

A

PASTOR'S LEGACY;

BEING

SERMONS ON PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.

BY THE LATE

REV. ERSKINE MASON, D.D.,

PASTOR OF THE BLEEKER STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK.

WITH A BRIEF MEMOIR OF THE AUTHOR, BY  
REV. WILLIAM ADAMS, D.D.

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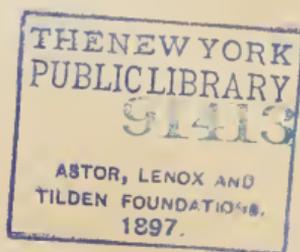
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## MEMOIR.

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THE life of a Christian minister never can be written. Its *incidents* may be easily mentioned, for they are few. His parentage, birth, education, conversion, ordination, preaching, illness and death, comprise the whole. The *whole*? His real life consists not in striking and startling events. When the streams are flushed with the spring-freshet, overflowing the banks and sweeping away the dams and the bridges, the marvel is heralded in every newspaper; but when the same streams flow quietly along their ordinary channels, making the meadows to smile with verdure, refreshing the roots of the trees and turning the wheels of the mill, they excite no remark, even though their tranquil flow awakens a grateful admiration. Sum up the professional labours of a minister, and give the product in so many sermons, written and delivered!

As well attempt to gather up the rain, measure and weigh it. A certain amount of water you may show, but what of the moisture which has been absorbed by the tender vegetable, and the leaves of the trees? The life of a preacher is spent in addressing the intellect and conscience of his fellow-men. Ten, twenty, thirty years has he preached. How many thoughts, in how many minds has he suggested during such a period! What manifold judgments and purposes, what great hopes and wise fears have had their origin in his own thoughts and words! What sayings of his have been lodged in men's minds, which have worked in secret about the roots of character! Even while despondent himself, because so few visible results of his toil are revealed, his opinions by insensible degrees are growing into the convictions of others, and his own life is infused into the life of a whole generation. It is a peculiarity of his position that he touches the life of his people at those points which are the most memorable and important in their existence. He unites them in marriage; baptizes their children, and buries their dead. He dies, and is soon forgotten by the world. The sable drapery which was hung about his pulpit on his funeral day is taken down; his successor is chosen and installed, and the tide of life rolls on as before. But he is not forgotten by all. His life is not all lost and dissi-

pated. As the manners of a father are acted over in his son, and the smile of a mother will brighten again, after she is dead, on the face of her daughter, so will the sentiments of a minister be transmitted after his ministry is closed, his words be repeated after he has ceased to speak, and all his hopes and wishes live again in other hearts, long after his own beats no more. His biography will not be finished nor disclosed till that day when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed; and the seals of his ministry will be set, like stars in the firmament for ever and ever. To accommodate to a Christian minister, the language employed by Mr. Coleridge, in reference to Bell, the founder of schools:—  
“Would I frame to myself the most inspiring representation of future bliss, which my mind is capable of comprehending, it would be embodied to me in the idea of such an one receiving at some distant period, the appropriate reward of his earthly labors, when thousands of glorified spirits, whose reason and conscience had, through *his* efforts, been unfolded, shall sing the song of their own redemption, and pouring forth praise to God and to their Saviour, shall repeat *his* ‘new name’ in heaven, give thanks for his earthly virtues, as the chosen instrument of divine mercy to themselves, and not seldom, perhaps, turning their eyes toward *him*, as from the sun to its image in the fountain, with

secondary gratitude and the permitted utterance of a human love.”

There is a wide difference between a Pastor and an Evangelist. To affirm that the latter is never needed and never useful, would be to doubt the truth of the Scriptures and scoff at the Providence of God. The writings of George Herbert prove how early and how deeply imbedded in the English mind, was that conception of the sacred office which is embodied in the idea of one teacher ministering to one people; a relation well described by that significant word Pastor, obviously borrowed from the employment of a shepherd feeding his flock. It was one of the very earliest of English bards, the father of English poetry, who wrote that description of a Parish Priest.

