

# A DISCOURSE

COMMEMORATIVE OF

JOHN RILEY VARNEY,

PREACHED AT THE

FIRST CHURCH,

DOVER, N. H., MAY 5, 1882,

BY HIS PASTOR,

GEORGE B. SPALDING, D. D.

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## DISCOURSE.

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DEUT: 9:1.—“Thou art to pass over Jordan this day.”

How great, how unexpected was this announcement to the Israelites! For forty years they had been marching and camping in the wilderness. For forty years they had been enduring manifold privations and sorrows. At first they had thought that their pilgrimage would be short. When the sun of each day went down they had said, as they lay under their spreading tents; “Doubtless when next its setting beams fall upon us we shall be unfolding our tents among the acacia groves and the green banks of the Jordan; perhaps we shall have passed the stream, and with triumphal march and song and banner have entered the *Promised Land!*” The thought inspired them. Weariness, pain, sickness, the heat and roughness,—they were all forgotten as their imagination pictured the glories of that land that was just before them. But the days went by. Each morning’s sun that rose upon them revealed the same unending desert plain. The burning sand, the lowing herds, the children’s cries, the moans of the sick and the dying, the hurried separation from the dead,—these experiences of yesterday repeated themselves to-day and came to be expected for to-morrow, until the vision of beauty that had floated be-

fore their eyes became distant and shadowy. The eagerness of expectation disappeared, as with grim and silent tread they pushed on and on along the interminable way. And so the years went by, and the old fell out of the moving ranks, and those who had been young themselves grew old, and sooner or later faltered in the march. “When would the end come?” Perhaps they had almost ceased to expect it. “Where rolls this Jordan? and the fair land beyond,—who of us shall behold it?” Wearily did they stretch themselves to the ever lengthening journey. The vision faded. It was only the promises of hope that bore them forward. But there came a time, an hour, a moment when all was changed. It was a day like that of any other. The sun, which had beaten its heat upon them through the forty years, rolled on in his fiery splendor. Their feet were still slipping through the scorching sands. The familiar sounds of the camp, the cries of children and cattle, the shoutings of men, the wailings of the sick, the farewells of the dying still filled the air. But through it all came suddenly the announcement, “Thou art to pass over Jordan *this day*.” “This day comes the end of your long struggle. This day, you are to bid farewell to this arid, rocky wilderness along whose long trail lie the bleaching bones of your fathers, and whose soil has been moistened with the tears and blood of your misery. This day sees the end of your hopes and your fears, your cares, your sorrows. This day shalt thou enter into a land of vines and olives, flowing with milk and honey, filled with the glory of the divine presence and love.” With what jubilant hearts must the sudden summons have been received! With what a shout of joy, drowning all other sounds, must the march have

been begun, the Jordan passed, and their bleeding feet have moved through the gates into the fair cities of the Promised Land! How immediate the translation from their wanderings and toils, from the burning sands and poisonous breath of the desert to Canaan with its

“Sweet fields arrayed in living green!”

All through these ages since these great events in Israel's history were enacted, the minds of holy men and women have been directed towards them, and, in stately prose and sweetest poetry, they have used them to prefigure the great spiritual realities of life. The Egyptian bondage, with its oppressions and sufferings,—it has always been made to typify the captivities and miseries into which sin draws us. The wilderness, with its toils and struggles,—it has always set forth the temptations, the disciplines, the afflictions of our mortal lot. The Jordan,—it has always expressed by its cold, sullen stream, the chill and darkness through which human souls pass at death. And the Promised Land, Canaan,—how highest poetry has taken of its beauties to give form to the inconceivable glories of the Christian's heaven!

