

A
SERMON

AT THE FUNERAL OF THE

REV. WILLIAM H. COOPER,

- IN -

BELLPORT, LONG ISLAND.

February 27, 1880.

By EPHER WHITAKER.

NEW YORK :

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S E R M O N .

I Thess. 4 : 13, 14.

“ But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.”

If the light of God's word did not shine upon us, we might be compelled to sit in anguish, and weep, and wonder, in view of death. We might very properly deem it the worst calamity that could befall us. We might rain our tears of inconsolable grief upon the lifeless form of one of our kindred, or upon the grave of the precious dead, and regard all beyond that cold and narrow house as darker than death, and more uncertain than the hour of His coming.

It is the word of God only, that can make us perfectly sure that the grave does not bound the Christian's highest hopes, nor end his joys, nor close his conscious and delightful existence. But, blessed be God, His word does make it perfectly plain, and as perfectly sure that when believers in Jesus die, after having worshipped Him here, and served Him in faithfulness and truth, their kindred and friends need not sorrow, even as others who have no hope.

There are several reasons, which the word of God affords, that may properly be presented to allay the

sorrow caused by our painful bereavement, which we feel most profoundly to-day.

The believer in Jesus enjoys, after death, perfect holiness in the presence of the Lord. All believers find even here much enjoyment in Christ, and in His worship and service. The sentence of their condemnation is removed, but their holiness is not complete. All the faithful in Christ Jesus can say: "Our sins are forgiven for our Saviour's sake;" but our sins are not all dead. We find a law in our members warring against the law of our mind, and bringing us into captivity to the law of sin. We still need deliverance from the body of this death. We feel the incurable disease which we must suffer until we die; and the gospel of forgiveness, although it comes from the very throne of heaven, cannot make us perfectly blessed, because we are in our own souls so imperfect. Though we have a true and hearty faith in Jesus, and the assurance of hope through Him, and some foretaste of heavenly felicity, as well as the peace of God that passeth all understanding, keeping the heart and mind through Jesus Christ; yet we are nevertheless constrained to say unto God, with the Psalmist of old: "I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness."

But after death, we are in a different state. We walk no more in slippery places. We experience no more any one of our ten thousand falls that distress us here. We leave a world of sin. We enter a world of holiness. The misery of our fallen nature is felt no more. Deviation from the path of rectitude hinders the pursuit of excellence no longer. Sin is not only

outstripped and left behind; but, in its place, there is the assurance that it will never more overtake us, to assail and wound, to afflict and defile the soul. Here we can feel no more than a gracious promise and encouragement of progressive sanctification. There we shall know the joy and the bliss of perfect holiness. And our conformity to the sinless character of God will fit us for the most delightful fellowship with Him. We cannot therefore sorrow, even as others who have no hope, when our believing kindred and friends depart from us to enjoy a purer and holier fellowship with Christ. This delightful intimacy gives them the most gratifying knowledge of God. Men of every diversity of character know of the existence of God. They see the proofs of His existence on every side. They mark the displays of His wisdom, power and goodness in the works of His hands. "For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuses." Rom. 1: 20. But believers not only know of His existence; they also enjoy His company. They cherish His society as that of their best Friend. They delight in Him as their unspeakably excellent and Heavenly Father. They speak to Him in prayer, and they receive and welcome His answers in His words and works; and their own love, and worship, and obedience, and service of Him bear witness with their own spirits that they are His children.

But the best people on earth deplore that their

fellowship with the Father, and with the Son, and with the Spirit, is imperfect. It will not be so always. It will, after death, be full, unceasing, and ever more perfect. In heaven they behold the glory of God. They see the Saviour in all His beauty and excellence; and their fellowship with Him is hindered by not one thought or act of sin. They hear the words of His lips. They rejoice in the light of His face. They feel His blissful presence forever. Their fellowship with Him is evermore unbroken and evermore faultless. They enjoy His life and His love without measure and without end. Therefore we sorrow not, even as others who have no hope, when our pious kindred precede us into the Father's house of many mansions, whither our Lord has gone to prepare a place for all His faithful worshippers on earth. How great is their privilege to dwell in the same house, to see Him face to face, and to know Him as they are known. It is eternal life to know the living and true God and His Son Jesus Christ whom He has sent to be the Saviour of the world. But there is more knowledge in store for us than we can obtain on earth. His creation as well as His providence makes known some of His perfections here. The Bible gives us fuller revelations, and especially through the incarnation of the Son do we come into the most grateful knowledge of God. We thus learn enough of Him to fill the obedient heart with worship and praise. But He may have a thousand attributes and excellencies of which we know nothing—not even their names. For we here

see through a glass darkly ; and who by searching can find out the Almighty unto perfection ? We desire greater, clearer, fuller knowledge of Him. Here His righteousness seems to us like the great mountains, which we cannot fully survey and comprehend, though we are sure that they are massive and unmoveable ; and His judgments are a mighty deep, which we cannot measure, nor even fathom. Many a time we hear Him saying : " What I do thou knowest not now ; but thou shalt know hereafter." We often desire and wait for the fulfilment of the promise. And while the Messenger tarries, who shall convey us to the immediate and manifest presence of the Lord, our heart sings :

" Then shall I see and hear and know
All I desired or wished below ;
And every power find sweet employ
In that eternal world of joy."

