

# AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT THE

**PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH of the FORKS of BRANDYWINE,**

CHESTER COUNTY, PA.,

NOVEMBER 24, 1864,

ON THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS SETTLEMENT OVER THAT CHARGE,

BY THE PASTOR,

REV. JOHN N. C. GRIER, D. D.

AND

## A SERMON,

PREACHED ON THE SAME OCCASION,

BY REV. J. GRIER RALSTON,

OF NORRISTOWN, PA.

NORRISTOWN:  
WILLS, IREDELL & JENKINS.  
1865.



## CORRESPONDENCE.

---

BRANDYWINE MANOR, Nov. 26, 1864.

To REV. DR. GRIER and REV. J. GRIER RALSTON:—

*Gentlemen*:—The undersigned, members of the Session of the Church of the Forks of Brandywine, having heard with great interest and satisfaction, the discourses delivered by you, on the 24th inst., and believing that their publication may do good, in time to come, we do hereby respectfully, but earnestly, request, that each of you will furnish a copy of his address for publication, and thereby afford to others such a gratification as we had in the hearing of them.

By complying with our request, you will confer a lasting obligation upon us, and upon the people we represent.

Respectfully, yours, &c.,

JAMES K. GRIER,  
JOHN RALSTON,  
JOHN DAUMAN,  
CALEB LIGGETT,  
JAMES C. LIGGETT,  
WILLIAM ROBBISON.

BRANDYWINE MANOR, PA., Nov. 28, 1864.

To MESSRS. JAMES K. GRIER, JOHN RALSTON, JOHN DAUMAN, CALEB LIGGETT,  
JAMES C. LIGGETT, and WILLIAM ROBBISON:—

*Gentlemen*:—We cordially comply with the request expressed in your note of the 26th inst., and herewith place at your disposal the manuscripts you solicit.

Very truly, yours,

JOHN N. C. GRIER,  
J. GRIER RALSTON.

The annexed extract, from a letter received from a co-Presbyter, will furnish the reason why the following Address was made to assume so much the character of a personal narrative :—

*January 19, 1863.*

REV. JOHN N. C. GRIER, D. D. :—

*My Dear Sir :—* \* \* \* \* You will recollect that, when I saw you last, I suggested to you the propriety of preparing for your friends, a sketch of your eventful life.

You have outlived almost the entire generation of ministerial brethren, who commenced their career with you. There remain but few, if any, to tell your history to those who may survive you.

I will esteem it a great favor if you will draw me an outline of your history ; embracing the time and place of your birth, the schools at which you were educated, and anything of interest you may remember, in relation to those schools and your teachers ; the time you graduated, and when you commenced your Theological Studies ; the date of your licensure and ordination ; and anything that may strike you as worth recording, connected with either of these occasions.

At the proper place, should come in the date of your connection with the Church, and anything you may feel at liberty to communicate, in relation to the manner in which you were brought to acknowledge Christ. Upon this point I would be very glad to know all that you may be disposed to say.

The account should then embrace a connected history of your ministry, including, if practicable, the number of persons admitted to communion by you, the number of infants and adults baptized, and the number married, &c., &c. If you have kept a record of the number of sermons preached, and addresses made, these should be noted.

It is very desirable, also, that the scenes of revival, in which your church has shared largely, should have a prominent place in the narrative. Your recollections of Presbytery, and the history of your connection with it, should not be forgotten.

The above will indicate sufficiently what is in my mind in relation to this subject, and I hope you will gratify me, as I am sure it will gratify others, by preparing such a sketch.

Do not refuse it. I know it will cost you some labor and trouble, but I think such a sketch could not fail to do good. God has honored you above most of your brethren, and I feel anxious that His goodness to you should be recorded for the encouragement of others.

\* \* \* \* \*

—————

# AN ADDRESS.

---

For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

1 Cor. II, 2.

Fifty years ago, on the day of your last communion, when I preached to the congregation of your fathers my first sermon, after I had accepted their call to become their Pastor, I came to them with this announcement, touching the course I intended to pursue, and the grand theme on which I purposed mainly to dwell in the exercise of my ministry amongst them. How this determination has been fulfilled, shall shortly be disclosed, when you and I and our fathers shall come up together to the momentous reckoning of the last great day. Fifty years ago, this day, I was permitted to kneel down in the presence of the people, then constituting the Church of the Forks of Brandywine, and was then and there ordained to the full work of the Gospel Ministry, by the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery, and installed in the Pastoral office over a People and a Church to whom my father had ministered for more than a quarter of a century. Of the two hundred and thirty-two who were then members of this Church, there are but five now living; and of those Ministers who officiated at my ordination, and laid their hands upon my youthful head, not one survives. When, after my ordination, I took my seat as a member of the Presbytery of New Castle, I was the youngest of them all. Now I am its oldest member. Then the

Master set me down in the midst of this valley full of dry bones, and although, through the prophesying which had gone before, there had been stirring and occasional shaking amongst them, and here and there was seen bone coming to bone; still the bones were very many, and lo, they were very dry. Then he bade me prophesy and say, O, ye dry bones! hear ye the word of the Lord. So I prophesied as he commanded me. But never did a single bone move toward his fellow bone through all my prophesying, until the Spirit of God was made to breathe upon them, and then he demonstrated, before our eyes, that we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the Power may be seen to be of God, and not of us.

It was then just fifty years ago God brought me up to this mount, where holy men of God had stood before me, and said to me, Son of Man, I have made thee a watchman to the house of Israel, therefore hear the word of my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, thou shalt surely die, and thou givest him not warning, the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thy hand, yet if thou warn the wicked and he turn not from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity, but thou hast delivered thy soul. Need I tell you that with such a commission, and to be most surely succeeded by such results, I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, desiring that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. These were the times when the Pastoral relation was held so sacred that it was not to be dissolved, but by the most pressing necessity. Hence, I can say, in honest truth, the idea of dissolution never entered my mind, unless, unfaithfulness or incompe-

teney on my part, should make such separation desirable to you. It was in my heart, then, to live and to die with you ; and so it is in my heart now, having lived with you for half a century, to die among you. I have thought that it might be desirable to you, now that we have lived so long and so pleasantly together in this most sôlemn relationship, and when we are sure that it must soon terminate, to know something of God's dealings with me, in opening up the way before me for the exercise of this solemn office. These are matters of which I have seldom spoken in my intercourse with you—desiring rather that ye yourselves should be our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men. Whatever I shall say to you now, touching the dealings of God with my soul, I wish you to regard it as my humble testimony to the undeserved goodness and mercy of God, to me, the chief of sinners.