Egypt, the wilderness, the rolling Jordan, these remain to us, these abide with us,—present realities. Their appositeness as setting forth the phases of man's personal experiences, no thoughtful man can deny. Sin and struggle and death all admit, all experience. But Christian faith and hope go beyond these. They take hold with a not less firm grasp upon that other mightier fact in Israel's history, Canaan as an abiding reality, a celestial promise, rounding out into necessary completeness the Christian's emancipa-

tion from sin, his discipline of sorrow, and his passage to the grave. To the believer this Heaven is the most certain, the brightest of all realities. It is with him in his thoughts. It is the object of his hopes. It is the inspiration of his life. It is the comfort of his griefs. It is the first thought which comes to him as, having watched the quickening breath of the loved one, he beholds the last faint gasp, and then with tender touch closes the drooping eyelids. It is the first thought that rallies to itself strength and exultant hope after the shock of sudden death has spent its force. Above the anguish of farewell, or the mightier anguish of a quick and viewless transit, the ear of faith catches the voice of God, which called the dying one away, saying, “Thou shalt pass over Jordan *this day*.” Immediately, the believing soul, when once it has gathered to itself calmness, when once its vision becomes steadied, follows the ascending flight of the dear companion and friend who in a moment has been swept from life,—follows him up into that immortal radiance, into that fullness of joy, and clearness of beatific vision which are just the other side of this river of death.

I am not talking of illusions. I am not using the words of a religious ecstasy. I am speaking of thoughts, convictions and realities which belong to that soul which really believes in God. I do not mean to say that faith always and at once rises into this strong hope and blessed vision as respects our dead. I know that it does not. I know that despite all our theories of another life, and all our own certain assurances of a blessedness too high for words, which the dead in Christ have reached,—I know that instead of thinking of the departure of our friends with a triumphant love, we are sometimes found in a state of commiseration for

them, as though they were called from all that engages and delights us.

And especially when one in the full vigor of strength, and amidst his earthly plans, ambitions and enjoyments, is, as in a flash of light, borne from us, we for a time are confused and stunned. We see others gradually fading out of life, each day losing more and more their interest in earthly things. We see them day by day being unclothed as to their earthly house, and more and more clothed upon with that which is from heaven. They talk of heaven, they adjust their hopes, their feelings, their affections, their life to heaven. They are prepared for heaven, and so we are prepared in our thoughts and even our tender griefs for their transition there. And when they go, the believer in Christ and His immortal life follows such ones with certain faith, with clear-eyed hopes, with glad felicitations. But it is a different thing when one goes from us in a moment. He left us just now in the home; his voice rings in our ears. We saw him just now on the street. His stalwart form and swinging march impresses us. Hark! the crash of the falling wall smites the air. He is dead, dead! How difficult to feel it! How difficult to follow with our thoughts hard after him in his viewless flight, and enter with him through the gates into the heavenly city, rejoicing in the conviction that its glories are already his possession. For days we walk as if dazed. We go to his accustomed place of business. Here was his desk. Here he was wont to employ himself. We go to his home. Here was his chair. Here we used to speak to him; just now we heard his voice, and caught his laughter, and rejoiced in his smile. We go to the prayer room; there he always sat. His tones fill the place,

tender, pleading as of yore. You tell me that I shall never see that form again, that I never shall have his kindly greeting. How impossible just now to really feel it! You tell me that he who Sunday last sat there in his great strength, who three days ago swept along our streets, was in a single breath swept upward into the heaven of Christ and his angels. Faith for a time is held in the hands of our feelings. Our recollections, our associations cluster too thickly around his outward self. Imagination paints him on every space before us,—his manly form, his quiet, loving eye, his radiant smile. But it is only for a time. Gradually the spell of association is broken. Faith clears itself. Our confidence in God soon is strong. Though it was without that notice with which a lingering sickness sometimes signals to one the time of his departure; though when he rose in the morning in the full flush of health and sat down in the family circle, radiating all with his shining cheer, the voice of God was saying, all too silently for him to hear, “Thou art to pass over Jordan this day,” and as the day wore on, the voice repeated, “Thou art to pass over Jordan *this* hour;” and as the minutes flew by, and, at last, the falling wall and the crashing floor broke upon him,—though in that flashing instant of time, the briefest space between life and death, for the first time he heard the divine voice saying, “*Now, now*, thou art to pass over Jordan,” it was enough for him, for he knew whom he had believed; and we know whom we have believed, and we are persuaded that this good man, thus swept across the separating stream in the twinkling of an eye, was clothed with immortality, and with a victor’s wreath upon his brow, and a palm in his hand, went in through the gates into the radiancy beyond.