“ Yet has his aspect nothing of severe,  
But such his face as promised him sincere;  
Nothing reserved or sullen was to see,  
But sweet regard and pleasing sanctity.  
Mild was his accent, and his action free,  
With eloquence innate his tongue was arm'd,  
Though harsh the precept, yet the preacher charm'd;  
For letting down the golden chain from high,  
He drew his audience upwards to the sky.  
He taught the gospel rather than the law,  
And forc'd himself to drive, but lov'd to draw.  
The tithes his parish freely paid he took,  
But never sued or curs'd with bell and book.  
Wide was his parish, nor contracted close

In streets ; but here and there a straggl'g house. ;  
Yet still he was at hand without request,  
To serve the sick and succour the distress'd ;  
The proud he tamed, the penitent he cheer'd,  
Nor to rebuke the rich offender fear'd.  
His preaching much, but more his practice wrought,  
A living sermon of the truths he taught."—CHAUCER.

That confidence which is born of intimate acquaintance, familiar intercourse, and friendly sympathy, contributes more to ministerial influence than the meteoric display of occasional eloquence. "A stranger will they not follow." But it was of quite another thing that I intended to speak when comparing the life of a pastor and evangelist. The latter visits a city for the first time, and preaches with a frequency and power which excite amazement. The secular press heralds it as little short of miraculous that a mortal should be able with no apparent exhaustion, day after day, and night after night, to address changing crowds. The truth is that such an one is leading a life of intellectual recreation. He repeats the same discourses over and over again in the course of his itinerancy, till they are as familiar to his memory, and facile to his utterance as the letters of the alphabet, and he has grown expert in every expression, gesture and intonation. It was the testimony of David Garrick that the sermons of Whitfield, as specimens of oratorical art, never reached their fullest power till

the fiftieth repetition. What, for intellectual expenditure is such a career compared with the life of a pastor, preaching to the *same* congregation two or three times a week, month after month, year after year, with increasing interest, profit and power! The late Mr. Sargeant of Philadelphia, after delighting an audience with a lecture on some moral topic, declared to a friend that, for the labour involved, he would prefer to speak at the bar, six times in a week, on cases made to his hand, in the ordinary course of his profession, than prepare one popular lecture on any point on the philosophy of law, once in a month. To the latter the weekly preparations of a minister are the most analogous, yet how few, among the most intelligent, pause to reflect what is implied in the intellectual labours of a pastor like the subject of this memoir, protracted through twenty years, in connexion with the same congregation, with ever-increasing freshness, novelty and delight.

After all, what a poor exponent of a minister's influence is a volume of his sermons! However elaborate their construction, and finished their style, they are but the residuum of a sparkling cup. Those who *read* what once they *heard*, invariably confess to a feeling of disappointment, and can with difficulty be persuaded that the sentences over which their eye passes so languidly, on the

printed page, are the very same which, upon their delivery from the pulpit, fresh from the heart and lips of their author, were as a chariot of fire to the devout auditor. The truth is, there is a keeping between the thinking and the speaking of a preacher. His manner may violate all the rules of his art; nevertheless, it is *his own*, and no other can serve so well for the expression of himself. It is *his* emphasis and *his* intonation, *his* pause and *his* look, which alone can give the full and just expression of his own meaning. Think of a sermon of Leighton, its delicacy of sentiment shading off into pure spirituality, delivered by a Boanerges; or a discourse of South, repeated tamely by another, without the author's own burning eye, sharp voice, and stabbing finger.

One advantage, indeed, they may have, who reading the discourses of their pastor, but recently deceased, retain a distinct impression of his form, face and manner, seeming to hear the voice which stirred their hearts when he was living. This, however, is but a shadowy resemblance of a once living reality, gone never to be renewed. "In fact, every attempt to present on paper the splendid effects of impassioned eloquence, is like gathering up dew-drops, which appear jewels and pearls on the grass, but run to water in the hand; the

essence and the elements remain, but the grace the sparkle and the form are gone." \*

Notwithstanding all these disadvantages, we have collected here some of the sermons of a distinguished preacher, in the form of a Pastor's Legacy; and before their author's form has mouldered away to ashes, the trembling hand of friendship would draw down the covering from the face of the dead, and try to sketch his features, for the recognition of those who knew him.