It is known to you all, that it was my great privilege to be descended from a pious ancestry. My father was a faithful and devoted Minister in the Presbyterian Church, himself the son of religious parents. He became the Pastor of this Church, A. D. 1787. He had five children. I was the third one of the five. I was born June 8th, A. D. 1792. I desire to record it now to the praise and glory of Divine Grace, that, owing as I believe to the paternal anxieties, which I could not but perceive agitated my father's bosom for my spiritual interests, I was the subject of tender impressions, from my earliest recollection. Now, after three score years and ten have passed away, seasons (and they were of almost daily occurrence,) come back upon my remembrance, when he would lead me away to the hallowed place of his secret communings with God, and with quivering lips, and a hand which trembled with emotion

on my head, and calling me by name, he would, with many tears, commit me to the care of Heaven, and call its blessings down upon my youthful head. In circumstances like these, as children often do, I promised to myself that I would "be good." These resolutions, I own with shame, were too soon forgotten; but still, in all the season of childhood and to youth, the recollection of them, and of the circumstances which led me to adopt them, came back upon me with such a force as often filled my conscience with alarm. On this account, though I was prone to sin, I had but little enjoyment from its indulgence. As a general thing, I was all the while careful to observe the forms of Prayer, more, however, from the dread of the wrath and power of Him to whom I prayed, than from any satisfaction it afforded me. Often indeed my prayers were forgotten, and oftener still neglected, and then my conscience would upbraid me, and terrify me, and drive me back to a formal observance of them. After attending such common schools as were held in those days, until I was nearly ten years old, a Classical School was revived in a building erected on the Church's grounds, and which, within the last few months, has given place to the Brandywine Manor Hall. The school was revived under the direction and care of Mr. John Ralston, a Graduate of Princeton College. There, in A. D. 1802, I commenced my classical education. Mr. Ralston died, A. D. 1804, and his place was immediately filled by the late Rev. J. F. Grier, D. D., who had been graduated just before, at Dickinson College, Carlisle, Pa. Under his instruction I continued until the Spring of 1808, when I was sent to Dickinson College, and was graduated there Sept. 27th, 1809, and in 1814 I received the degree of A. M. from the same institution.

During my collegiate course, while occupied with the studies of my class, and separated from home restraints, and exposed to irreligious influences, and surrounded by an irreligious and careless companionship, my seasons of conviction became less frequent, but when renewed as they sometimes were by letters from home, and by deaths in the village, or by other causes, they increased in pungency and painfulness, and would drive me back to those forms of devotion which had been forgotten or neglected. Until this time my mind had never been directed with any particular seriousness to my future occupation. I had, indeed, a kind of vague impression that I would like to be a Minister, but without any reference to the Glory of God, and the advancement of the Redeemer's Kingdom, as the object and the end of the Christian Ministry. The thought and wish was often, but transiently upon my mind, and yet it was as often banished, by the consciousness that I was myself unreconciled to God, and in unpardoned sin. Still, I had no particular thoughtfulness nor anxiety as to my future occupation.

When I returned from college to my father's house, and my old family associations were renewed, and religious influences were cast around me afresh, I began to have more deep and serious impressions with regard to the necessity and importance of Religion, and a more abiding fear of a Death in Sin. These impressions were very much increased during the exercises of the first Communion season which I witnessed after I arrived at home, and when I saw some of my former companions in youth and sin making a public profession of Religion. Then, with more seriousness than I had ever felt before, I began to inquire what was to become of my soul, in the awful future, if I contin-

ned without God in the world. I began, as I thought, to seek Religion. I read the Bible more, and was more constant in my forms of prayer ; but going about thus to establish a righteousness of my own, and refusing to submit myself unto the righteousness of God, no wonder that I should still be without hope. Increasing anxiety about my soul only increased my conviction that I had no right to look for mercy which, in the most favorable circumstances, had so long been slighted. I need not now recount the struggles through which I passed. The love of sin on the one hand sorely besetting me, and the increasing dread of Hell on the other, my resolutions to amend my ways, and the utter failure of them all, my case seemed to myself as growing every day and every hour more desperate and hopeless. Now the impression took deep hold upon my mind, that if I was unwilling to own God before the world, how could I dare to hope that He would own me at the last.

As the season of another Communion was approaching, O what a throbbing anxiety began to overwhelm me ! What, O what should I do ? I knew myself to be every way unfit for such a service, and unworthy to claim such a privilege ; and yet how was I going to deny the Saviour ? What could I do ? I was afraid to own the Saviour, and yet more afraid to disown and to deny him altogether. I was in this state of mind as the Communion season drew nigh. On the morning of that memorable Fast-Day, when persons desiring to make a first approach to the Table of the Lord, were to meet the session, I went away to a retired place in a thicket upon the banks of the Brandywine, to try to settle that question which now seemed to involve my everlasting destiny. O, now I must make the dread decision. It is for Life or Death ; it is for Heaven or Hell !

In an anguish I will not attempt to describe to you, I cast myself down upon my face, and giving up all for lost, unless the Blessed Redeemer himself would come for my relief and deliverance. What then and there occurred I will not try to tell you, only this : I gave myself up to Him, to be whatever He should choose to make me, and to do whatsoever He would qualify me to do for Him, if He would but save my Soul. I united with this Church in June, A. D. 1810, and soon after commenced the study of Theology, under my father's direction, in company with my elder brother, the Rev. Robert S. Grier, the Rev. John H. Grier, and the Rev. S. Park, all of whom are yet alive. I was licensed to preach the Gospel as a Probationer by the Presbytery of New Castle, April 7th, A. D. 1813. My preaching during the succeeding year was in vacant churches in the State of Delaware, and principally at the Forrest Church, near Middletown.