“Faith already with its gathered clearness beholds thee there,—away from the desert fare and march, away from these scenes of sorrow and distress, away from this purblind vision and these vague guesses of earth. Oh, Friend, all hail! Thy hopes are accomplished, thy joy is complete! We salute thee as blessed.”

But while we would seek to thus release ourselves from the power of these physical associations, and give wings to our faith, that we may soar into his beatific abode, and think of his joys there, we would not forget to speak of those qualities in our friend which here on earth have shone out conspicuously in the family, in the church, in the community and in the state.

If I shall speak of Mr. Varney in warmest praise, my claim is, that I knew him well, and in ways of intimacy that rarely come between two souls, I came to admire and love him in large measure.

John Riley Varney, the son of James and Sarah Varney, was born in Dover March 26, 1819. The house where he was born stood on what is now the extension of Washington Street, opposite the new No 1. mill. His early education was in the public schools of Dover. He then became a clerk in the store of Messrs. Alden & Morse. He soon determined that he would have a college education, and for this purpose he entered our Franklin Academy, fitted for college, went to Dartmouth, and graduated in 1843, taking the first or second position for scholarship in his class.

As usual with college boys in those times he taught school during his vacations,—an education in itself. After his graduation he taught in the Franklin Academy here for two years. He then took up the occupation of Civil En-

gineer, and continued in it for ten years. Here the very strong mathematical bent of his mind had full play in the solution of those problems which enter into the laying out of railroads. He was employed for a considerable time in surveys and measurements for a route through the great forest region of New York. I have often heard Mr. Varney speak of those thoughts and feelings awakened in him by those solemn and majestic scenes among which he dwelt at times alone,—the silence of the primeval woods, the magnificence of the towering trees, the grandeur of the mountains, the beauty of flowing brook and sweet-faced flowers. No soul among us was more attuned to these outward forms of nature than was his. In 1856 Mr. Varney became Clerk of the Court for Strafford County, remaining in office four years. He was then chosen Professor of Mathematics in Dartmouth College, in which position he remained three years. His extraordinary capabilities in this department of science were very fully conceded. But it was with him as it was with others of like greatness in mathematical science, as it was with Professor Chase of Dartmouth and Benjamin Pierce of Harvard,—his mind worked with great intuitive rapidity, leaping at conclusions over vast distances, which to the ordinary student in mathematics must be slowly bridged by successive stages of proof and reasoning. In 1863 he was admitted to the Bar and became the partner of Hon. John P. Hale. He served as Postmaster for four years. He was a member of the Legislature in 1856 and 7. He was Secretary of the Naval Committee at Washington in 1862 and 3. He was Register of Probate from the death of William C. Woodman until 1874, and, two years after, was re-appointed to the office. He has also served the city as

its Police Judge during the past five years, and as a member of the Board of Education, for four years. In 1868 Mr. Varney became a joint proprietor and editor of the "Dover Enquirer" and subsequently of the "Daily Republican," which position he filled to the time of his death. He has served this church in the office of Deacon since 1878.

These are the outlines which mark the courses through which the public life of Mr. Varney for these forty years has run. I do not claim that he has filled all these so widely diversified activities in such a way as to have escaped the adverse criticisms of others; for it is not possible that one should walk thus so conspicuously before men, holding positions where on every side he was exposed to the gaze of all the world, without calling down upon himself harsh judgments begotten of human envy, and jealousy, of party strife and bitterness. And going beyond this I would not in any blind, indiscriminate eulogy claim that Mr. Varney was otherwise than any one of us,—with imperfections and infirmities which enter into our best living, and detract from any full rounded symmetry and completed beauty of character. But I claim by my own intimate knowledge of his daily life in public, and by what I gather from those who have known him for longer years, from friends, and opponents too, that no act of his in all the wide discharge of his various trusts can be pointed out that does not show him to have been honest and honorable and truthful in all respects. Without ambition at all commensurate with his powers, or at all equal to the services which he has rendered to this community in every department of its interests, he has served on with diligence, with faithfulness, leaving a record, which will shine bright-

er and brighter through the days to come, of a life of true manliness, consistency and purity.