ERSKINE MASON was born in the city of New York, 16th April, 1805. He was the youngest child of Rev. John M. Mason, D. D., whose fame as a preacher is known on both continents. His mother, Mrs. Anna L. Mason, was the granddaughter of Derick Lefferts, Esq., a prominent and affluent merchant of New York, with whom she resided, her father having died in her infancy. Mrs. Mason was admired from her youth for grace of manners, intelligence of mind, excellent discretion, and cheerful piety.

Singularly fortunate in his ancestry, the subject of this memoir had for his paternal grandfather, Rev. John Mason, D. D., distinguished alike for his scholarship and eloquence. Born in the vicinity of Edinburgh, Scotland, receiving a thorough classical education, competent to write and speak the

\* James Montgomery, on Summerfield.

Latin language, in his day the language of the lecture-room and of scholars, he was invited to the pastoral charge of the Scotch Presbyterian church in this city, at that time in Cedar-street. In that pulpit he continued to preach, till his son, Rev. John M. Mason, D. D., became his successor. Descended from an ancestry so illustrious, we may apply to the subject of this memoir the words which Horace first addressed to Mæcenæas :

“ ————— atavis edite regibus ;”

and he followed them with no Iulian steps. Erskine received his name as a tribute of the grateful respect entertained by his father for the late Rev. Dr. John Erskine of Edinburgh, from whom he had received many expressions of kindness while prosecuting his own theological studies in that city, near the close of the last century. The object of his father's indulgent and hopeful regard, “ tender and beloved in the sight of his mother,” this youngest of a numerous family of children, displayed in his boyhood more than common intelligence and spirit, which, being accompanied with no special love for study, or effort at sedateness, was the occasion of no small anxiety to his religious parents. In the twelfth year of his age he was removed from home to the family of his brother-in-law, Rev. Dr. Van Vechten, of Schenectady, and

joined the school of Rev. Mr. Barnes. Dr. Johnson has very justly said, "Not to mention the school or master of distinguished men, is a kind of historical fraud, by which honest fame is injuriously diminished." The life of Mr. Barnes needed not its tragic end (he was killed by the upsetting of a stage-coach, the day after he had preached on the uncertainty of life) to make his name memorable. The act of entering the school of this judicious teacher, in company with his own brother, James, always correct, high-minded and sedate, was the happy crisis in the life of Erskine, when he awoke to sober reflection and earnest purposes, like the visit of Sir Thomas Buxton to the family of the Gurney's, at Earlham Park.

In consequence of impaired health, Dr. John M. Mason was constrained to exchange the pastoral office in this city for the Presidency of Dickinson College, at Carlisle, in Pennsylvania. Hither Erskine accompanied his father, and was entered a member of the College, in the fourteenth year of his age.

And here I avail myself of the pen of Rev. Dr. Knox, senior pastor of the Reformed Dutch church of this city, the son-in-law of Dr. John M. Mason, who, in a discourse on the death of Rev. William Cahoone, some three years ago, expresses himself as follows:

“A large number of choice young men of this city and its vicinity, attracted by their regard for the venerable President, and the faculty he had gathered around him, followed Dr. Mason to Carlisle, and became members of the College. In the autumn of 1822, a son of the President, *James Hall Mason*, a youth of singular purity and elevation of character, eminent promise and greatly beloved, having just received his degree, and with the ministry in view, after a violent and brief illness, was taken away by death. The event produced a solemn and profound impression throughout the College. The heart-stricken father, who had a short time before parted with a beloved daughter, sat as one astonished. Clouds and darkness were round about the throne. The explanation was not yet. When the bier on which lay the body of his deceased son was taken up by his young companions, to be conveyed to the grave, as by involuntary and uncontrollable impulse, he spake, ‘Softly, young men, tread softly, ye carry a temple of the Holy Ghost!’