My father, who had succeeded the Rev. John Carmichael in the Pastoral office here, was permitted to break to your fathers the Bread of Life for twenty-seven years, was removed by death on the 30th day of March, A. D. 1814. Having been licensed to preach the Gospel in April, of the preceding year, I was appointed to preach occasionally in this Church, made vacant by my father's death, and in September of the same year received, through the Presbytery, a call to undertake the Pastoral office over the people then worshipping where we worship now. For the first seven years of my ministerial labors, the additions to the Communion of the Church were about as they had usually been ; but in the year 1821 God made our desert to rejoice, and our wilderness to bud and blossom as the rose, and there were added to our number forty-one souls, giv-

ing satisfactory evidence that they had been born again. Then there was a gradually growing coldness over us, and over all our churches, until the summer of 1831, the season long to be remembered as the commencement of the great revival, and in which many who now hear me, and more, who have gone up yonder, were brought to the Redeemer's feet, clothed in his righteousness and restored to their right mind. The Records of the Presbytery will be insufficient to unfold to an interested enquirer the circumstances which, under God, led to that great and general awakening, and the first general revival of religion since the days of the Tennents and of Whitefield. And because a reference to these circumstances may in the future lead to the adopting of like measures, and to the blessed experience of like results, I will detain you for a little, to make a record of them. I do this the more cheerfully and with the greater confidence, because I do know that of which I speak. I have said already, that coldness had settled down upon our hearts, and upon the hearts of our people, to such an extent, that we began to be filled with alarm at spiritual destitutions, so wide and deep, and so rapidly extending and increasing. We had heard of seasons of mercy afforded to the Eastern Churches through the blessing of God, upon what was then called four days' meetings, and yet many of us feared extravagancies to which they had sometimes led.

On my way to the meeting of Presbytery, which was to convene in Wilmington, Del., Mr. White and I spoke of our destitutions, and resolved, after consulting with some other members, to bring the whole matter before Presbytery, that some extraordinary effort might be employed to accomplish a change in our spiritual condition.

The matter was brought before the Presbytery, and every one seemed to feel its dread importance. The Presbytery seemed disposed to give it the solemn consideration which it deserved. At this juncture I made the motion that the ordinary business should be suspended, and the Moderator should lead in Prayer, that God would lead us to the adoption of such measures as he would bless, for the promotion of His glory, and the interests of His Church. After prayer by the Moderator, a Committee was appointed, of which I was one, and directed to retire and consider the subject, and make a report as soon as convenient. We retired into an unfurnished room in the basement of the Hanover Street Church. There the Committee united in Prayer, each one leading in his turn, and then entered upon the consideration of the subject which had been submitted to us. The Committee unanimously agreed to recommend seasons of protracted service in all our Congregations, and for this end that the Presbytery should be divided into Classes, each Class to be held responsible for the service in the congregations of those composing the several Classes. To recommend the observance of what was called the twilight concert of prayer, in which all should retire from the usual occupations of the day, and in secret seek and implore the Divine Blessing upon those means of Grace agreed upon, whereby to secure a Revival of Religion in all our Churches. These measures so recommended, were carried out with a spirit of earnestness and devotion amongst the ministers, and elders and people, such as had never before been seen or felt amongst us—and from the very outset, God vouchsafed His presence and His blessing, so that in all our Congregations, without a single exception, the reviving influences of the Holy Spirit

were richly poured forth, and many were added to our Churches, of such as have been, and shall yet be saved.

The footsteps of Jehovah at these meetings were so distinctly marked and so clearly seen, that ministers and people flocked to the scenes of wonder, and caught the glowing Spirit, and carried it with them wherever they went, so that a spirit of expectation and hope, pervading the whole people, prepared the way for like services and like blessings wherever these means should be employed. It was no unusual thing to find more than a dozen Ministers associated together on these occasions, and you would never hear a word from one of them excepting upon the grand work assigned them to perform, and how the blessing of God might be secured. Meeting with Christians within and around the Churches—for they came together from every quarter—O, with what affection they admonished them to cry mightily to God, or meeting with the impenitent, how earnestly they entreated them now to flee from the wrath to come. I am sure that I am calling back to your remembrance, after the lapse of more than thirty years, precious seasons which many of yourselves have witnessed, and scenes of grace and mercy through which many of yourselves have passed, and the recollection of which even now overwhelms your souls with gratitude, and call forth your devoutest praise. Of the Class with which I was associated, all but myself are gone—gone to receive their crowns studded with many a gem gathered up here, and to be worn forever in the tiara of their rejoicing, in the presence of God and of the Lamb. Of the twelve or fourteen ministers, who came to share our labors, and mingle in our rejoicings, all but four have gone to the retributions of Eternity. These were the circumstances which gave rise

to those seasons of protracted service, which were so signally blessed of God to all our churches. These were times which may pass into oblivion and be forgotten here on earth, but they will be remembered forever in Heaven.

The first of these meetings amongst ourselves, was held in September, A. D. 1831,—as the result of which there were added one hundred and twenty-seven to the Communion of our Church. This revival of religion continued, but with some abatement, until A. D. 1837. So that from '31 to '37, there were added to us, in all, two hundred and ninety-four; and from A. D., 1837, to A. D. 1849, there were added two hundred and thirty-three; and from that until the present time, two hundred and fifty-two. So that in the fifty years of my Pastorate among you, there have been added to the Church, eleven hundred and fifty-three. I have preached five thousand and thirty sermons; I have solemnized four hundred and thirty marriages; I have baptized six hundred and twelve children, and three hundred and ten adult persons. During my father's ministry, this congregation furnished eight young men to go out and preach the Kingdom of God, three of whom are yet alive, while five have been removed by death. Since I became the Pastor of this church, seventeen have devoted themselves to the labor of the Gospel, fourteen of whom are still engaged in their appropriate work, while three have gone up to their rewards above. Thus this congregation has furnished to the ministry of reconciliation, twenty-five of her sons, eighteen of whom are still engaged in their blessed work. We have given of our members and of our worldly substance to organize and establish four self-sustaining churches, within our own original bounds, and upon our own territory.