And the wiser, holier and happier service of God in heaven, by the worshippers of Jesus there, may well make Christians here sorrow not even as others who have no hope, when our faithful kindred and helpers of our faith depart to be with Christ, which is far better for them than to be here. For every Christian finds delight and profit in the worship and service of God according to the purity and excellence thereof ; and death ushers the believer into a scene of holy activity so pure and excellent that it is faultless ; and there is no weariness nor cessation of that activity for ever. Among the innumerable hosts of the holy,

strength, ardor, wisdom, joy, all increase in the glad experience of every worshipper.

In that supernal scene, there is not only the increase of all the sources of holy joy and blessedness, but there is also the absence of every bitter fountain of sin, and suffering and sorrow. In the presence of Christ there, His people never hunger, nor thirst, nor tire, nor weep. They suffer from no cold, nor heat, nor disease, nor wound. No one injures them in reputation, feeling, or character. The sky never threatens. The storm never comes. No sickness invades. No pain is felt. No friend ever fails or proves false. There is no envy nor jealousy among those who form the perfect society of heaven. The wickedness of the ungodly and the imperfection of the good never cause uneasiness and distress. No experience of weakness tempts to evil ways. No possession of power incites to haughtiness and wrong-doing. No prosperity inflates with pride, and no avarice causes neglect of the needy. No low condition promotes discontent, and no elevation fills the mind with anxiety and care. No hardness of heart disregards the claims of love and kindness. No worldly temptation urges one to deny the faith, to restrain pure affection, or to sacrifice truth and duty. There the rage and the restlessness of human passions disturb no more. Discord never enters; and the heavenly society is all perfectly pure as well as peaceful. Every mind is full of light; every heart overflows with love. They are like the holy angels. They are not strangers to each other. They are not a selfish, reckless throng. They all have their

own proper places and their own peculiar joys in the household of the Heavenly Father. They are all members of one perfect family.

Furthermore, life there does not begin, advance, mature and then decay. The movements of the holy there are not like the waves of the sea, that spring to the shore only to be thrown backwards in confusion and failure. God never says to His children there: Hitherto you may come, but no further. He says to each, to all: Higher, better; and heaven shines forth all the brighter as the eye becomes stronger and more thoroughly trained to behold the glorious beauty of the home of the Father of the redeemed and sanctified.

The Bible uses all the magnificence of the most opulent kingdoms; all the splendor of richest cities; all the beauties of an Eastern paradise, with its parks and gardens; all the wealth of empires; all the worship of the church; all the glory of the heavenly Jerusalem, with its gates of pearls, its streets of pure gold and its walls of precious stones; and all the perfection of its innumerable inhabitants, in order to give us some idea of the loveliness of the abode of the holy.

How strange that there is but one step for the believer between that abode of supreme and eternal bliss and this world of sin and care, and toil and pain.

The Rev. William H. Cooper has taken that step. He has passed from the small part of the church on earth to the larger commonwealth of the church in heaven.

Through what course among mortals did he reach the immortality of bliss into which, we doubt not, he has entered?

It appears that he was born in Pittstown, Rensselaer County, New York, June 27th, 1808—seventy-one years and eight months ago to-day.

His parents, Henry and Elizabeth Cooper, removed in his infancy to the City of Troy, where he spent his childhood in their Christian home, breathing the atmosphere of faith and piety. When he was about twelve years of age, they changed their residence to Albia, a manufacturing village two miles from Troy. In this place, his early Christian life became earnest, decided and manifest; and when he was fourteen years of age, he became a communicant in the First Presbyterian Church of Troy, under the pastoral care of the Rev. Dr. Nathan S. S. Beman.

His Christian character and condition soon became conspicuous, attractive and full of promise; and, by the advice of wise and good men, he began to prepare for college, with a view to the ministry of the gospel. He studied for some time as a pupil in the Academy of Troy, and subsequently continued his classical preparation under the instruction of the Rev. Cornelius Bogardus, the pastor of his parents, who were members of the Reformed Dutch Church in Winantskill. He finished his preparation for college in the Grammar School of New Brunswick, New Jersey, and entered the Sophomore class of Rutgers College in September, 1827, soon after he was nineteen years of age. He pursued the full course of study, and was graduated

with honor in the class of 1830. He was one of the speakers at Commencement.