Mr. Varney bore about with him two natures, and they were most singularly opposite. He was large in physical stature, but every nerve tingled with life. He was as active in body as any child, buoyant and bounding in step. Years ago a stranger coming into town, and asking one of our citizens, "Where shall I find John R. Varney?" was told, "Stand just where you are at this corner for ten minutes; you will be sure to see a man within that time shooting past like a locomotive; that is your man." It proved so. The stranger easily identified him. One of the ways by which a boy was able to fix with certainty that it was Mr. Varney whom he saw enter the fateful building, was his description of him as he saw him the very day of his death, rushing into the post-office, snatching the mail from his box, and thrusting his letters and papers into his pockets. How many times have I seen him in the fields and woods in search of May-flowers or other objects, flitting here and there like a swallow in its low flights. In his long mountain excursions, it was a man of rare strength of muscle and elasticity of frame whom he could not easily weary out. And that other nature, his intellectual, was built on the same grand scale as was his physical, but the fires beneath it were further down and burnt slowly. It took the winds of great occasions to breath through the slumberous mass; and when they did, no man in all this community could flame out to better effect. If you will turn the leaves of the "Dover Enquirer," now and then you will strike an editorial which is really masterful in the force of its logic, in the fulness of its fact and information, in the clearness and

felicity of its language, and the eloquence of its appeal. I carry in my mind articles written for the Christmas weeks of the "Enquirer's" issue which in beauty of thought, in rhythmic flow of words, in tender pathos, and rejoicing faith are gems in literature. His mind was logical. His judgment was clear. His opinions were unmistakable. He had an intense zeal for any cause he represented, for he carried to an unusual degree his moral and even religious convictions into every cause he espoused. It was the moral part in him that kindled into heat and activity his intellectual forces. He believed that his party was right, hence he battled for it with an intensity that provoked personal opposition. He believed that his church was right, hence he was loyal to its every interest, to its very name, down to the core of his being. He believed that his friends were good, hence he was impatient and indignant when others spoke aught against them. And yet in all the antagonisms which he met or challenged there was no bitterness in his soul, no lingering vindictiveness in any part of his nature. He had a love for every body, and some of the more special acts of kindness were performed for those who had sought to do him injury. He was a man of purest taste, of cleanest speech. He abhorred profanity, irreverence, and impurity of every kind. He was pitiful and charitable to an uncommon degree. In his office of Police Judge he had very large discretion granted him in his adjudication of criminal cases. More than the judge on a higher bench he had opportunities to mingle mercy with justice. It was not the majesty of the law that he kept so much in mind as the moral saving of the culprit. I have been told by others who knew him in this very important

sphere of our public interests, that often when as magistrate he sat like one inflexible, when nothing else could move him, the tale of suffering which farther examination disclosed would melt his heart. How many poor sinners have found their discharge from him, as with hearty, touching fones he has said, "Don't do it again." His last official act, which was performed within an hour of his death, was a judicial decision in which the kindly instincts of his heart triumphed over the undue severities of the law in the case. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." How soon was the beatitude accomplished for him!

Oh, Friends! how little some of you knew of the womanly tenderness of this man's nature. Behind the atmosphere of careless unconcern, behind the brusque manner, which largely arose from his preoccupation of mind, there was a heart of kindness towards all,—so generous in its estimates of others, so full of allowance and charity. I, and many others, have seen it and felt it. None more true, more tender, more loving, and more lovable have I ever known.

