned in consequence, and retired to Pittsburg, after more than six years of pastoral duty. He was not, however, to be idle. A call was made upon him by the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Allegheny, then recently organized of a colony from his father's congregation. He accepted, and was installed Pastor in 1839. This introduced him to a new field of labor, and he cultivated it with his usual energy.

While Pastor of the Church in Allegheny, Dr. Black received the appointment of Chaplain or Moral Instructor in the Penitentiary of the western district of Pennsylvania, and for several years discharged its duties with success. His habit was to preach each Sabbath morning, at 8 o'clock, to the prisoners brought within the sound of his voice, and then repair to his own place of worship to attend to the ordinary services of the sanctuary. He spent some time each day in tendering instruction to the convicts in their cells, and had the satisfaction of seeing many appreciating his tuition, and living to reform, or dying in the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. In this service he gained much knowledge of human nature; had his own sympathies kept alive, and was instrumental of much good to the offcasts of society for whose eternal welfare he labored. We are aware that he continued to occupy this post rather for its opportunities of usefulness, than for any emolument it afforded. He always regarded the period during which he preached to the "spirits in prison," as one of the most useful of his life. From the experience he had gained in the treatment of the criminal, and the known tact and wisdom he had shown in their management, he was

much consulted on the subject of prison discipline. Even after he resigned his connection with the State Prison, he took an active part in the establishment of the House of Refuge for Western Pennsylvania, and visited almost all the western counties of the State, to urge its claims to support. And all this time he was attending to his pastoral duties, taking an active part in the public business of the Church generally, and occupying a place in the front rank of the evangelical preachers of his locality.

It was while discharging the pastoral office in Allegheny that he received the degree of D.D. from Rutgers College in New Jersey. It was an honor worthily conferred by an institution of high respectability, by no means promiscuous in the dispensation of its literary favors.

Having resigned his charge in Allegheny, in 1855, Dr. Black accepted for a year the agency of the American Bible Society for several of the northern counties of Pennsylvania and Ohio; and in the meantime received invitations to settle in Chicago and several other places. All of these he declined. At the meeting of the General Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, held in Cedarville, Ohio, in June, 1857, he received the appointment of delegate to the sister Churches in Britain and Ireland, and also of the representative of the Church to which he belonged, to the Conference of Evangelical Christians meeting in Berlin, Prussia. To these duties he attended with great propriety, and left a very favorable impression upon many individuals of eminence with whom he met abroad, as well as on the several public assemblies he addressed. His voyage to Europe, and intercourse with the many Christian men and ministers whose acquaintance he made, refreshed his spirit. And his friends and the Church fondly expected that this would be a means of preparing him

for more extended usefulness. The printed report to Synod on the subject of his mission, which he prepared, displays his grasp of mind, his catholic temper, and his decided views, both of the evils of the defective Protestantism of the continent of Europe, and of the only remedy adequate to their removal. His eloquent sermons, lectures, and less formal addresses on these subjects, after his return, attracted much attention at the time, and have left permanent impressions of value.

At the meeting of the General Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, held in Eden, Illinois, in June, 1858, Dr. Black was appointed Professor of “ Exegetical, Historical and Evangelistic Theology,” in the Theological Seminary under their care. He was preparing for the duties thus devolved upon him by the unanimous act of the highest judicatory of his Church, when death came in and summoned him to his reward. Before the day had arrived for the opening of the Seminary, he had gone up to the higher seats above. And instead of his living voice speaking his matured instructions to his students and the Church, which we expected to have heard about this very day, it is the impressive, warning silence of his early grave that now addresses us. It tells us that all human calculations are uncertain, and that there is nothing permanent but what stands connected with the unchangeable God. We bedew his grave with the tears of bereaved friendship, but we also plant upon it the perennial flower of Christian hope. “ Thy brother shall rise again,” was the language of Jesus to the mourning sisters of Lazarus. It is his voice of consolation to us also. We believe it. And any mysteries which we may think we find, covering as a cloud the designs of God in this mournful providence, will all be dispelled by the light of the resurrection morning.