“This dark and bereaving dispensation, in the wonder-working providence of God, was made the occasion and commencement of a work of grace, the extent and results of which eternity alone will be able to disclose. Of the students who then experienced a change of heart, and subsequently

devoted themselves to the ministry of Christ, a majority being of the senior class, I have been able to recall the names of *fifteen*; among them many familiar to us all, such as Mr. Cahoone, Dr. Bethune of Philadelphia, Dr. Erskine Mason of this city, Dr. Morris of Baltimore, Bishop M'Coskry of Michigan, Messrs. Labagh of Long Island, Boice of Claverack, and others, with no less fidelity and usefulness occupying different and important stations in the church. In addition to these, and of the same class with a majority of them, six young men are recollected, who were members of the church previous to the revival, but who probably were more or less influenced during that scene, in devoting themselves to the ministry. These were President Young of Kentucky, Prof. Agnew of Michigan, Mr. Holmes, Missionary among the Chickasaws, Rev. Messrs. Whitehead and Vancleef of our church, and Rev. Mr. Williams, formerly of Salem, N. Y."

"Connected with this revival are various remarkable circumstances. It furnishes a chapter in God's gracious providence, which deserves to be had in admiring and grateful remembrance."

"In its origin it was remarkable. It was as life from the dead. That which, to all human view, seemed to abstract from the anticipated services of the church, and to depress the hearts of the godly,

in the early translation of a youth of high and holy promise, became the occasion in the dispensations of Him who worketh all things according to the counsels of his own will, of quickening many souls, and sending into the vineyard of our Lord a band of faithful labourers, who have sustained the heat and burden of the day."

"The work was remarkable in the fact, that although previously many of its subjects were very inconsiderate and heedless of their obligations, and were the objects of great solicitude, those at least to whom we have referred as having been called to the ministry were, every one of them, from the bosom of Christian families, carefully trained in the knowledge of divine things—sons on whose behalf prayer to God had ascended day by day continually."

"Remarkable, in the fact, that, of so large a number brought into the church at the same time, under all the excitement of such a scene, all have maintained their integrity, not one has fallen, or faltered, or backslidden. All have been useful, many of them eminently so."

"Remarkable, in the additional fact, that after the lapse of more than a quarter of a century, this hallowed band has now with a single exception, for the first time, so far as I have been able to ascertain, been invaded by death. With this exception

our brother Cahoone is the first of them all to be released from his labours, and taken to his recompense."

Graduating in 1823 Erskine Mason spent a considerable part of the next year with his cousin, the late Rev. Dr. Duncan, of Baltimore, prosecuting his studies under the direction of that distinguished preacher. In the summer session of 1825 he resorted to Princeton, and connected himself with the middle class of the Theological Seminary in that place, where he completed his professional education.

On the 20th October, 1826, he was ordained in the Scotch Presbyterian church in Cedar Street, by the second Presbytery of New-York, and in the next year was installed over the Presbyterian Church of Schenectady.

On the 26th September, 1827, he was married by his father to Miss Mary McCoskry, daughter of Dr. Samuel A. McCoskry, and granddaughter of the celebrated Dr. Charles Nesbit, President of Dickinson College. Mrs. Mason survives her husband with three daughters and one son, all of sufficiently mature age to sympathize with their widowed mother in their common bereavement.

Converted by the grace of God, educated for the Christian ministry, inducted into the sacred office, the true life of Dr. Mason now begins. With

the highest models of pulpit eloquence before him, in his own father and grandfather; deeply impressed with the sanctities and responsibilities of his profession, he appears from the very first to have proposed to himself no common-place mediocrity in his pulpit preparations, but eminence of the highest order. Though he was but twenty-one years of age at the time of his ordination, he intended that no one should "despise his youth;" and that no measure of toil should be withheld which was necessary to prevent him as a "workman" from being "ashamed." In a striking passage in one of the Greek tragedies, a character is introduced expressing great surprise, that, amidst all the inventions and attainments of human science and art, there should be found so few to cultivate that *art of persuasion* which is the mistress of human volition, and so the helm of human affairs. The pastor of an educated and intellectual congregation,—the faculty and students of Union College attending on his ministry, Dr. Mason neglected not that undervalued art of conviction, but addressed himself to the understanding of his hearers with a clearness of conception and a depth of thought, which, in the language of the venerable Dr. Nott, "appeared wonderful in so young a man." "His power," such is the continued testimony of this distinguished witness, "was chiefly felt in the pulpit.

