

AN
ADDRESS,
DELIVERED JUNE 24, 1812,
AT
THE FUNERAL
OF
MRS. SARAH CUMMING,
CONSORT OF
THE REV. HOOPER CUMMING,
Pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church in Newark, New-Jersey.

BY JAMES RICHARDS, A. M.
PASTOR OF THE FIRST CHURCH.

NEW-YORK:
PUBLISHED BY WHITING AND WATSON,
NO. 96 BROADWAY.
J. Seymour, print.
.....
1812.

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PREFACE.



THE following address was occasioned by the melancholy death of Mrs. SARAH CUMMING, consort of the reverend HOOPER CUMMING, Pastor of the second Presbyterian church in Newark. She died by a fall from the rocks at Patterson, on the morning of the 22d of June, 1812, in the 23d year of her age.

She had gone with Mr. Cumming to spend the sabbath at Patterson, where he was appointed to preach, by the Presbytery. On Monday morning, they took a walk to the falls of the Pasaick, which lie in the neighbourhood. When they had finished their view of the wonderful scenery, which this place affords, Mrs. Cumming fell from a high part of the western rock, an elevation of about seventy feet, into the basin below.

She had just before complained of dizziness, and sat down with Mr. Cumming at a little distance from the edge of the precipice, until she was composed. Wishing to take another view of a scene so sublime, and to her so novel and interesting, she ventured again, with her husband, to the margin of the rock. When they had stood a few minutes, he said, "It is time to return," and requested her to accompany him. The path being narrow, he stepped back a pace or two, supposing she would follow. Alas! only a cry is heard. He turns—but she is gone from his sight for ever! In the dreadful agitation of his mind, he runs backward and forward along the awful brink, crying, "she is fallen! she is fallen!"

At this perilous moment, a lad of about sixteen years of age, who was providentially but a few rods distant, flew to his assistance, and once actually held him by the skirt, when he seemed in the act of throwing himself down the precipice. They both descended by the usual passage to the foot of the rock; and again the agonizing husband would have plunged into the abyss, but for the firm resistance of the youth, destined in providence to preserve him, during this paroxysm of unutterable grief. In a few minutes Mr. Cumming became composed, and manifested a spirit of devout resignation.

Hundreds crowded to the mournful place, and the deepest sympathy was seen working in every bosom. Great apprehensions were entertained for a time that the body could not be found. The water deep, the current rapid, and a huge bed of rocks lying at different depths, it was believed that the chance was very small. A search was immediately commenced, and continued till late at night, but in vain. At seven o'clock the next morning, when only a few persons were present, and these chiefly of Mr. Cumming's congregation, the body was taken up by one of the elders of his church. It was conveyed to Newark; and at ten o'clock the next day the funeral was attended in the second Presbyterian Church, by a great concourse of people from Newark and the neighbouring towns. Tears flowed from a thousand eyes. Never was greater sympathy excited on any occasion. The profoundest silence reigned through the assembly; and the procession, formed in conveying this lamented female to the tomb, amounted to more than sixteen hundred persons of both sexes.

Mrs. Cumming was born of reputable parents in Portland, Maine, and received her education, in that town *. She was married and removed to Newark, a few weeks, only, before her death. Her person was agreeable, her manners simple, and her mind strong and ingenuous. Torn from her husband in all the loveliness of youth, she has left him, with her widowed mother, and only sister, to mourn her loss.

The author of the Address has given this detail, not only to satisfy the curiosity of the public, but to mark more distinctly the footsteps of Providence in an occurrence, so wonderful and painful in all its circumstances.

Newark, July 11th, 1812.

* Her family name was **EMMONS**.

AN ADDRESS,

&c.



MOURNFUL day! The sympathies, and anguish of a thousand hearts proclaim it to be a mournful day. When have we seen such an assembly as this? Every bosom swells with a sigh, every eye runs down with tears. Who could have expected the awful event we now deplore? We know that we are mortal. We know that death may assail us, at any moment, and in numberless forms; but how unlooked for, and in what distressing circumstances, has this dread messenger approached in the case before us!