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Were we to attempt to concentrate into a portrait the various features of character which we have been scattering over the past description, we would say that it is a genial and attractive picture which they form. It is a decided Christian man, and minister of Jesus Christ, that stands before us. But we must remember that it is the hand of partial friendship that holds the pencil, and the coloring may be made too high for truth. We had better let the facts speak their own conclusions.

We may, however, say, while we appropriate a language which we have elsewhere used, that Dr. Black was possessed of fine natural talents, which were duly cultivated by the discipline of study, and intercourse with living minds, of a high order. He believed himself to have been brought to God in early life, and he devoted himself to the work of the Christian ministry, while still a youth. His piety was earnest, cheerful, confiding, and diffusive. He had his clouds, but it was more frequently sunshine with him, as he pursued his Christian journey.

As a man, he was intellectual, candid, social, conciliatory and jocose. Intensely truthful himself, he demanded truth in others. He detected deception in character, almost at a glance, and from the deceiver he fled as from pollution. He had warm affections, which he expressed with earnestness toward all that commanded his regard, and a genial temper that made it sunshine wherever he was. Dr. Black had high qualities for public business and usefulness. Well versed in the rules of order, and prompt and decided in all his movements, he was often chosen to preside over public bodies. On two occasions he was called to the Moderator's chair of the General Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, and both commanded and conciliated respect by his

decision, promptitude and fairness. He took a prominent part in the literary, benevolent, and religious institutions of his own locality, and of the country, and was often found upon the platform advocating their claims, which he did with readiness and power.

As a public speaker, he was always prompt, ingenious, and attractive, and often eloquent and commanding.

It was, however, as a preacher of the Gospel that he most excelled. His large store of sound theology, and his quick apprehension of the relations of his subject, and the meaning of its terms, made him a good expositor of Scripture. But it was in the sermon that his superiority appeared. There his abundance of material, his self-control, his large Christian experience, his warm sensibilities, and his elegant and fluent elocution, gave him great influence over his audience, and showed him to be an able minister of Jesus Christ.

While Dr. Black remained, amidst all changes, and with many inducements to connect himself with larger and more popular bodies, firmly attached to the Church of his fathers, he loved and was willing to co-operate with evangelical Christians of every name. He was at home with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ, and look delight in their fellowship.

A distinguished physician, and mutual friend, R. B. Mowry, M. D., of Allegheny, thus sketches his character in a word : “ Dr. Black was a warm and constant friend. He had been for years an adviser in whom I placed implicit confidence. He wore the religion of Jesus Christ meekly. He proclaimed the Gospel boldly. There was nothing that savored of cant about him. He was a substantial minister of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he looked the character well, without any of the extra efforts which some men have to

use, in order to appear what they profess to be. I feel his loss most keenly. This world sends few fitter inhabitants to heaven.”

Rev. T. W. J. Wylie, also, his accomplished predecessor in the theological chair, now absent in Europe for the benefit of his health, thus pours out his heart, on hearing of his demise : “I write to unite my sympathies with yours in regard to the departure of our beloved friend, Dr. Black. O, how sad to think that we shall never meet with him again on earth. The light and the life of any company in which he was found; so warm-hearted, so frank, so earnest, so ready, so active, so undoubtedly a true servant of Jesus Christ. My heart is poured out in me when I think of it. You will especially miss one who was, emphatically, to you a brother beloved. But God is supremely wise and good. We must be dumb because He has done it. Still, his removal to the bright world above beckons us onward. It is a renewed pledge of its reality, for he is there ; and it is an additional incentive to press forward, that we may meet him again.”

But we now approach that solemn place, to which we must all ultimately come—the death-bed. And we are often preparing, unconsciously, for this, by the operation of those very plans, and projects, and consultations with God, which we design shall qualify us for longer life, and more extended public usefulness.