A year before his graduation he delivered, by appointment, a junior oration. The subject which he had chosen was the Wrongs done to the American Indians. It is a theme which has not yet become obsolete. When he resumed his seat, after the delivery of his oration, the chair immediately in the rear of his seat on the platform was occupied by the Hon. William Wirt, one of the most charming writers of American literature; a consummate orator, as his Rutgers College oration delivered at that time well attests; an eminent lawyer, many years Attorney-General of the United States; and subsequently the candidate of one of the parties for the Presidency of the Union. The junior student had scarcely taken his seat when Mr. Wirt placed his hands upon the young orator's shoulder and said: "Young gentleman, I thank you for that speech. I am very soon to plead the cause of the Indians in the Supreme Court of the United States, and your speech contains one argument which had not occurred to me. I shall take the liberty of using it."

Immediately after his graduation, Mr. Cooper became a member of the chief Theological Seminary of the Reformed Dutch Church, in New Brunswick, and commenced his special studies for the ministry. He continued these studies with great diligence and faithfulness for two years, until the death of one of the Professors, and especially the outbreak of the cholera, caused the students to leave the city, and return for the most part to their homes.

While Mr. Cooper was visiting his eldest brother in Wampsville, Madison County, New York, the Session of the Presbyterian Church in that place invited him to conduct their public worship. This invitation he accepted. The church had never had a pastor, and contained but fourteen communicants. His services were cordially welcomed by the congregation, and in due time, he was unanimously called to be the pastor. The call was put into his hands by the Presbytery of Onondaga, and he was ordained and installed November 23d, 1833.

While he was a student in the Seminary, he was often an acceptable and worthy visitor in the home of Mr. Elias J. Thompson, whose son, the late Rev. George Washington Thompson, D.D.,* of Academia, Pa., became a minister of remarkable power and usefulness. Mr. Thompson was also the father of Mrs. Harriet Newell Hallowsay, the wife of the Rev. William W. Hallowsay, Senior, and the mother of the Rev. William W. Hallowsay, Junior, of Morris County, New Jersey. Brother Cooper found in the same household of love and piety the wife of his youth, the sharer of his richest joys and of his deepest sorrows for many years—the chief mourner here to-day.

Mr. Cooper labored in Wampsville with diligence, faithfulness and spiritual prosperity during a period of twenty-four years; and under his pastoral care the church increased more than tenfold.† His genial

* See a vivid, analytic and appreciative sketch of his character and ministry, by Mr. J. H. Shumaker, Principal of Tuscarora Academy, in *Wilson's Presbyterian Historical Almanac*, Vol. VII., (1865), pp. 124-133.

† It has since declined from one hundred and fifty communicants to thirty-three.

disposition, trustworthy character, ministerial ability and scholarly attainments made him well known in that part of the country; and in 1847 the Trustees of Hamilton College conferred upon him the honorary degree of Master of Arts.

He remained the faithful pastor of Wampsville until 1856. Providential events then made it his duty and his desire to resign his charge; and the Presbytery released him according to his request.

He had been for some years at a previous time in that place a near and congenial neighbor to the Rev. Francis Topping Drake, a Long Island man, Southold being the place of his birth and of his burial. Mr. Drake had become the pastor of Middletown, Long Island; and he made the congregations of South Haven and Bellport, which adjoined each other and also his own, acquainted with his dear Brother Cooper. Thus this beloved pastor commenced his ministry here, in the summer of 1856. He became a member of the Presbytery of Long Island at Port Jefferson, on the 10th day of September, in the same year; and he was forthwith called to be pastor of these churches.

He accepted the call, and was installed on the 23d of September, 1856. His neighbor and friend, the Rev. Mr. Drake, presided. His brother-in-law, the Rev. William W. Halloway, Senior, then of the North Reformed Dutch Classis of Long Island, preached in the forenoon at South Haven from Hosea 14: 5: "I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots like Lebanon." The Rev.

William B. Reeve charged the pastor; the Rev. Thomas Owen, the people. In the afternoon of the same day a similar installation was made in Bellport. The Rev. Mr. Drake presided; the Rev. Mr. Halloway preached from Gal. 6:7: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." The Rev. Mr. Drake charged the pastor, and the Rev. Mr. Reeve, the people.

The Rev. Dr. Cooper continued to be the pastor here so long, that more than half the ministers who were at that time members of the Presbytery departed this life earlier than himself.

The South Haven church then contained thirty-four members and the Bellport church eleven, in full communion. Both congregations have greatly changed in the course of twenty-four years. But one of the eleven members of the Bellport church survives the beloved pastor; and yet under his pastoral care the membership of these churches has advanced from forty-five to one hundred and eighteen, making a gain of two hundred and sixty-two per cent.—a proportion of increase such as few of our churches have made in these years on Long Island.

