

Sermon.

A FUNERAL SERMON.

For Miss Emma and Mrs. Lydia George, Sister and Wife of the Rev. William George, preached at Cambridge West Cornwallis, on Sabbath afternoon, July 1st, 1866.

By the Rev. E. M. SAUNDERS, A. M.

"What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter."—John xlii.

It is too often necessary for the minister to resort to some novel or striking remarks, for the purpose of arousing the attention of his audience to a consideration of spiritual and eternal things. No such artifice is required here to-day. The feelings of the most unfeeling and the carelessness of the most careless have been arrested and deeply stirred by the sad events, which is the common centre of our thoughts and emotions on the present occasion.

As the basis of an appropriate discourse we have selected this remark from the gospel narrative by John: "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." The transaction, which called forth this expression from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ, was a very plain one, but although plain, in one aspect, yet, in another, it was singularly mysterious. The Saviour, after partaking of a meal with a small company of Galilean fishermen, girded himself with a towel, according to the custom of a menial, and, retiring behind them, and stooping to their feet which hung from the benches on which they were reclining, proceeded to wash them: from the basin, and to wipe them with "the towel wherewith he was girded." This was a very simple and plain operation; but when we consider the antecedents, the rank and the destiny of him who performed the service, our thoughts are at once carried into the regions of mystery. For him, who could say, "Before Abraham was I am," and "I and my Father are one," to humble himself into the capacity of a servant to rude men coming from the back country of Canaan, and volunteer to wash their begrimed feet, is to present to the human mind a scene so extraordinary and incomprehensible, that the only satisfactory deliverance from the feeling which it superinduces, and the thoughts which it begets, is through the declaration of God's Word, "Great is the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh." When this fact is submitted to the investigation of the religious mind, it becomes no matter of surprise, that Peter said—"Thou shalt never wash my feet." Leave the standing and relation of the several characters out of mind, and there is nothing uncommon or marvellous in the transaction; but, on the other hand, when this is taken into the account, we feel that an honest heart, unacquainted with the Christian grace of humility, would have shrunk back with hesitation and surprise, when the Son of God approached the feet to perform such a service. Our minds are shocked with such sudden and unwonted changes in the established relations of life. But this is so far beyond the most extraordinary case that could come within the limits of the humanly possible, that the first impression is followed by a bewilderment, produced by the mysterious and the apparently contradictory character of the event, and not by a sublime pleasure which would be experienced in contemplating acts of humility performed by some eminent personage. No part of the literal transaction was obscure to the minds of the spectators, for these were services which they were accustomed to witness; but it was the purpose and ends for which it was done, that were then plain to the divine, but entirely concealed from the human mind. The explanation soon followed, "If I your Lord and Master have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another's feet." By an act of humility the most extraordinary that mortals ever witnessed, the Saviour just before his death impressed the hearts of his disciples with the importance of the principle of humility. The utility of God's works and ways sometimes appears in conjunction with their performance, sometimes after a short interval, as in the present instance; but at other times the revelation is reserved for eternity.

1. Let us notice some of the features of this great affliction.

The sad occurrence, which has called us together at this time is a scene in that department of God's government, known as his providential government. The literal account of the catastrophe has been minutely and painfully learned, but the purpose of God is veiled in impenetrable mystery. All that God will accomplish by it, no one would assume to know. The language of the text becomes appropriate, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter."

Having made those observations, we shall turn our attention to the melancholy events, in order to notice some circumstances which seem singularly providential in bringing about this great affliction.

The incidents which overruled to make the return of our friends to their home issue so fatally, as I learned them, are as follows:—The arrangement was made to sail, at a certain time, and the table containing the times of tide was incorrect, and they arrived at the place of embarkation too late. A purpose was then formed to proceed by land, and from this they were turned by ascertaining that a conveyance by water could be obtained at Windsor. This was accepted, and proved the passage to death. By these singular occurrences and incidents the feet of our friends were turned out of one path into

another, till they entered upon that one which terminated in a watery grave.

The fatal boat is lowered and soon casts her immortal freight to the mercy of the agitated waters. The spirits take their flight, and leave the bodies the sport of currents, the victims of the cruel waters.