This long Pastorate has not been without its discouragements; discouragements not arising so much from the nature of the work, nor altogether from the want of evidences of a partial success, as from the consciousness we have often felt that our love to the Master and to the souls of men have fallen so far short of what they should have been, that the constraints of the love of Christ have often been so feebly felt, and yet I know that I should be guilty of vile ingratitude, if I did not own that its comforts and encouragements have been many too. Of some of these I may speak freely on this occasion, but only to the Praise of the Redeemer's Grace. In the earlier days of my ministry I often felt discouraged lest, even in the few who were gathered into the visible church, we were but reaping the fruit of a harvest which other men had sown, while I had no satisfying evidence that souls had been converted by my instrumentality. While laboring under such despondency, I could not tell you if I should attempt it, how my soul was cheered on a memorable Sabbath when, after sermon, a man came to me with the earnest cry upon his trembling lips, O, Sir, what must I do to be saved? That man was the father of one of those ministers who sit before you now.

Not long after this, a young man presented himself before the Presbytery, to be examined on experimental religion, and as to his design in seeking the Gospel Ministry. I knew but little of him, save only that he was the son of an Elder in the church of Faggs' Manor. In the account which he gave of the work of Grace in his soul, he stated that, while under distressing conviction of sin, he was led to go to the church of Pequoa, then under the care of the Rev. Wm. Arthur. It was on a communion Sabbath, in the services of which I was permitted to participate. He

looked at me with peculiar significance, and said, there, Brother Grier was the first to preach Christ to me. By these and by other incidents of a like nature, which I could mention, I was encouraged in my labor; and if, by these examples, any of my younger brethren shall be encouraged in the Master's service, my object in referring to them here shall be fully gained.

Shall I mention to you an incident which fell out under my observation, which goes to show the preciousness of the assurance given to the Christian, that even though walking long in darkness and having no light of which he is himself sensible, God is his God and will be his Father still? There is a man amongst you now, I see him here, who said to me some time ago, "After I made a profession of religion, it pleased God that a horror of great darkness came over me, and O! how deep the darkness, and how long it lasted. I was for sixteen years after my formal covenanting with God, without one single hope of mercy, and strange as it may seem to you, and unaccountable as it was and is to me, I held on to my profession and observed the secret, social and public forms of worship without interruption, while I could see nothing before me but increasing darkness and eternal death. You remember," said he, "that some time ago you preached a sermon from the words 'Is anything too hard for the Lord?' Although for sixteen years before, I had not one single hope of mercy, from that hour to this I have never had a single doubt of it." I have seen more than one instance in which the power of Divine Grace has been displayed where the sinner, in the pride of his heart, had determined that whatever others might do, he would not have Christ to reign over him. At one of those seasons of revival which

God was pleased to grant us, there were two young men, just passing from youth to manhood; they were sons of pious parents, their father a Presbyterian minister. There was an unusual anxiety awakened on their behalf, and prayer was made continually by the Church unto God for them. Under such circumstances it was natural that we should carefully observe them, that the first indications of seriousness, if any should occur, might be noticed and improved. The younger showed no signs of hatred to religion, nor any disposition, deliberately, to resist the operations of the Divine Spirit, and seemed to be soon and sweetly drawn to the Saviour. He lived till lately, a bright example of the intelligent and useful Christian Elder, and died not many weeks ago in the triumphs of the Christian faith. The elder not only seemed to become more careless as cases of conviction and conversions multiplied, but he put on an unwonted air of contemptuous indifference, and exhibited a decided unwillingness to be spoken to on the subject of personal religion. All this increased, until we discovered, or thought we discovered, that there must be some peculiar reason for that look of scorn which he assumed, and his careless and noisy stamp as he sought his usual place amongst the singers. Upon seeking an interview with him we soon discovered that the haughty look and noisy tread were both the feignings of a heart that would conceal the truth that the hand of God had touched it. He too was soon found in his right mind and an humble listener at the Redeemer's feet. That man has been for many years a successful laborer in the vineyard of the Lord, and is sitting among you now, come back once more to visit the place of his espousals to Christ, and to walk amongst the sepulchres of his kindred and fathers.

I will detain you only to give another incident to show how sometimes the feet of the Christian, when setting out from the City of Destruction to seek the Kingdom of God, become entangled in the snare of the fowler, so as for a time to mar all his spiritual enjoyments and to retard his progress in the way to Heaven. At one of our meetings so richly blessed of God, there was a man—his body sleeps out yonder—brought under deep conviction, and after a season of great spiritual anguish, was brought to entertain a precious hope in the pardoning love of God, and made a public profession of religion, and seemed to walk in the fear of God; without hesitation he led in the exercises of social devotion. A year after, when another protracted meeting had been held, and a goodly number were inquiring after the way of salvation, and I had appointed to meet such inquirers on the morning of the following Sabbath at the church, to give them counsel, you may judge of my surprise when I tell you that this was the very first man I met. He approached me, saying, “I know you are amazed to see me here, and you will be still more amazed when I tell why I came. Could you believe that after long praying in your prayer meetings, and appearing to be devout, that I have never been able to pray in my own family?” and bursting into tears, he added, “that is not the worst of it, for, O! I never can, and I read that God will pour his fury out upon the families which call not upon his name.” When I saw the anguish of his soul, I said as calmly as I could, we are to be helps to each other’s infirmities, and I will see you early to-morrow morning, if the Lord will. Next morning, early, I was at his house, and found his family just rising from the breakfast table to go each to his appropriate work. I said to them all, I wish to detain you

for a little while. I desire that we shall have family worship before we separate. Our friend, the head of this household, tells me that he has never reared the family altar, that he dreads the wrath of God on that account, and now he is resolved that with the help of God his shall no longer be a prayerless house. Then I called him to lead us all in prayer. The snare of the fowler was broken, the difficulty all overcome and never returned again to interrupt or hinder their family devotion. But I may not detain you longer with recollections which, however precious and endeared to me, may not be so entertaining to you. The occasion which has brought us together now, is to me one of peculiar interest and solemnity. How could it be otherwise, when it reminds me that I have already passed the age ordinarily allotted to humanity, and that fifty years of that allotment have been already numbered in the exercise of that ministry which the Great Redeemer entrusted to hands so incompetent and so unworthy, and which reminds me too that my hour of final reckoning up will soon be here; that soon I must be confronted with those multitudes to whom I have preached the Gospel, before the throne of God, to give an account of my stewardship. And I wish you distinctly to understand that now, when by reason of my age, as well as by the fact that disease has fastened upon my mortal frame, and which may speedily bring me to the lonely sepulchre, it is on account of no service I have ever rendered, no fidelity I have maintained in the blessed Master's service, from no apparent success which may seem to have accompanied my efforts to prevail with my fellow-sinners to be reconciled to God. No, no, it is from nothing of all this that I derive one single hope that I shall be accepted of Him, for in His