Did our young friend languish on her bed, and after leaving her dying counsels to those around her, pass away into eternity? Did she apprehend the stroke, which severed her from earth and all that earth holds dear? Did she give the parting look, or parting hand? Did she say but once, I die—I go to Jesus—I bid farewell? alas! none of all these circumstances were permitted. In the walk of pleasure, she meets with death. While admiring the works of her Creator; while her heart was beating with innocent and new delight; she slides, in an

instant, from the awful precipice into the troubled wave beneath. Who can describe the anguish of her surviving husband? Who shall prevent him from rushing down the dreadful steep, in this moment of unutterable distress? That merciful providence, only, which planned the whole from eternity, and which ordered every circumstance of this painful event, by counsels as efficient as they were wise.

God saves the distracted sufferer, when he had no power to save himself. A fellow youth, as an angel from heaven, is sent to pluck him from the brink, and to restrain him, for a moment, till reason resume her throne. But why do I attempt a picture, which no mortal can ever draw? Why do I recall a scene, which plants a dagger in the soul?

Let me rather present the consolations, which are afforded on this occasion, and point you to the lessons of divine instruction, which the occasion was designed to give.

We mourn the loss of an amiable woman, torn from her husband in the bloom of youth, and torn from him under circumstances, which excite the liveliest sympathy in every heart. But we have, for our comfort, the blessed assurance, that this dark and trying event has taken place by the appointment of an infinitely wise and righteous God.

His providence extends to the falling of a sparrow; and his providence is always *just*, always *wise*. He does nothing, and suffers nothing to be done, which he will not overrule for his own glory and the highest good of his great kingdom. His immediate designs are often out of sight. We cannot tell wherefore it is, that he deals thus with us. The wheels of his government move high and dreadful. His path is in the great waters, and his footsteps are not known. Of this, however, we may be certain, that he has some great and glorious purpose to answer by every event, which befalls.

This is unquestionably the case in the distressing providence before us. To feeble and short-sighted man it presents a cloud of impenetrable darkness. But, as sure as God is upon the throne, and controls the events of the universe, this cloud has a bright side, and one day its brightness will appear.

Yes, ye mourning friends, this thick cloud, this cloud of astonishment and terror, shall be turned into the light of the morning. Into the light of the morning? Nay, into the blaze of yonder sun. Your weeping eyes shall see that infinite wisdom and goodness planned this dispensation, and that not a circumstance could be altered for the better. Is not this a strong ground of consolation? To all the friends of God's government—to all who are will-

ing that God should be on the throne, it cannot be otherwise.

I have to add, surprising as it may appear, that the present affliction is not only sure to serve the purposes of God's glory and the interests of his great kingdom; it will promote the personal happiness of those whom it immediately affects, provided they love God and submit themselves to his righteous providence.

It is one of the most comprehensive and consoling promises of the Scriptures, that all things "shall work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." Nothing can fall out amiss to them. Whether it be trouble or joy, their highest, their eternal, welfare goes on. The severest afflictions do but humble them and bring them nearer to God. They are a fire to take away their dross: they detach them from the world, and ripen them for the purity and blessedness of heaven.

Whence the apostle thus addresses the afflicted Hebrews: "We have had fathers of our flesh, who corrected us, and we gave them reverence. Shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of Spirits, and live? For they verily, for a few days, chastened us after their own pleasure, but he for our

profit, that we might be made partakers of his holiness. Wherefore lift up the hands, which hang down, and the feeble knees.”

Blessed be God, important and consoling as this consideration is, it is not the last, nor the chief, which we have to offer on this occasion.

Our young friend, whose death we now lament, was a professor of religion, and one of its brightest ornaments. She was not merely an intelligent and amiable member of society, who easily and strongly attached to herself those who had the pleasure of her acquaintance—she was a *Christian*. She early imbibed sentiments favourable to religion, through the medium of a pious mother and sister, and, about two years since, made an open and explicit avowal of her friendship to the Redeemer. From that period, she has been considered by those, who knew her best, as unusually devoted to the duties and interests of religion. She was constant and fervent in prayer. It is known that, on the last night of her life, she was particularly and solemnly engaged in this duty; as if, excited by the omniscient Spirit, to prepare for the great event so near at hand. She loved the distinguishing truths of the Gospel, and took a special interest in the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom. Christ and his cross were to her living and precious

themes. The friends of Jesus, whether rich or poor, were the friends of her heart. Her benevolence was ardent. As an angel of mercy, she was often seen at the beds of the sick and the dying. The tears of the aged and helpless widow can bear witness to the tender sympathies of her soul. Such was her humility, such her discreet and amiable deportment, that she was affectionately and universally beloved, by the christian society from which she came, and, as far as time and circumstances permitted, no less beloved by her acquaintance in this place.