It had been remarked by Dr. Black’s more intimate friends, that an unusual seriousness had pervaded his spirit for some time prior to his unexpected death. An unction more than common had characterised his pulpit services, and he was earnest and persevering in his exertions to promote the revival of religion in his own denomination and in other Churches. And it was thus that God was preparing him for

the close of his life and ministry together. The last discourse which we heard from his lips, was delivered on the morning of Monday, June 7th, 1858, from the pulpit of the Rev. Professor Wylie, in Bloomington, Indiana. It was at the close of a highly interesting communion season, in which the evident presence of Jesus Christ had been largely enjoyed by the ministry and assembled people. The text was from the Song of Solomon, vii., 13, last clause : "At our gates are all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old, which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved." The theme was the provision made by the Saviour in his love, for his Church and people. It was treated as a matter of joyful experience, and with an earnest tenderness and holy unction of manner, that riveted the attention and delighted the hearts of the Christian assembly present. We thought, as we heard it with deep sensibility, that it indicated as much spirituality of mind, and as mature religious experience, as we had ever heard expressed in a sermon. It made a deep impression on the minds of the hearers. It was an epitome of the experience of his own heart.

Dr. Black was then unwell. He had been so through the whole journey which we had taken together to the General Synod, in Eden, Illinois; we met him again early in August, at the conference of the committees of the Reformed Presbyterian Synods in Allegheny for promoting the re-union of those bodies, and at which he had taken a prominent part. And again, for the last time on earth, in the city of Philadelphia at the close of the same month. His health was evidently shaken, and a cloud of seriousness was over his spirit. He had no immediate thought of death, and no fears of it, even as viewed at some distance still in the future. But his conversation was in heaven. Secret prayer—its

necessity, its hindrances, its uses, and the enjoyment it affords, was the subject of mutual remark in our last conversation of any extent together. And this was connected with the expression of earnest desires for the prosperity and success of the cause of God in the hands of the beloved Church, with which we were both identified. We parted, expecting to meet again at the opening of the Seminary, at the appointed time. But God had ordained it otherwise. Dr. Black went home to die. The last battle was to be fought, and it was fought under an abundant outpouring of sustaining grace. It was therefore won. On Thursday, 26th of August, we separated in Philadelphia. He then went to the sea-shore, where he spent the Sabbath, and, on the morning of Thursday, 2d of September, arrived at his home in Sewickley. He had engaged to dispense the Lord's Supper at Deercreek, on Sabbath, 5th, and with his usual perseverance, proposed to set out on Thursday. Seeing his weakness, and filled with uneasiness for his health, his beloved wife accompanied him. He took seriously ill in the cars, and with difficulty reached home in the return train of the evening. He had been attacked with malignant dysentery, and, weakened as he was by previous indisposition, he soon sunk beneath its power. He was no more to sit down at the Communion Table of earth. It was his unspeakable privilege to receive his summons when actually about his Master's business. He died with the harness on.

The following extracts from letters of witnesses of the scene of death, will show how God sustained him in the dying hour:—

“ In reference to his last hours, (says his brother, Rev. R. J. Black, of Philadelphia,) I cannot easily write. It is still well nigh overwhelming to think of him as he lay on that bed

of death. I reached Sewickley some twenty-four hours before he was called away. At that time his physical pain was over, to a great degree. His sufferings previous to this, however, were, I am told, very great, despite all the efforts made for their alleviation. Yet all was heroically borne, and not a murmur escaped his lips. It was needful, as he well knew, for the perfecting of the saint, “ that he fill up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ,” and therefore did he patiently endure. He viewed his approaching end with the greatest composure. I never saw a person dying who appeared so calm and resigned. There was given him what has been, not inaptly, styled dying grace, in that solemn hour. I said to him, “Andrew, I fear you are soon to be taken from us, but it is better that it should be so.” “ Oh, yes,” said he, “ it is better—to depart and be with Christ, is far better.” He was willing to leave all, to be with Christ, for a little afterwards he turned to his wife, and said, “ I did not think, a week ago, that I should have to leave you so soon, but it is better.” The farewell messages which he sent to different individuals and congregations, indicated that all within was tranquil, and the mind perfectly undisturbed. “ What shall I say to my people from you, Dr. Black, on next Sabbath ?” inquired Rev. Dr. Allison, of Sewickley, for the sake of his charge. “ Tell them,” was the reply, “ I am on the verge of the grave ; tell them to follow Jesus. It helps a man to have done so when he comes to stand on the very edge of the grave.” To the brethren of the Pittsburg Presbytery, he expressed the desire that they might be stirred up to increased, diligence in duty. “ Tell them,” he said, “ they have much work to do for Christ. The field of labor is large, let it not languish and die.” In the midst of these parting advices, he desired the 23d Psalm to

be sung. I think he joined distinctly in the singing when it was commenced. Then prayer was offered, and when it was over, he uttered the words indicating his experience of Christ's sufficiency, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." After this he seemed to be absorbed in meditation and prayer, and so continued until the spirit was released from the frail tenement, and took its flight to its eternal home in the heavens. His death was so perfectly calm and easy, that it was some minutes afterwards before it was known that he was gone."