sight I know I am not now, nor ever have been, anything but a sinner, and never have rendered one single service which has not been marked by a guilty imperfection, which, if strictly judged, must involve me in the condemnation of stewards who have wasted their Master's goods. When I have been brought, as I have lately been, to a near view of that estate of eternal retributions which lies before me, my soul has turned away with utter loathing and abhorrence from every other source of hope than the finished work of the adorable Redeemer. It is here, and only here, I have cast my whole reliance, and I would not for a thousand worlds that a single one of you could say in truth, that I have ever preached to you another Gospel, or recommended to you another Saviour. Our accounts are soon to be adjusted; I know that I am soon to be gathered to my fathers; and this day, as with wings outspread for that bourne from whence no traveler returns, I cry it in the ears of all, behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world, and who still makes to you the glorious proclamation, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest; yea, and the spirit and the bride say come, and let him that heareth say come, and let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will let him take the water of life freely." We have been long together in our earthly pilgrimage; I have been permitted to rejoice with you in your prosperity, to weep with you in your adversity; I have been permitted to bring the consolations of religion to the bed of suffering, to the couch of the dying; I have mingled my sympathies with your sorrows, when you have gathered around the death-bed of your loved ones, and when I saw the anguish of your crushed and bleeding hearts, O, how I have sometimes

wished that I could bring you relief by bearing a part of your burden for you. But, O, it was better for both you and me, that I could point you to one who was able to bind up the broken-hearted, who never breaks the bruised reed, nor quenches the smoking flax. I have bowed down with you at the Throne of Grace around the lifeless bodies of those you loved most fondly, and then stood with you as you wept at the grave's mouth. Our fathers and mothers, our brethren and sisters, our husbands and wives and children, lie down together in yonder City of the Dead, to await the hour when they and we shall hear the shrill echo of the trump of God and awake together, some to the resurrection of life, and some to shame and an everlasting contempt. I dare not trespass upon your patience longer; I will only say to these, my brethren in the bonds and labor of the Gospel, be instant in season and out of season in your momentous embassy, remembering that you watch for souls as they who must give account. If faithful in the trust committed to you, you shall be unto God a sweet savor of Christ, both in them that are saved and in them that perish, to the one a savor of death unto death and to the other a savor of life unto life. And to you, my beloved people, I say, watch and be sober—be sober, be steadfast, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. God grant that when the Master comes, in the end, to make his jewels up, you and your children may all be found among them.

AMEN, SO LET IT BE,

# A SERMON,

BY REV. J. GRIER RALSTON.

---

Now, thanks be unto God, who always causeth us to triumph in Christ and maketh manifest the savor of his knowledge by us in every place.

For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ in them that are saved and in them that perish.

To the one, we are a savor of death unto death; and to the other, a savor of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things.

2 Cor. 2; 14, 15, 16.

THIS is the language of a minister of Christ. It is earnest, instructive, and solemn. It tells of *ministerial dependence* upon God; of *heavy responsibility* to him; of *glorious rewards* from him; and of the *utter insufficiency* of human wisdom for the work.

I. Throughout the entire passage the idea of *dependence* runs.

Without Christ, the ministry is nothing. "The office has its origin directly in an appointment from Heaven. This claim has been asserted from the beginning, and in no instance has it ever been modified or relinquished. We conclude, as by intuition, that it pertains to God alone to institute an office, the functions of which have exclusive reference to spiritual duties."

The first who ever reared an altar and presented an oblation was doubtless the common progenitor of our race; and as no dictate of reason could have led him to suppose that the streaming blood of an immolated victim could expiate the guilt of his soul, we must conclude that he acted under the sanction of a divine command.

This view is sustained by the names applied to the

bearer of this office. He is a minister—a servant.—*Mat.* 20: 26. He is a shepherd, and Christ is called the Chief Shepherd.—*1 Pet.* 5:4. He is an ambassador for Christ.—*2 Cor.* 5:20. All these titles indicate an appointment to the important trust he holds. With what dignity does this consideration invest it! But, when God calls a man to a position he qualifies him for it. “As thy days so shall thy strength be.”—*Deut.* 23:25. “Now thanks be to God who always causeth us to triumph in Christ,” &c.

Here we have the secret of ministerial success. It is not dependent upon the estimate in which the world may hold the minister. He need not be, according to the standard of earth, a *great man*. “For God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty. And base things of the world, and things that are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things that are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.”—*1 Cor.* 1; 27—29.

It is not grandeur of mind; it is not gigantic development of intellectual and moral power; it is not breadth of worldly wisdom nor the refinements of human learning, to which the haughty and rebellious spirit bows. It is not the glowing eloquence of unsanctified talent that, concentrated upon the frozen soul, warms it into spiritual life. Not even thoughts that flash with electric fire and energy, while uttered in words that burn, can melt the flinty heart in love to Christ, and make it a fit abode for the Holy Ghost. Ah, no! All this is the work of a Divine agency. “It is not by might nor by power, but by My spirit, saith the Lord.”—*Zac.* 4; 6.

The minister must sow the seed, but he can't insure the

harvest. He must set before his people the bread of life, but he cannot give them a spiritual appetite. He must, as a shepherd, lead his flock to the well of salvation, but he cannot make them drink. He may sympathize with his people in their poverty, and tell them of the riches that are treasured up in Christ Jesus, but he cannot constrain them to accept the inheritance of God's people. He may pity them in their spiritual nakedness, but he cannot compel them to put on the robe of a Saviour's righteousness.