He appeared to be conscious that his mission was to preach the gospel; and in the performance of that duty he excelled. He was greatly beloved by his people, highly esteemed by the citizens generally, and his removal from the place was regretted by all, and by none more than by the officers and members of Union College."

The Bleeker Street Presbyterian Church, in New-York, gathered by the persevering labours of Rev. Matthias Bruen, was early called to weep over the remains of their accomplished pastor, who died on the 6th December, 1829, in the thirty-seventh year of his age. To the pastoral office of this church Dr. Mason was unanimously invited; and to this new field was he transferred September 10th, 1830, with the experience of but three years in his profession; and to this people, though often invited elsewhere, did he devote his best services, for more than twenty years, to the close of his life. At the time of his settlement over that people, the Bleeker St. Church was quite above the centre of the city population; that tide of removal and growth which has since made such prodigious advances, scarcely having commenced. An "up-town church," however, afforded accommodations and attractions to those who soon began to change their residence, and such was the ability displayed by the pastor in Bleeker Street, that it was not long before that church was en-

tirely filled; and, for many years after, it occupied a position which gave it pre-eminent advantages over all other churches of the same denomination in the city. Nothing of opportunity was lacking on the one part, and nothing of talent, diligence, and success on the other. The congregations were large and intelligent, and every thing encouraged that purpose which the pastor had formed to devote himself to the one thing of a studious, careful, and excellent preparation for the pulpit. Others might grasp at a different prize, and select a different path, but the composition and delivery of good sermons was the object for which his taste, talent, and judgment of usefulness best qualified him. From that occupation he never suffered himself to be diverted. There are many extemporaneous sermons written out in full. With Dr. Mason, the composition of a discourse was never postponed to some anticipated uncertainty of favourable feeling, or to the last pressure of inevitable necessity. Before he had lost the impulse of one Sabbath he had begun the preparation for another. It was his deliberate judgment, that a minister, special cases only excepted, could serve his people the best, after preaching twice in the day, to pass the evening of the Sabbath at his own home; and seldom did he retire that night without having decided upon the topic which was to be

the subject of study and preparation throughout the week. Thus he never lost the headway he had gained; neither weary himself, nor waste time in searching for subjects, or waiting for them "to come to him," as the phrase is which describes the suggestion of topics by accidental association. Adhering to the counsel of our great dramatist,

"Stick to your journal course: the breach of custom  
Is breach of all,"

he has left a thousand sermons, (of their intellectual and theological excellencies I shall speak hereafter,) written entire in the perfection of penmanship, as the proofs of the wise and faithful manner in which he occupied the pulpit.

In versatility of talent he may have been excelled by others. The richest banker who can draw the largest check does not always carry about with him the greatest amount of small coin. Warmly social in his temperament, Dr. Mason was never garrulous; and that false idea of pastoral duty which many seem to cherish, requiring the consumption of one's chief time in going from house to house, and conversing in the ordinary chit-chat of trifles, he utterly discarded. Because of this was he deficient as a pastor? Who of his people ever knew a substantial sorrow or necessity without his presence and aid? Did Age ever complain of