Dr. Cooper was attentive to his presbyterial duties and faithful in the superior courts of the church. He was greatly beloved as well as highly esteemed by his ministerial brethren. His first service in the General Assembly was, I believe, at Pittsburgh in 1836, when he voted with the majority to restore the Rev. Albert Barnes to the ministry, and to the pastoral duties of the First Church of Philadelphia, from which the

Synod of Philadelphia had suspended him. His last service in the General Assembly was at Baltimore in 1873. To this Assembly he was chosen, by all the ballots cast in our Presbytery, to be the ministerial commissioner.

If I may be permitted to say a word respecting his relations of a personal nature to myself, I would remark, that we were first drawn into intimate friendship by our common and strong desire, that the union of the two great parts of our Church might be most fruitful and happy. At the time of the Reunion, we were providentially Moderators of our respective Presbyteries; and with his habitual courtesy, wisdom, kindness and generosity, as he was the elder, better and abler man, and the chief officer of the larger body, he invited me to take his place and preach the opening sermon in the presence of his Presbytery. This service I performed in my poor way in the Church of Fresh Ponds, at Vernon Valley, on the 12th of April, 1870, using for my text the words of the Apostle Paul, I Thes. 2: 12. "That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto His kingdom and glory." Just a week later, at Cutchogue, Brother Cooper preached to my Presbytery. His sermon was a discourse of great excellence and force. Did he ever preach any other than good and great sermons? I have heard him preach several times, and every one of his sermons was remarkable for excellence. The first which I heard from his lips—the one at Cutchogue—was eminently characteristic of the man. It was clear, strong, spiritual, warm,

tender and eloquent—full of the gospel, of the grace of God, and of the Christian faith and life. His text was the words of the Apostle Paul in Acts 20: 24. "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." I have never known a pastor who could, in my judgment, more appropriately take these words of Paul for his own. How well he fulfilled all the various, manifold, confidential and responsible duties of the pastoral office is better known to many of his own people who hear me than even to myself. These bereaved congregations know his devotion to their welfare and his eminent worth and loveliness. No other man more largely possessed the confidence and hearty affection of his ministerial brethren with whom he was most closely associated. He was at the head of the Presbytery when he ceased from his labors—the longest in ministerial service, and unsurpassed for congeniality of spirit and Christian faithfulness. Our hearts were knit to him; for he had been proved to be worthy of unshaken trust and of the most cordial affection.

The Heavenly Father most carefully prepared the way for the quiet and peaceful transition of His servant from earth to heaven; and He also prepared His devoted worshipper for this serene and happy transition. Dr. Cooper was in the house of his son, a physician of intelligence, experience and skill. He had for weeks enjoyed the company and the assiduous

attentions of Mrs. Cooper and all their children: The malady which had distressed him for months, lost its painful nature ; and for at least four days before he ceased to breathe, the distressing cough had been unheard, and all fear that the disease of the throat might fatally suppress respiration had passed away. The gentle sufferer had the full possession of all his mental powers until the very last hour. He needed for the last half week no one to support him, or even to bolster him up. He lay upon his bed with ease and comfort in any position, and thus he quietly and peacefully ceased to breathe as the child falls to sleep in the arms of the mother.

“ 'Tis well with him ;
But who knows what the coming hour,
Veiled in thick darkness, brings to us ? ”

It is not for us to rebel, though we most deeply feel the bereavement. Our Heavenly Father will not fail us. Our faith shall not falter. Our great sorrow—the grief of his fellow presbyters, of his congregations, of his kindred, finds its best relief in the full and firm assurance of the rectitude and graciousness of God's character and ways, and the truthfulness of His word, respecting His people ; and so we may appropriately use the words of the Apostles, saying: “ I would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.”

It is time to close this service. I have repeated the divine words of consolation. I shall make no application of the matter in hand by way of admonition. The life which the beloved pastor has lived best speaks to his people. It calls you to remember the instructions which he has imparted; to heed the counsels which he has given; to walk in the way of truth, and duty, and life, looking unto Jesus, and trusting Him for salvation. To persuade you to be mindful of the truth which your pastor spake to you, during these many years of his ministry among you, this draped and vacant chair is more eloquent than any human lips save those which are here, but speechless to-day. I therefore close with the latest words which I have seen from the pen of our dear brother. His words were these:

"I remained the pastor of these churches, of Bellport and South Haven, twenty-three years and four months, until I became subject to a throat malady whereby my voice was a failure; and I was forced to abandon all attempts at preaching. I must now be watching and waiting in patience and submission for the Master's call to another field, in the world of blessedness and peace, where labor, toil and suffering give place for praise, singing His name who is the Redeemer of His people, and in the glory of whose presence eternity will be spent."