When he sees the sinner, under the influence of a dreadful infatuation, rushing to the brink of ruin, it becomes his duty to sound the alarm, and to cry in the language of affectionate concern, "*Stop!*" But he cannot make this voice of warning penetrate the understanding, and affect the will. Suppose, however, it proves effectual, and the almost ruined man stops, as he lifts his foot to take the fatal plunge. Trembling and pale, he turns upon his heel, and slowly retraces his steps. Now restored to his right mind, he meets his deliverer, and with streaming eyes and overflowing heart, he grasps his hand as he exclaims, O, Sir! you saved my life. How that word "*stop*" rings in my ear, and penetrates my very soul; and then he adds, with deep emotion, How wonderful the Providence of God, that interfered for my salvation. Ah! here at last comes out the solemn truth—that God is everything; without him, the minister is nothing. It is God that sends the word and God who makes it effectual.

"Now thanks be unto God, who always causeth us to triumph in Christ and maketh manifest the savor of his knowledge by us," &c.

## II. THE MINISTERIAL OFFICE INVOLVES FEARFUL RESPONSIBILITIES.

“For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ in them that are saved and in them that perish. To the one we are a savor of death unto death, and to the other a savor of life unto life.”

The design of the Gospel is to save men. All its provisions are adapted to this end. Its bitterest enemies cannot point to a single feature of it intended or calculated to make them miserable either here or hereafter. Yet many reject it and perish, not because it is not the “power of God and the wisdom of God unto salvation,” but because they neglect its provisions.

Under the Gospel men sin against clearer light than they do without it, and their responsibility is thereby greatly increased. If they refuse the plan of salvation, as therein revealed, and go down to eternal death, they meet a more aggravated condemnation and a deeper doom : for punishment will always be in accordance with guilt, and guilt is in proportion to the amount of light and privilege abused.

The preaching of the gospel is often the occasion of adding to the sinner's criminality. He sees in it, as in a mirror, the deformity of his moral character. At this he becomes enraged and gives vent to the deep malignity of his soul. His eye kindles with indignity and his lip curls with scorn. He is profane and blasphemous, and the offer of the gospel only excites deep and malignant passions against God, against the Saviour and against the ministers of religion.

Now this is not the fault of the gospel. It may not be the fault of the minister, but here his terrible responsibility

rises into view. He may fail to proclaim the whole truth or to present it in its most attractive form. He may omit something that he ought to have said or utter something that he ought to have suppressed. His manner or tone or gesture may be at fault; and he may thus become a stumbling block to some soul committed to his care. How oppressive the thought! He may lack skill in handling the sword of the Spirit, and as a result wound to death those for the defence of whom he is set.

A lawyer, by the exercise of his talents, saves or ruins families. So by his skill or ignorance, the physician saves or destroys life. But here the stake is not family nor fortune, life nor limb—it is not time, but eternity. Here, Heaven is lost or won. Here, in the Providence of God, on mortal lips may hang the destiny of immortal souls. Here the issue is an immortality of bliss or an eternity of woe.

Ah me! what momentous interests are suspended on the closet with its prayers—the study, with its preparations, and the pulpit, with its Sabbath sermons!

Under the crushing weight of this mighty responsibility, the faithful minister may well exclaim, with the Prophet, in his vision of the Lord in his glory, “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.”—*Isaiah* 6; 5.

Well can he understand the speech and sympathize with the feelings of the martyr, who, to the surprise of all, stopped on the ladder—suddenly stopped—not to kneel for life, nor sell his principles, nor live a base apostate, but stopped to say, as he turned him to the weeping multitude, “I ascend this ladder to die, with less fear, than I have sometimes felt in going up my pulpit stairs to preach.” Happy the land, and happy the church, whose pulpits are filled.

with such men as he; who, robed in the mantle, and burning with the spirit of their master, look round upon the assembled congregation, through the very eyes of him, of whom it is written, "When he saw the multitude he had compassion on them."

We speak but the words of truth and soberness, when we declare that no powers of language, no eagle flight of fancy, no glowing enthusiasm of temper, can ever over-estimate the importance and consequent responsibilities of the pulpit and the ministerial office.

It is worthy of the highest talent and the holiest piety. "The gospel offers a theme, and the pulpit a place, for an angel's intellect and a seraph's fire."

It has been well said by Dr. Guthrie, "that God can work out his own ends by the most unpromising instruments through the agency of those who are neither gifted with parts nor graced with piety." On one occasion, some one engaged in exploring a northwest passage, relates how he shaped a lens from a block of ice, and gathering in its focus the rays of an Arctic sun, kindled a fire by that frozen mass. And so, using him as an instrument to reflect the rays of the Sun of Righteousness, by means of a cold, frozen, lifeless minister, God may awaken souls and kindle within the heart of men a celestial fire. To show that the power is by His Spirit, through some poor, weak, silly man, he may do great things: as of old, by the sound of an empty horn, he threw down the walls of Jerico. This is true; yet, in his providential, and also in his gracious dealings with mankind, he commonly selects the means that are best adapted to the end. "Once, but only once, he called a youth from the sheepfold with sling and pebble to lay a giant low. Once, but only once, he spoke by the

mouth of an ass. Once, but only once, he summoned a woman from her household cares to save his people, and lead on to battle the tribes of Israel. Commonly, shortsighted as we are, we can discover an adaptation of the means to the end in view. Look at Moses; see with what ardor he flung himself into the quarrel, and how, bestriding the prostrate Hebrew, he stood up to the Egyptian, and as he received his blow returned it on the head of the oppressor with the power of a battle-axe.

Was this a soft, apathetic, lethargic, even common man, cast in the ordinary mould? Look at Paul; how he stirs and blows the fires of persecution, how he roams through the church like a roaring lion, how he steels a kind heart against the wails of women and the cries of children, how he crowds the dungeons with captives and makes the name of Saul as terrible as that of Nero! Were these weak men?—men of average intellect, energy and courage? No, no. God had a great work to do and he chose great men to do it."

We have said it is impossible to over estimate the importance of a minister's office. In view of the judgment, and the reckoning with God for the care of souls, how overwhelming is the responsibility! It casts over every Sabbath, not, indeed, a gloomy but a very solemn air, and gives to a large congregation something of an awful aspect.