When thinking of these incidents and circumstances which follow in succession to accomplish the work of death, the enquiry naturally arises were they dropped into train by the hand of capricious chance, or were they arranged by the hand of unerring wisdom? "I have the keys of hell and of death." No one can be conducted to the portals of the house of the departed without the permission of Him who "Opens and no man shuts, and shuts and no man opens." He who guides with undeviating precision the revolutions of worlds, and beholds the sparrow that falls to the ground, and numbers the hairs of the head, is not surprised by any event, however small, much less by such a calamity as that which engages our attention at the present time. The future, infinitely capacious as it is, contains no incident, buried so deep, or of dimensions so minute, that it cannot be seen by the penetrating eye of the omnipresent One, who gazes at all times upon every particle and person in the universe. As we are borne along by the ever advancing present, the finite mind is bewildered in its attempts to observe the unknown of the future, recede by us into the past. As well might we attempt to examine the particles of vapour which ascend to form the clouds, or the drops of rain that descend to make a deluge; but to the eye of God they are all clear in their undeveloped, their devolving, and their developed state. No calamity ever discharged its contents into the bosom of humanity to pierce the soul with sorrow and envelope the mind in darkness without the knowledge and approval of Him to whom all things are known from the beginning.

2. In the next place we will turn your attention for a few moments to the nature and extent of the sympathies which have been crushed by this most lamentable occurrence. We must enter into the circles of strangers who are in common mourners with the heart-stricken here to-day, in order to refer to the affection which was centered in the dear departed ones.

It is, with a strong conviction, that no mind, however clear and defined its conceptions, that no words, however great their power to him and shade thought of every mould, are adequate to a full and just description of the sympathetic nature, which religion has refined and strengthened in the breasts of the several members of a Christian household that I attempt to refer to the nature and extent of the affections upon which this blow has fallen. Here we find currents of feeling not discolored by sordid selfishness; here we find sympathies, the firmness and tenderness of which can only be appreciated by knowing their nature and the process by which they have been cultivated into their present state of delicacy and strength. For instance we behold a mother in a state of widowhood presiding at the head of the household, responsible for the physical, moral and religious training of a group of sons and daughters. As she remembers that death smote down the husband of her youth, upon whose right arm she leaned for sustenance, and to whose manly and sympathetic bosom she did not look in vain for affection, through the trials and struggles of many years, her grief is assuaged and her otherwise heavy heart made light, by the unceasing flow of filial affection, which comes like perpetual balm upon her widowed heart. She gathers comfort and strength, as these manifestations of the kindness of the God of the widow, plainly indicate, that it is the purpose of a merciful heavenly Father, who called away the partner of youth, to heal the breach, and supply the loss, in permitting her to possess a thriving family of dutiful sons and affectionate daughters. When we consider the natural affection of the mother for her offspring, chastened into a holy refinement by the religion of Christ, and toned into strength and tenderness by the peculiar circumstances to which allusion has been made, we then begin to have just perceptions of the exquisite tenderness, and susceptibility of anguish, of which that heart is capable, which has received this stunning and painful stroke of bereavement. Having thus passed only across the threshold of the family, around whom our sympathies are now thrown, and into whose aching hearts we would pour a few drops of consolation, let us cease at the very commencement of the survey of that world of sympathy and affection, lest our emotions become strong beyond our control, and refer to a relation into which this household has recently entered, with other circles at a distance from the place in which we are now convened; a connection, which the painful providence, compels us to mention.

We pass now from the circumstances of the afflicted household in its private relation, to an interest and connection of a more public character. It turns out that God had called the eldest son to preach the gospel of the Son of God to his perishing fellow men. After many struggles and peculiar trials, incident to entering upon this public and holy calling, he is installed into the sacred office, and becomes pastor of a church of Christ in a distant part of the province. An alliance is formed with one to share with him the toils, responsibilities and joys of the pastor's life. A full appreciation of her worth and adaptation to the place which she occupied, we, who for so short a time enjoyed her acquaintance, could not in the nature of things be able to possess. But her transient visit, in company with her beloved husband in this community, did leave an impression on our minds, and make a place for her in our hearts, of which, however, we were not fully aware, till we saw and felt that sadness, which overspread this neighbourhood, on the reception of the intelligence, that the cruel waters of Minas had made