disrespect, or Grief of his want of sympathy, or Suffering that he refused a balm? While the pulpit was the throne of his strength, who could speak, out of it, more wisely than he? If he sometimes appeared to be taciturn, who shall forget that *silence*, in its place, is wisdom as well as speech; that modesty is a beautiful property of greatness, and that he talks to the best purpose, who says the right thing at the right time, and in the right manner? How often has ministerial usefulness been impaired by folly and frivolity of speech. What Dr. Johnson has said of an author's book is equally true of a preacher's public office. "The transition from it to his conversation, is too often like an entrance into a large city after a distant prospect. Remotely we see nothing but spires of temples and turrets of palaces, and imagine it the residence of splendour, grandeur and magnificence; but when we have passed the gates we find it perplexed with narrow passages, disgraced with despicable cottages, embarrassed with obstructions, and clouded with smoke." No one, after being impressed with the dignity of Dr. Mason in the pulpit, lost that impression when meeting him in the familiarities of private life. It was said of some one whose infelicities and imprudencies of manner and conversation were equalled only by his extraordinary endowments as a preacher, "that when in the pul-

pit one might wish that he was never out of it ; but when out of it one could wish that he should never be *in* it." Confidence in the soundness of his judgment, the integrity of his motives, and the sincerity of his piety, is the secret of a preacher's success ; let that confidence be shaken by one act of folly, and the rod of his strength is broken. It were well if every preacher of the gospel should bear in mind the last sentiment of the following allegory, by one of the oldest poets in our language.

"Upon a time, Reputation, Love, and Death  
 Would travel o'er the world : and 'twas concluded  
 That they should part, and take their several ways.  
 Death told them they would find him in great battles,  
 Or cities plagued with plagues : Love gives them counsel  
 T' enquire for him 'mongst unambitious shepherds  
 Where dowries were not talked of : and sometimes  
 'Mongst quiet kindred that had nothing left  
 By their dead parents. *Stay, quoth Reputation,*  
*If once I part from any man I meet*  
*I am never found again."*\*

The discourses of Dr. Mason advertise their own quality. Those which compose this volume are in no respect superior to hundreds more from the same pen. Their first excellence is that they are decidedly *scriptural* and *evangelical*. A French preacher of the reign of Louis XIV, in a sermon to his brother monks, in which he bewails their

\* Webster, 1610.

criminal neglect of the fundamental doctrines of the gospel, makes this candid confession: "We are worse than Judas; he sold and delivered his Master: we sell him, but deliver him not." In the preaching of Dr. Mason was no such defect as that referred to in this tremendous satire. He was a *Christian* preacher; and in his eye all truth arranged itself around the cross of Christ, compared with which, the world beside, is, as Leighton well expresses it, one "grand impertinency." I know not how to describe what he was in this regard, so well as in the use of his own words when describing what a minister should be. In a discourse preached by him at Newburgh, October, 1838, before the Synod of New York, of which, in his 33d year, he was then Moderator, which discourse was, by the request of his brethren subsequently printed, entitled "The Subject and Spirit of the Ministry," he employs the following language. I am led to extract largely from this discourse, for the benefit of those who would know the character of its author, for it seems to be a daguerreotype likeness of himself.

"By the gospel of Christ, as an instrument of human conversion, I suppose we are to understand all those principles which cluster around the doctrine of vicarious atonement as their common centre; the lost, ruined, helpless condition of man as

a sinner, the provision which the grace of God has made for him, involving the nature, character, the righteousness even unto death of Jesus Christ as the ground of pardon; the regenerating and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, and the promises of good, as well as threatenings of evil, which have been sealed in atoning blood. These, and their correlative truths, usually comprised under the general term of gospel, constitute the exhibition to us of those great facts, in view of which we are brought into the kingdom of God, and prepared for eternal glory. They all give rise to, spring from, or serve to illustrate the sufferings of the Son of God. You cannot find a single doctrinal statement in the New Testament which does not carry you directly to the cross, or for the explanation of which you must not go to that cross. You cannot find a single motive, nor a single explanation, nor a single offer, nor a single warning, nor a single appeal, to which the cross of Christ does not give meaning and power—that is the radiating point of light and heat to the whole system. Blot out from the gospel the doctrine of Christ's vicarious atonement, and you rob it of all its vitality; and it remains to be seen what you have left, beyond the frigid influence of infidelity, or what effectiveness your teachings carry along with them to correct the evils of the human heart, to give

peace to the human conscience, or to make man like his God.