We have reason to believe, that she has exchanged a world of sin and sorrow for a world of light and glory. Her departure was sudden and unexpected, but not the less safe. The covenant mercy of God never forsakes those, whom it once embraces. She falls in an instant out of time into eternity, but underneath her are *the everlasting arms*. Quick as a beam of light, her soul bursts the darkness which shrouded it, and makes its way to the throne of God; but it does not go unaccompanied by angels, nor unwashed in the Redeemer's blood.

Why then should we mourn? Not because she has flown so soon to the bosom of her Saviour. Hear what a voice from heaven proclaims: "Blessed are the dead, that die in the Lord, from hence-

forth; yea, saith the spirit, for they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them." *There*, they are before the throne of God, day and night. They rejoice without intermission, and without end. They have none of the darkness and sorrow, which encompass us. They have done with sinning and repenting, with doubting and fearing. They wrestle no more, they strive no more. Their warfare is accomplished, their dangers are past; God has for ever wiped away their tears. Let us lift up our souls to those shining and tranquil regions, whither they are gone, and, instead of repining at their departure, let us prepare to follow them.

Turn your thoughts to these things, my dear brother, and let your heart repose itself on the bosom of eternal love and mercy. Great as your loss is, God is good, God is wise. His promises are rich, his truth is unchangeable, his power is almighty. He loves those whom he afflicts, and he afflicts them because he loves them.

Think it not strange, that this trial has overtaken you. God will bring good out of evil, light out of darkness, joy out of sorrow. If you know not what the Lord does now, you shall know hereafter. This is the world of faith; the next, the world of vision. Soon the dark cloud shall be scattered and a light poured upon this path of providence,

which shall be full and satisfactory. In the mean time, rejoice that your beloved friend is not lost; though she is gone from you. A happier world receives her, and she waits to be joined by those, that loved her here, in the song of praise, which with angels she has begun, but which shall never, never, have an end.

Bear then with christian resignation the trial, which heaven hath appointed; and while you assure yourself of the sympathy of many thousand hearts, let your eye be steadily fixed on Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith. Let his example encourage you, and his almighty power and grace be your refuge. May that God, who comforteth those that are cast down, comfort you under all your sorrows, and thus teach you to comfort others with the comfort, with which you are comforted of God. Who can tell but one end of this sore bereavement is to enlarge your sympathies, and deepen your knowledge of divine grace, that you may be better able to condole with others, and extend the balm of consolation to their wounded spirits!

Shall we direct our minds, a moment, to some of those lessons of divine instruction, which this affecting providence seems intended to give?

God speaks loudly and solemnly to us on this occasion; and what is the language which he holds? Does he not say, ‘think not to measure my proceedings, by the short line of your understandings. Expect not fully to explore the paths of my providence in this world.’ “My ways are not as your ways, nor my thoughts as your thoughts. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

Had the destiny of our young friends been lodged in the hands of men, how different would have been the result. Who, that thinks of the union recently formed, of the tender friendship, which glowed in their faithful bosoms, of the bright prospect which was opening before them, but must stand astonished at what has happened? This astonishment, however, only proves how wide God’s counsels are from ours, and how far his wisdom lies above our sight. What could teach us more effectually, that God is great, and we are little? We are compelled to cry, O the depths of his providence! “How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!”

Does not God proclaim in our ears also the uncertainty of all earthly joys?

When the heart was full of expectation ; when the fond imagination was dreaming of years of increasing felicity, how instantaneous and awful the change ! In one sad moment the bright vision vanishes, and all is darkness and anguish. Who can trust to the world after this ?

“ Lean not on earth,”—is the voice of this Providence,

“ ’Twill pierce thee to the heart ;

A broken reed at best, but oft a spear,

On whose sharp point peace bleeds and hope expires.”

Are we not warned here, moreover, of the danger of living a moment unprepared for death ?

By how many avenues may this last enemy approach us ! He may overtake us in the midst of business, in the midst of pleasure. He may come without the slightest notice. We walk over the graves of departed generations. Every step may land us in the tomb. Why then should we procrastinate in the great work of our salvation ? Why should we risk our immortal destiny, on the chances of a life so frail ? Why should we do this, for a single moment, against the voice of reason, and the most solemn admonitions of God’s word and providence ? What if our dear young friend had delayed her preparation for death ? Where now had been her departed spirit ? Where now the most precious consolation of her surviving friends ?