Another ministerial brother, Rev. A. M. Stewart, of the Second Reformed Presbyterian Church, in Pittsburg, says : " I was with Dr. Black when he departed. It was in peace. Not more than two minutes before he died, I asked him if there was any doubt or darkness on his mind. Readily and distinctly he answered, No. I asked again, if all was bright and joyous before him. The answer was, Yes; and his gentle breathing at once ceased."

We introduce one other witness (our eldest daughter), not used, like the others, to scenes of death : " I have seen Dr. Black die, and, Oh ! so gently, so peacefully did he pass away that it was impossible to tell at what exact moment the spirit took its flight. He retained all his faculties to the last, and died looking straight at his wife, his eyes beaming with intelligence and love, and his arms gently folded across his breast. He appeared so startlingly natural as he laid there after his spirit, without a single struggle, had left its tenement of clay, that for some time the physicians, four of whom were present, could not believe that he was really gone. The Rev. Mr. Stewart came in at the same time with myself. He prayed with Dr. Black, and asked him several questions concerning his faith in Christ, to all of which he received the most satisfactory replies. The morning he

died he called all his family to the bedside, and from about 12 o'clock, M., until half-past 2 o'clock, P. M., he talked to each, and all of them, in the most solemn and beautiful manner, taking leave of each one separately with words of parting advice. He sent distinct messages to all of his sisters who were not present, and to his absent brother, (Judge Black, of Nebraska,) a special declaration of his love. He talked about you (the present speaker) for some time. He said your intercourse together had always been sweet, and that if any funeral sermon was at any time preached for him, that he desired that you should do it.—

Then he said, “ Dr. McLeod, true brother—yes, true brother—I loved you in life, in death you are not forgotten. Death shall not separate us.” This last sentence he repeated, slowly and emphatically, three times. His parting with his wife was most affecting. But into this sanctuary we must not intrude. Having given some directions respecting his funeral, he lay back quietly for a few moments, and then repeated in a loud strong voice the beautiful words of Job, “ I know that my Redeemer liveth.” Again, after a brief silence, he said, “ Hark ! Who is singing ?” He made all listen, and when they assured him that they heard no music, he said, “ Well, then, I suppose it is the angels’ song of welcome I hear.” He then requested them to sing, “ The Lord is my shepherd.” But, for some time, no one was equal to the task, until his brother, (Rev. R. J. Black,) in a trembling voice commenced to sing; and they all, amidst tears and sorrow sang it through. He lay perfectly still for some time, and they all supposed him to be dying, but he again revived. After the formal leave-taking with the family, he appeared to be done with the world. Between four, and ten minutes past, he expired. Oh, that death-bed scene ! I

can scarcely for a moment get it from my eyes. It is a scene I never can forget.”

And so our dear brother entered into his rest. Thank God, for such death-bed scenes ; they demonstrate more powerfully than volumes of logical argument, the truth of Christianity, and the loving kindness of its divine and blessed Author.

The announcement of Dr. Black’s death produced a powerful impression on the whole community in which he lived. From the time he was laid upon his bed until his death, notice was given to the public of his condition, by all the daily papers of Pittsburg and its vicinity, and extended editorial comments, and obituary notices—many of them of the most complimentary character—were presented. His removal was deplored as a public loss.