her and her sister-in-law their victims. As she mingled with us in our families and in the house of God, her grave and dignified bearing commanded our respect, her gentle and unobtrusive modesty won our hearts, and her meekness and evident devotion secured our Christian confidence and love. Such an one must have been very tenderly related to the home of her childhood. Her kindred and early associates alone can fully realize the extent and strength of the love which they cherished for her. I take this, to me unwonted liberty, on such occasion as the present, of entering into the private sympathies of a domestic circle, to which I am a perfect stranger, in order to give a just impression, with reference to a more public relation which the departed, together with her husband sustained. Who, in imagination, can go into all the families of the congregations to which our brother ministers, and view the love and esteem which the departed had secured for herself as she went from house to house with her husband, expressing in a quiet but certain way, her lively interest in the temporal and spiritual welfare of every member of the flock? We have thus glanced at some of the relations which the departed sustained, leaving much unexpressed and much more untouched, but what we have said is sufficient to awaken every reflecting mind to a lively appreciation of the tenderness of those hearts, upon which this painful and heavy blow has fallen.

3. There was no note of warning, no dark shadows which coming events sometimes cast before them; but as the bird, borne aloft on joyous wing, is pierced by the discharge of the fowler's piece and falls a bleeding and fluttering victim at his feet, so this stroke of bereavement pierced the hearts of the kindred and friends of the departed. The human heart possesses remarkable capabilities of endurance, when by being forewarned, it has time to take its proper attitude for receiving a shock, and to string and nerve its energies to endure the pain and anguish of the trial. Especially is this true of sanctified human nature. When, in addition to the stoicism which is natural to humanity, the advantage of the approach of the coming evil is possessed, the destined sufferer can, by counsel from God, and a deliberate survey of the brevity and evil of the present life, and a calm contemplation of that which is to come, command a preparation that will rob the blow of half its force, and save the heart much of its anguish. But not even the shadow of this advantage was enjoyed by our bereaved friends. We fear that there was not even the foresight exercised that the patriarch Job possessed. He did fear, lest his family would sin; and he was performing his devotions with a view to averting its consequences, when the sad intelligence reached him. It is a favorable time to listen to the painful news when we have just come out of the presence of God, where we have been holding intercourse with heaven. Who can appreciate the anguish that seized a mother's heart, and the strange bewilderment that filled her mind, when she was told that her beloved daughter whose head had been pillowed on her bosom from infancy, was now drifting, the sport of the maddening currents of Minas depths? Who can enter into the feelings of the mother, fathers, brothers and sisters, when this mournful intelligence fell upon their ears, and discharged its appalling contents of grief and agony into all their hearts? What language in all the accumulations of secular or sacred literature, so appropriate for them as expressions that we may find in the written word of God. "I was dumb because thou didst it." "Naked came I out of my mother's womb and naked I return thither, the Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord."

II. Some remarks in connection with the way in which God makes known the ends to be secured by His providential dealings.

We turn away from the details of the sorrowful event, and invite your serious attention to the fact, that out of this trying and mysterious providence, God will bring some real and lasting good. "All things work together for good to them that love God, who are the called according to his purpose." But his "judgments are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out," God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform." We, with all the wisdom that we can command, in considering the places which the departed filled, and to what a large extent the happiness and prosperity of others depended upon them, would decide, that it would have been better for the interests of the families and religion, that lives which have been taken, should have been spared. But in reply to this we hear the word of God answering, "My ways are not your ways, neither are my thoughts your thoughts, but as high as the heavens are above the earth so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter."

"Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan his work in vain;
God is his own interpreter,
And he will make it plain."

God in his providential government exhibits the same exhaustless variety that he does in the works of his hands, and in the development of his moral government.