I have spoken of his love of flowers. It was the love that he had for all nature and humanity itself. When he was younger, his friends used to say of him that he would sit all day by a snow bank waiting for the snow to melt and the May-flowers to come up. The wine of poetry and beautiful sentiment and most delicate feeling ran through every vein of his nature, giving forth its own aroma to all his private life. The stars! how often I have seen him gazing upward, exclaiming at their beauty. The ocean! how often I have chased him with languid steps from place to place on the rock-bound shore, and heard him shout, and strike his hands, with enthusiasm as the great waves broke, and sent

their seething foam high up the shore ; and how often as the twilight deepened, and the shadows fell upon sea and land have I sat by his side, awed by the great solemn thoughts, which I knew were surging through his inmost soul. There was a rare combination in him of natures which are too opposite to be often found in union,—the strong, logical reasoning and the quick sensibilities. But these were early developed in Mr. Varney, and were easily recognized by others, each distinct and superior, but most harmoniously blended. In his college days he was both the mathematician and the poet of his class.

And in a very special way all these sentiments in his nature, in which I find the truest elements of any man's greatness,—these came out with tender force towards children. The smile suffusing his really beautiful face, the low, hearty laugh, the striking together of his hands at beholding the play of children, I can never forget. And he was such a child himself, full of play, and the untrammelled freedom of unconscious youth. The sunshine was not dearer to me than his beaming eye, nor any music so sweet as his kindly voice.

“ Thy manhood fused with female grace  
 In such a sort, the child would twine  
 A trustful hand, unask'd, in thine,  
 And find his comfort in thy face.”

How much of this richness in his nature was fed by his religious faith, I cannot say, but his religious faith had done much for him, and to some of us had been doing a very noticeable work during these few years past. He was a man by nature of heated temper. God so made him, but grace

was given him, after many and many a battle and long, severe self-discipline, to master it. I know how he refrained from amusements in which he was wont to engage with his whole nature, refrained for years from indulging in them, because he found himself betrayed into self-assertions which he knew were wounding to others. He never took up these forms of amusements until he had, through years of severe discipline, gathered grace enough to bear defeat with a Christian equanimity and control. Into what mellowness he was ripening! Into what childlike simplicity of spirit and faith! Christ was the central sun in all his speculations, and forms of belief. He held at last no formularies of faith, or philosophies of salvation, or human systems of the indisputable facts and truths of revelation; he held none of these human theories with any great tenacity of belief. But Christ was all and in all to him, sufficient for all needs,—his, and the world's.

I cannot and I dare not bring myself to measure the loss which this community will very soon find has come by this death. It will soon be seen by us, soon enough, in the streets, in the office, in society, in our public life, in a wide social circle, here in this church, and there in his home,—greater loss there than any where else,—a vacancy every where, only to be peopled with recollections the most sacred in all life, and, thank God, as enduring as eternity. That is my supreme comfort, my ever strengthening hope, as in such thickening ranks so many noble men and women, and dear, sweet children are withdrawing from us. They are not lost to us. They are safe. They are not far from us. They have swelled to larger dimensions that cloud of wit-



nesses which doth compass us about. Happy we, if by the imitation of their faith and love we shall at last join them.

“ They are all gone into the world of light,

And we alone sit lingering here !

Their very memory is fair and bright

And our sad thoughts doth clear ;

“ I see them walking in an air of glory

Whose light doth trample on our days,—

Our days, which are at best but dull and hoary,

Mere glimmerings and decays.

“ O holy hope ! and high humility,—

High as the heavens above !

These are your walks, and you have shown them me

To kindle my cold love.

“ Dear, beauteous death,—the jewel of the just,

Shining no where but in the dark !

What mysteries do lie beyond thy dust,

Could man outlook the mark !”

## ANCESTRAL NOTE.

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John Riley Varney was descended from a vigorous ancestry.