“ The funeral services, at the house and the grave,” (we again quote from Rev. Mr. Black’s letter,) “ were impressive and memorable. The remains were carried from the room in which he expired to the front porch, where an opportunity was furnished to the friends to look for the last time, on the face of him who had been so beloved in life. Rev. Dr. Allison, of Sewickley, introduced the services by reading the Twenty-third Psalm. It was sung to the old Sacrament tune of Coleshill, and many an eye was moistened with tears. Dr. Pressly then made an address from Proverbs, xiv., 22. ‘ The wicked is driven away in his wickedness, but the righteous has hope in death.’ I thought it excellent, and that justice was done to the personal and ministerial character of the deceased. Prayer was next offered by Rev. A. M. Stewart for the afflicted family and friends. A second address followed the prayer. It was made by Rev. John McMillan, and abounded with comfort-

ing expressions of condolence and sympathy. The services at the house were closed with the Apostolic Benediction, by the Rev. Mr. Travelli, of Sewickley. The remains were then taken to Pittsburg depot, where they were met by many friends, and thence the funeral proceeded to the Allegheny Cemetery, which is some four miles east of Pittsburg. Andrew's 'dust redeemed' was laid by the side of his father's, and the whole solemn scene was closed with prayer by Rev. Dr. Plummer of the Theological Seminary, at Allegheny."

And now, that the grave has closed over all that is mortal of our friend, what are the lessons of profit which the event inculcates upon us ? Among them is the utter uncertainty of life. Who knows, at this moment, how near he is to the end of his journey ? We may be in vigorous health to-day, surrounded by prosperity, our hands filled with employments, and our minds deeply impressed with plans and projects for the future; and yet, if we could penetrate the veil that hides the future from our view, we would, perhaps, see the bed of death, the mourning household, and the open grave prepared for ourselves.

Our friend, to whose memory we are offering this feeble tribute, was recently in life and health. He was actively engaged in plans of usefulness for the Church of Christ. The Church had called him to an important official station in her school of the prophets. He expected to be to-day instructing the youth of the Church in the science of Christian theology, that they might be prepared for the service of God, in the Gospel of His Son. He looked over his own beautiful household, as its members are preparing for usefulness in the world ; and he considered with deep solicitude, the present condition and future prospects of the

Church of his birth, and labors and unabated affection; and he was preparing himself for new efforts for the advantage of all these, and for a more earnest consecration of his talents to the great Redeemer, whose honored minister he was. But amidst all this, the message comes—"Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live." He ascends almost from the very altar of public duty, to take hold of the crown of immortality in heaven. And our summons may be as unexpected as was his. Are we ready to meet the responsibilities of the close of life, of the bar of God, of our stewardship in the Church below? Ministers of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, and of other Churches, whom I see before me, students of theology preparing for the service of Christ, Christian men and women, to whose ears those lips which are now silent in the grave have often brought the glad tidings of salvation, are you ready to die? Can you, as before the Omniscient eye, say at this moment, "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better!" If you can, the uncertainties of time need not confuse or dismay you. All is safe. The unchangeable is yours. But, Oh, beware how any of you puts off the decision of that question of questions: Have I believed in Jesus Christ to the salvation of the soul?

Choose Jesus Christ as your Saviour NOW. The ministry that brought the message to your fathers are gone; their sons who have succeeded them are passing away also.

But again, and finally, we are taught by the providence we have been considering, the present consolation and eternal security of the Christian in union with Jesus Christ. Christianity is a sustaining power. It sustains by its instructions, its hopes, its certainties which faith realizes, and by its blessed anticipations of future good. Among the good,

the “ far better” things of the future heaven are its permanent friendships. The friendship with God which is secured to the Christian on earth is extended to, and perpetuated in heaven. And why not the friendships founded on Christian character on earth ? Does the soul made perfect in holiness, lose its memory in passing from earth to heaven? Does death so change the man, that he forgets the brother beloved in Jesus Christ whom he knew and loved in the sanctuary below ? Will the resurrection from the dead blot out the recollections of persons and things which the heart knew and loved when in the mortal body ? Will the soul in glory be so absorbed in the contemplation of God in Christ, as neither to know or love the sons and daughters of adoption bearing his image, that it knew on earth ?— It cannot be. Heaven is a place of blessed re-union to Christians, bound together by friendship on earth, and laying that friendship with all its products at the feet of Jesus Christ. “ Death shall not separate us.” Thou hast said it, brother. I shall see thy face, and hear thy voice of music no more on earth. May God grant it that we meet in heaven—that all here may meet together there, through the grace of Jesus Christ whose friendship is as lasting as His throne.