1. In some instances his intentions which were veiled in obscurity, have been brought, in a short time, to the light, so that his wisdom and goodness in the particular event, become evident to the minds of all men. The rapid shifting of unexampled prosperity and adversity in the life of Joseph and Job, was speedily followed by consequences, which disclosed to mortal minds the wisdom and love of Him, who sits in undisturbed calmness upon the throne of the universe, maintaining order in all his illimitable dominions; and is prevented in no one instance, from securing the highest good to each one of his

children on earth, and untarnished glory to his own name. The bounds of the universe are the bounds of his great purposes, and the limits of the eternities are the limits of his great plans. It contains parts as large as the largest world, and it also contains parts as small as the atom that sports in the drop of dew. In the plan of human redemption, which is the center of all that is revealed to us of the works and ways of God, we turn away bewildered with a view of that part, where we behold God manifest in flesh, one of the three of infinite dimensions, and pillowed upon the bosom of Mary, the humble Nazarene, to see a company of heartless soldiers casting lots for a coat, which takes its place in this great scheme as one of its essential parts. Here is one part of such stupendous magnitude that it overwhelms and confounds us, and here is another, which presents itself to the human mind as the merest trifle. But the relation of these facts, which strike our minds in so peculiar a manner, have a place in the mind of him who sees not as man sees, according to their own real importance. As God has the extent of the universe for the scene of his operations, so he has eternity as the period for unfolding and perfecting all that He has purposed. Some of his purposes are hurried to perfection like the growth of Jonah's gourd, others grow leisurely like the mammoth trees of the Californian forest. Ends were soon disclosed for permitting Luther to be confined in the Wartburg, and Bunyan in Bedford gaol, but eighteen hundred years have not made quite clear the utility of John's losing his head at so early a stage of his mission. Let no rash conclusions be drawn because the word of explanation has not come to throw light upon some great trial, neither let the conclusion be drawn, that it is too insignificant to answer any good end, or have the attention of Him who is our heavenly Father. He who presides in the carriage and death of the battle field, was present to regulate all the details of that painful struggle and death in the waters of yonder Basin. The bounds of their earthly habitation had been reached, the summons was sent, and events came one upon another to carry it into execution. What will come out of it? "Be still and know that I am God." "Oh how trying and painfully severe, I am "too wise to err and too good to be unkind." God does not grieve or afflict the children of men willingly, but for their profit.

(Concluded in our next.)

For the Christian Messenger.

Prince Edward Island Correspondence.

DEAR EDITOR,—

Since my last I have visited several of my old preaching stations, bearing in mind the Saviour's injunction, "As ye go preach." It was very gratifying to meet a number of friends, whom many years ago I had baptized into the fellowship of the Church of Christ. But some had passed over Jordan, whom I hope soon to meet in the Heavenly Canaan.

Last Sabbath was a deeply solemn and interesting day with us here—the funeral of Susanna, daughter of Deacon Thomas Wood, took place. After a short but very painful illness, she expired fully resigned to the will of her Heavenly Father in hope of eternal life. She was a promising girl of 14 years, a child of many prayers. Though she had not been baptized she had obtained a hope in the Saviour and took great interest in the progress of the Church. The funeral was largely attended. And as she was a Daughter of Temperance, "The Sons" walked in procession. After the corpse was interred, the writer delivered a discourse from Amos iv. 12, to a large and deeply attentive congregation.

There is a good work in progress at this place. Brother Archibald, who is at present absent attending the Association, labors here one fourth of his time to good acceptance.

Charlottetown was overwhelmed on the 15th inst., by a great fire. More than one hundred houses and stores have been consumed, and thirty families rendered houseless. Seven (7) acres of the closely built business part of the city has been laid in ruins. The loss has been estimated at \$200,000, about one third of which was insured.

There is a good appearance of abundant crops in the Island, though the Spring was late. While the bow appears in the cloud we shall have seed time and harvest. There is great need of more faithful laborers in this beautiful Isle; for fields are now waiting white to the harvest. Any friends wishing to write me will address to me at Charlottetown, P. E. Island, as I expect to remain a few weeks longer ere I return to Nova Scotia.

Yours truly,

Lot 49, July 24th, 1866.

B. SCOTT.

[By some unexplained cause the above did not reach us till the 8th inst.—Ed. C. M.]

NOBLE GENEROSITY.—Mrs. James B. Colgate, of New York, daughter of Ex-Governor Colby, of New London, has just made the liberal offer of \$25,000 to the Literary Institution in that place, on condition that \$75,000 be raised from other sources. It is proposed to raise the sum necessary to make the endowment \$100,000.