When some one once said to Dr. Johnson that he thought a minister's an easy office, he replied, "No, sir, I pity the minister who thinks his an easy office. I pity the people who are under such a minister. I look upon a minister as upon a father who has a larger family than he can very well provide for." We believe that Heaven's brightest crowns shall shine on those who have shone as lights

in the world, and Heaven's highest throne shall be occupied by those who, with God's blessing, have turned many from sin to the living God: but we believe, as certainly, that to faithless ministers, to men who have sought the priest's office for a piece of bread, to these cold, lifeless, careless men, will be reserved the hottest fire and the deepest Hell.

In all the depths of perdition, there appears no situation more appalling, no group more terrible, than a lost minister among a lost people.

But we turn from this painfully oppressive view of the subject to consider the fact that—

### III. THE MINISTERIAL OFFICE HAS ITS REWARDS.

"Now thanks be to God, who causeth us always to triumph in Christ," &c., &c. The word here rendered "triumph," occurs but in one other place in the New Testament—*Col. 2, 15*. It properly refers to a triumphal procession. It was particularly applied, by both the Greeks and Romans, to a public and solemn honor conferred on a victorious general on his return from a successful war. He was conducted into the Capitol with all the pomp that human ingenuity could invent, and all the splendor that wealth could buy. His march was graced with the richest spoils he had captured, and with the nobles and generals he had conquered, in chains. His path was strewn with flowers, diffusing a grateful fragrance<sup>1</sup>; and during the triumphal march, incense was constantly burned on the altars of the Gods, filling the air with sweet perfumes and aromatic odors. In reference to this fact, the word "savor" is introduced into the text.

The apostle here refers to a victory he had, and to a

triumph with which he was favored by the Redeemer. It was a victory over the enemies of the gospel, and a success achieved, by grace, in an assault, almost single-handed, on the citadel of the Prince of Darkness. Nor was this a fruitless achievement, for in his triumphings, the savor of his knowledge—the *knowledge of Christ*—is diffused abroad, as the odors which were scattered in the triumphal march of the conqueror.

*Always* and in *every place*, wherever the gospel is faithfully preached, a triumph ultimately results. If *grace* does not conquer, *judgment* will. The faithful minister goes forth to his work with the declaration of Jehovah ringing in his ears, “My word shall not return unto me void, but shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereunto I sent it.—*Isaiah*, 55 : 11. It may be a savor of death unto death to all who hear it, but if faithfully presented in the fear of God and in love for the souls of men, the minister will not lose his reward, nor God be robbed of his glory. “For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved and in them that perish.” Then blessed, thrice blessed be God! our acceptance with him does not depend on the measure of our success, but upon our fidelity.

Among the rewards graciously bestowed upon the ministering servant of Christ, on earth, may be mentioned—

*First.* THE SANCTIFIED ENJOYMENT RESULTING FROM THE FAITHFUL DISCHARGE OF HIS DUTIES.

These are in their very nature elevating, and are calculated to wean him from the world and to draw him towards heaven. His efforts for the good of others react upon himself with most salutary effect. The frequency with which

he is brought into the presence of death, to administer the consolations of religion to the dying, cannot but impress him deeply with the importance of eternal things, and with the value of that salvation he is commissioned to offer to his fellow men.

You enter the sick room in the midst of weeping friends, at the bedside of the departing saint sits the man of God. See how his tears flow, and how, in every limb, he quivers with emotion as he witnesses the triumphs of faith in the sufferer. He has more than a common interest in what is now passing in review, for upon the brow where the dews of death are gathering he sprinkled the water of baptism. He saw the infant leave the cradle and take his place in the ranks of happy, thoughtless childhood. Ere long the child became a man—a reckless, daring man ; reckless, because he heeded not the great salvation—daring, because, in the clearest light of gospel day, he presumed to shake his rebel arm in the face of God. O ! with what fervor the minister labored and prayed for his salvation, and for years prayed and labored, apparently, in vain. But at length grace conquered, and the haughty rebel becomes the obedient subject, and the wayward prodigal the loving child. For a few years he was permitted to adorn his profession, and to gladden the hearts of God's people by a holy walk and conversation. But now the failing strength, the faltering voice, the glassy eye and fluttering pulse, all indicate that his work is nearly done. Turning his dying gaze upon his minister, he says : “ O, sir ! you led me to Christ, and taught me to love him. Together we will adore him when we shall see him as he is. You taught me to pray and praise, and yonder we will unite in praising the riches of redeeming grace and dying love.”

Now, do you wonder at the emotion of the man of God, or at the tears he sheds?

I know this picture lacks the touches of the skilful artist, but in outline it is faithful. It is but the faint etchings of a scene in which your venerated pastor has often been an actor. A scene from which he has always come with feelings corroborating the experience of the Wise Man, "that it is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting."—*Eccle. 7:2*. He has felt his faith strengthened, his heart fired and his arm nerved afresh for the Master's work, and there has sprung up within his soul a joy that the "world knows not of."

Among the minister's rewards on earth, may be enumerated—

### *Second. THE HAPPINESS RESULTING FROM SUCCESS.*

There is no work more pleasant than that of directing inquiring sinners to the Lamb of God. There is no joy on earth more pure and elevated than that a pastor has in a revival of religion. In the evidence that God accepts his labors, and that to many his message is a sweet savor of life unto life, there is a joy that no other pursuit can furnish: a joy which, even on earth, is *more* than a compensation for all the toils and trials and sacrifices of the ministry.

We can take in at a single glance very little of the history of an individual. Each year of an active minister's life is so loaded with incident, as to crowd out of notice that which was not specially noteworthy during the preceding period. In our proneness to individualize, we look at the labors of to-day without studying their connection with those of yesterday. Hence we are apt to form our estimate of the value of a work by the results before us at

a given time. This leads to error. Could we collect to-day into one mighty congregation, all who have here, under the present pastorate, been instructed in the knowledge of God and the way of life, with what additional interest would it invest this occasion. How much it would enlarge our ideas of the importance of the ministerial office, and of the richness of the minister's reward. Scattered through this and other lands, are multitudes, who look back to this dear old church as the place of their second birth, and to its Pastor as their spiritual father. If the spirits of the just made perfect, still feel an interest in the things of earth, may we not suppose, that a mighty host, who here learned to love and worship God, are now gazing on this scene with wrapt attention, as they bend over the crystal battlements of heaven. Perhaps they are nearer to us—hovering here, in their angelic form.