“It is evident, if what I have advanced is true, that the power of the gospel lies *in the facts themselves*, which it discloses. It is by bringing *them* into contact with the human mind that you secure the results of the gospel; and whatever you may do, however ingeniously you may argue, however earnestly you may labour, however impassioned may be your appeals; you argue, and labour, and appeal in vain, so long as the great facts of the gospel system are not brought to tell with power upon the conscience and the heart. There is such a thing as speculating *about* the gospel, taking up its principles as mere themes of philosophical investigation; approaching it and handling it as a mere theory, which passes sometimes under the name of preaching the gospel, which is, after all, nothing more than exhibiting one’s own philosophy; and which, placing that philosophy in the front ground before the human mind, conceals the great facts of the revelation of God; and is, therefore, not only without beneficial result, but prevents those facts from producing their designed effect, standing, as it does, between the mind and their perception.

“I do not mean, by this remark, to cast odium upon what is called the philosophy of Christianity,

nor to rebuke as wrong all inquiries into the mode of the truth's operation, and the best methods of presenting the facts of the gospel. Every minister of Jesus Christ must be a Christian philosopher, if he would be '*a workman, that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth;*' he must be one, if he would remove the obstacles which a false philosophy has interposed to the influence of the truth; he must be one, if he would work a way for the truth through the varied and almost endlessly diversified windings of the human bosom, and find for it a lodgement in the human mind; and he who cannot be one, is unfit for the office which he exercises.

“And this, what I call the philosophy of Christianity, presents a legitimate field for the exercise of the human mind. There may be diversities here in the *results* at which different minds may arrive; but so long as the facts themselves of the gospel are brought out to view in all their distinctness, the power of the gospel remains, since that power is found not in the philosophy of those facts, but in the facts themselves. When I speak of, and condemn speculations about the gospel, I refer to all attempts to philosophize *away* its facts, or to those laborious arguments which give the mind nothing but philosophy; which make the *rationale*, if I may so speak, the main thing, and truth second-

ary; which may teach men to reason but not to believe; which may show them how they ought to be convinced, but never convict them; how they ought to repent, but present them nothing in view of which to repent: in fine, which make philosophers, or rather sciologists in philosophy, sometimes; but Christians, never. Let a man philosophize as much as he pleases; but against two things let him be on his guard—philosophizing away the facts of the gospel, and bringing his philosophy with him into the pulpit. He may use it to guide him in his exhibition of truth; he may use it in giving shape to his argument, place to his exhortations, and time to his appeals; but let him never use it *as itself*, an instrument for the accomplishment of saving results. A minister of Christ may in his study be a philosopher always; in his pulpit, never.

“No man can be truly said to *preach* Christ, who is not himself personally interested in his theme. I know that the words of the gospel may be uttered—and the arguments of the gospel may be advanced—and the consciences of men may be plied with the claims and appeals of the gospel. It may be all done with eloquence of diction, and grace of utterance; it may disclose the workings of a powerful genius, and constrain men to do homage to the might of intellect; but there is no *preaching of the gospel*. The science of experience, and the language consecrated

to it, may be mastered; but the gospel will not be preached. No man can preach who does not himself perceive the glory of Christ, and know the preciousness of Christ. Spiritual knowledge, spiritual feeling, and the powerful impulse which is derived from principle alone, are essential requisites to a preacher. Without them there may be fire, but it will be false; there may be an unction, but it will be spurious. Under ministrations however clear, however powerful, as exhibitions of intellect, yet unbaptized with the spirit of Christ, not a cord will be touched, not a heart will be moved. Give a man what you please, in point of genius, learning, eloquence, he wants more to make him a preacher—he wants that genius enlightened, that learning directed, and those lips of eloquence touched by the spirit of his master. Let him but be gifted with a spiritual discernment, and the change is amazing. New treasures of every kind will be disclosed; floods of sublime emotion, fields of brilliant imagery, and super-human power of persuasiveness. It is not eloquence, in the proper sense of that term, that constitutes the rod of the ministry; it is the tone of their feeling, the holy unction of their utterance; and this is the result of the impressions of the gospel upon their own souls. This is, in fact, the ground-work of all excellence; the first, the chief element of all pastoral competency; and when we read this remark-

able resolution of the Apostles, '*We will give ourselves continually to prayer,*' we seem to have reached the secret of their soul prosperity, their preaching eminence, their wonderful success. They preached the gospel, because they felt the gospel. God was with them, as they were with God.