WILLIAM VERNEY, or VARNIE, of Ipswich, Mass., the immigrant ancestor, died in Salem, Mass., in 1654, leaving four children. His widow, Bridget, died in Gloucester, Oct. 26, 1672. Their son

HUMPHREY VARNEY, after living in Gloucester, was "received an inhabitant" in Dover, N. H., Aug. 4, 1659. He married, March 2, 1664-5, Sarah, daughter of Elder Edward and Catherine (Reynolds) Starbuck, and widow of Joseph Austin, having previously been widow of William Story. His Will, dated Sept. 17, 1713, was proved Aug. 8, 1714. Their son

PETER VARNEY, born in Dover, March 29, 1666-7, made Will May 27, 1732, which was proved July 18 following. By his first wife, Elizabeth, he had children, among whom was

BENJAMIN VARNEY who died before his father and is so mentioned in his father's Will. He was of Somersworth, and by wife Mary (Hussey), married as early as 1720, had

MOSES VARNEY, born near 1724, who married, near 1750, Esther Chick, and had eight children, of whom was

MOSES VARNEY, born May 10, 1762; lived and died in Rochester, N. H.: married, in 1782, Mercy Cloutman, born June 1, 1759, died in 1848. He died in Nov. 1823. Of their ten children was

JAMES-BOWDOIN VARNEY, born in Rochester, July 17, 1784, lived in Dover, and died March 22, 1838. He married, April 14, 1812, Sarah-Byles daughter of John and Mary (Hanson) Riley, of Dover, born Feb. 22, 1788, died Nov. 30, 1862. The fourth of their seven children was

JOHN-RILEY VARNEY, born in Dover, March 26, 1819.

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*Edward Starbuck*, born in 1604, was an estimable Elder in the First Church in Dover, probably at its organization in Dec. 1638. Becoming a Baptist, he left Dover in 1659 and removed to Nantucket, where he died Dec. 4, 1690, leaving many descendants.

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*John Riley*, born in London, England, Jan. 27, 1752, became a ship-master, and resided in Dover, and died Nov. 6, 1818. He married, Oct. 13, 1777, Mary, daughter of Ebenezer and Anna (Hodgdon) Hanson, born

in Dover, Jan. 9, 1754, died Aug. 25, 1841. They had seven children, of whom Sarah-Byles, who married Capt. James-Bowdoin Varney, was the fifth.

*Thomas Hanson* of Dover; his Will was proved June 27, 1666. His widow Mary was killed by Indians in the massacre of June 28, 1689. One of their sons was

Thomas Hanson; born in 1643, lived at Cochecho, and made Will April 4, 1710. By wife Mercy, he had

Thomas Hanson, born about 1680, a "Friend"; married, first, Margaret, daughter of Thomas and Naomi (Lindsay) Maule, born Mar. 29, 1680. He died in 1728. They had ten children, of whom was

Ebenezer Hanson, born June 6, 1726, died in 1782, married, as above, Anna Hodgdon, born Nov. 25, 1728, died Aug. 5, 1803. She was daughter of Shadrach Hodgdon (deacon of the First church in Dover), by his wife Mary, daughter of Joseph and Tamsen (Meserve) Ham, and granddaughter of the immigrant John Ham by his wife Mary, daughter of John and Elizabeth (Hull) Heard,—Elizabeth Hull being daughter of Rev. Joseph Hull of Piscataqua.

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Rev. *Joseph Hull* was born in Somersetshire, England, in 1594; A. B. Oxford 1614; rector of Northleigh, Devon, 1621 to 1632; minister at Weymouth, Mass., 1635; at Yarmouth, Mass., 1640; at York, Me., 1642; at Oyster River, Dover, N. H., 1662; and lastly at the Isles of Shoals, where he died Nov. 19, 1665. Of his several children was

Elizabeth, born in 1628, who married Capt. John Heard, of Dover, as above. Her remarkable escape from the Indians in 1689 is described by Cotton Mather; she died Nov. 30, 1706.

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*Thomas Maule* was an estimable citizen of good estate in Salem, Mass., who suffered by being whipped for offences as a "Quaker." He was a shop-keeper, from England by way of Barbadoes. He married, July 22, 1670, Naomi, daughter of Christopher Lindsay of Lynn, Mass., and had several children, including Margaret who married Thomas Hanson as above.

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*John Ham*, town clerk of Dover in 1694, died in 1727. By wife Mary (Heard) he had nine children, of whom,

Joseph, who married Tamsen Meserve, was killed by the Indians in 1723. Joseph's daughter Mary, born Dec. 28, 1706, married Shadrach Hodgdon as above.