Here, my thoughts are strangely carried back to scenes, now, more than thirty years ago. I seem again to stand a youth, within this sacred place. The house is crowded to its utmost—full—around the doors and windows anxious listeners crowd; familiar faces and loved forms, that are not here to-day, graced the assembly then. My father—now gone up—was there; and by his side a sister, who now sleeps—in Jesus sleeps—to wake again.

The ministers of God press home the truth upon the conscience of the waiting, eager people. Many are moved to tears. The sermon is ended, and before the congregation is dismissed, all who desire to be conversed with on the subject of their salvation, are invited to rise. In a moment more than half the congregation are on their feet. More stood up than remained sitting. It was a sight to move a heart of stone. O, how it thrilled the soul of the impeni-

tent sinner, and filled him with the apprehension of impending wrath.

The man of God, since gone to rest, by whom the services were conducted, looking with streaming eyes over the Spirit-smitten congregation, exclaimed : "I know not what to say !" "I know not what to do."

As a result of the blessed work then commenced, there stood up here, a few weeks after, to receive, at the hands of their pastor, the ordinance of Baptism, as many adults as would have constituted a church, with a larger membership than that of many of the churches in our connection. On the same day there sat down at the Communion Table, for the first time, a number, greater than that found to-day on the communion roll of any one of the sixteen smaller churches, of the twenty-six, now under the care of our Presbytery. During the following year, these blessed scenes were re-enacted, differing in their results only, in slightly diminished numbers.

Thus often repeated have been the manifestations of divine favor to this congregation. What emotions fill the soul as we revive the memories of those stirring times ! Many that then shed tears of repentance and others that wept for joy, now weep no more. God has wiped away all tears from their eyes. In them faith has given place to sight and hope is lost in fruition.

But for none can these scenes possess the interest felt by the faithful Pastor. In the midst of them all he stands out upon the foreground, distinctly prominent, the highly honored instrument of God in arranging and directing the agencies by which these glorious results are brought about.

In such a light how responsible his office ; how great its rewards. Great here, but greater, unutterably greater,

hereafter. "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever."—*Dan.* 12:3.

The happy and saving results of the ministerial work can be seen, fully, only in heaven. Other plans and labors of men terminate at death. But, in its consequences, the work of the minister reaches into the skies, and will be seen ever onward in eternity.

Well may the apostle ask, who is sufficient for these things? From what has been said it plainly appears—

#### IV. THAT HUMAN STRENGTH AND HUMAN WISDOM ARE UTTERLY INADEQUATE TO THE WORK OF SAVING SOULS.

The renewal of the heart is a work requiring just as much the omnipotence of God as the creation of a world. Unless light from the Sun of Righteousness shines into the benighted mind, the darkness of death will brood there. If the human bosom be not warmed by love kindled from the altar of God, it must remain forever frozen. Cold, icy cold, are the affections that flow from a heart that has never been melted by the breath of the Holy Spirit. For this agency there is no substitute. Personal influence—individual or united effort—the Word read or spoken, in short, the means of grace in all their variety and richness, are utterly impotent until energized by the Holy Ghost.

We read with wonder, if not with awe, of the effect produced by the shot and shell thrown from some of the guns now in use, upon the field of strife. We can hardly look into the iron throat of one of these engines of death without shuddering; yet there is no power there. It is charged with a grained and coaly mass and upon that is forced home the iron missile; still there is no power there. It resides

neither in the one nor the other, nor in all united. As separate, so combined, they are but passive, inert matter. But to the nitrous grain you apply a spark; now you have awaked an energy that leaps into life with resistless power. The air is convulsed, the earth trembles beneath your feet, and the messenger of death goes shrieking to its dreadful work. As in this case, the spark energizes the quiescent matter, so with respect to the means of grace, the Spirit must impart the power. It is not the minister, it is not his eloquence, nor the language in which the truth is presented, but the Holy Ghost that makes it effectual. How much, then, the minister needs to be taught of God. How much he requires directing wisdom and sustaining grace.

It will now appear, I trust, that the pastor has a strong claim upon the sympathies of his people. They should pray much for him. Paul often sought the prayers of the churches to which he wrote. If *he* needed them, assuredly *they* do who now bear similar responsibility. Ministers have the same conflicts and temptation as other christians. Beside, they have those which are peculiar and which grow out of the nature of their office, for the warfare of Satan is carried on, mainly, with the leaders of God's army. The people should hold up his hands. His success will be generally in proportion to the frequency and earnestness of their prayers in his behalf. The more they pray for him the better he will preach and the better they will hear. No congregation will be greatly profited by gospel privileges unless they feel anxiety enough about them to pray for their minister.

May God, my hearers, give you a praying spirit, and a benevolent heart, that by your prayers, your sympathies,

and your substance, you may sustain in comfort, to the end of life, your beloved Minister. He has worn himself out in breaking to you, for *fifty years*, the bread of life.

“If he has sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great matter, that he reap your carnal things?”—1 *Cor.* 9:13. May he ever be unto you a “savor of life unto life.”

But, permit me, honored father in Christ, for myself and for my brethren, present, to offer you our most hearty greetings, on the happy termination of the fiftieth year of your pastorate over this flock. God has wonderfully blessed your labors and honored you among your brethren. He has permitted you to see a luxuriant harvest already garnered, and the waving fields your hand has sown, still ripe and ready for the sickle. In all this we rejoice with you; and now, that you feel the enervating power of disease, we tender you our condolence and sympathy. We pray that you may soon be restored to your accustomed health, and that your affliction may work for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

While we linger in this sacred place, made dear to us by a thousand tender recollections, we would unite with you in erecting a memorial before God, on which, in gratitude for the past, and in confiding trust for the future, we would write,

“EBENEZER,”

“JEHOVAH—JIREH.”