Presume not, O sinner, upon to-morrow. Trust not to a sick bed. To-morrow may never come. A sick bed may be denied you. From the midst of health, you may be called to the judgment-seat of Christ, and your eternal state unalterably decided.

Christians, is there not here a peculiar and solemn voice to you? The Lord, you see, comes suddenly to his people, as well as to others. Our young sister had not time to trim her lamp. To her the coming of Christ was as the lightning, which shineth out of the east unto the west. Thus it may be to you. Are “your loins girded about, and your lights burning;” and ye yourselves like men, that wait for the return of their Lord? Is your house in order? are you doing the very things, which Christ commands you, and doing them with the zeal and activity of faithful servants? I beseech you, brethren, by the mourning which covers these altars, not to sleep as do others. Time is short, eternity is at hand. Soon its boundless scenes will open upon us, and we shall find ourselves in heaven or hell. Let us live for that eternity, which is approaching. Let our eye be single to the glory of our Master. By patient continuance in well-doing, let us commit the keeping of our souls to him, as unto a faithful Creator. Death will then neither injure, nor surprise us. Come when or how he may, he will only put a pe-

riod to our service on earth, and introduce us into the joy of our Lord.

Husbands and wives, can you forbear to reflect upon the special interest, which you have in this mournful scene?

Does life glide smoothly away with you? Are the cares of each day beguiled by your growing attachments, and by the cheerful discharge of reciprocal duties?

God grant that your happiness may be prolonged. But remember the hour approaches, which dissolves the tenderest earthly ties. The time will come, when you must say, " Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness." Look forward to that eternity to which you are going, and dwell together, as the heirs of the grace of life. Seek to have your friendship sanctified. Let it be at once the joyful instrument and the undoubted earnest, of a more exalted friendship in the kingdom of God. This will soften the pangs of separation. This will dry up the tears of the survivor. Grief will pass away in the hope of meeting those you love, never more to part, refined from the imperfections, and delivered from the sorrows, of the present life.

People of this congregation! you are deep mourners on this occasion. God has not bereaved your beloved pastor only; he has bereaved you. He has snatched from you one, to whom you were already strongly united, and whose virtues could not have failed to attach you still more, had she been permitted to continue longer with you.— Would she not have strengthened the bonds of christian love? Would she not have softened the anguish of sickness, and plucked the thorn from the dying pillow, by her sympathies and her prayers? Why has this amiable youth been sent among you to die; why, to die in such a manner? Was it merely to fill your minds with grief? Was it not, to constrain you to look at her example, to carry your minds forward to eternity, to think of that heaven to which she is gone, and of that Saviour, through whose blood and righteousness she has made her entrance there?

Brethren, I do not exhort you to weep with your afflicted pastor. I know your hearts bleed for him. Let your sympathies carry you to the throne of divine mercy. It is not long since, in this sacred place, you publicly promised to pray for him. Now he peculiarly needs your prayers. Bear him affectionately and constantly before the throne of grace, and God will sustain him.

Can I close this address without dropping a word to the youth in this assembly ?

You are full of hope. You leap forward with eager expectation to the enjoyments of the world. But what security can you have against the bold demands of death ? Does the pulse of health beat high in your veins ? Have you a thousand charms to endear you to others ; a thousand ties to bind you to the world ? Look at yonder solemn spectacle. Could any of these availed, that sable covering had not been there. The loveliness of youth, the vigour of health, the charms of virtue, are nothing, when the time which God appoints is fully come.

Are you ready for so solemn a change ? Have the first of your days been consecrated to the Author of your beings ? Do you know the God of your fathers ; and are you treading in the steps of the pious youth, whose remains we are now to commit to the tomb ? I exhort and conjure you, not to let this affecting providence address you in vain.

God in awful majesty is passing by. Will you not bow to him ? He is proclaiming in your ears, " All flesh is grass, and the glory thereof as the flower of grass ; the grass withereth and the flower thereof falleth away." Will you let this truth sink

down into your hearts? Will you henceforth set death and judgment before you? Will you make a business of religion? Now is your time. The tears which you shed on this occasion will be a witness against you, if, from this moment, you make not the concerns of your souls, the concerns of eternity, the object of your chief regard. A louder call you cannot look for; and if this be rejected, may not God in righteous judgment, give you to walk in your own ways, and seal you over to a state of awful retribution? Our prayer is, that this wonderful dispensation of providence may issue in the conversion of sinners, and in the greater watchfulness and fidelity of the Lord's people. *Amen.*

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