"Oh! if I am right in my supposition as to the requisites of a herald of the cross; if a man must possess the spirit of Christ in order to preach Christ; is there not room for the inquiry, whether we do indeed preach Christ? and if the spirit of our office is gone, no wonder that its results are absent also.

"The spirit of the ministry is a spirit of self-renunciation, '*We preach not ourselves.*' In the statement of this general principle, and in its truth, we shall all agree, while it is possible that through the deceitfulness of our hearts we may be blind to our constant contradiction of it. It is not only when our aim in our office is the promotion of private interest, that we do preach ourselves. We may pour our severest censures upon the man who would say, '*Put me into one of the priests' offices, that I may eat a piece of bread,*' or give vent to a burst of holy indignation against him who uses his office for the purposes of earthly emolument, while at the same time we may be involved in the same condemnation with himself.

"We may preach ourselves, when we are as far

removed as possible from the influence of mere pecuniary considerations. There are temptations of an intellectual kind, the dangers of which must be seen to be many and powerful by every man who knows any thing of his own heart. They exist in proportion to the greatness or splendor of endowments which God has bestowed upon him who exercises the ministerial office. '*An eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures,*' may be above the gratification which thousands and tens of thousands of silver and gold would bestow; and yet he may preach himself, by aiming at the applause of his listening auditory. It is always so with him who is more concerned about the impression he makes upon the minds of his hearers as to the character of his exhibitions of truth, than about the impression he makes upon their minds respecting Christ. Though a man may understand the gospel, he may conceal its glorious object behind the display of his own powers; and he may use that object, as it may serve to fix the attention of men more firmly and exclusively upon himself. He holds up the pole, but the brazen serpent is invisible; and so charms the ears with the sound of the silver trumpets, as to make the people forget the jubilee they are intended to proclaim. Such a man preaches himself, not Christ Jesus the Lord."

Little danger was there that a man holding such

sentiments as these would ever prostitute the pulpit to purposes of mere rhetorical display or intellectual entertainment. The cross of Christ being his theme, there was no imitation of that cardinal fault of a celebrated painter who, in a picture of the Lord's Supper, has made the gold and the silver vessels so large, magnificent and brilliant as to divert the eye of the spectator from the main subject of the piece. He had no ambition to select pearls and diamonds when plainer materials would serve his purpose better. His characteristics were clearness, precision and force. Convinced himself, he sought to convince others. Relying on God, he believed that the truth was capable of being so exhibited as to commend itself to every man's conscience. Studying that truth himself, and feeling its adaptation to his own intellect and heart, his presentations of truth always had the freshness of originality without the least suspicion of that ambition and affectation which often passes by that name. His preaching was argumentative and logical. Commencing with some obvious truth, which all would admit, he advanced step by step, carrying one conviction after another, by a process of demonstration which would admit of no escape till he reached that conclusion, in the application of which he poured out the fullness and fervor of his religious pathos. A distinguished civilian, skilled

in diplomacy, and an adept in letters, invited once by a friend, a parishioner of Dr. Mason, to hear him preach, sat in the corner of the pew, at first somewhat listless, then alert, and following the argument with intense interest, till his countenance betrayed the emotion which was working in his heart, exclaimed on leaving the church, "Well, I know not what you who are accustomed to this may think; as for myself, I never heard such preaching before. As Lord Peterborough said to Fenelon at Cambray, 'If I stay here longer, I shall become a Christian in spite of myself.'"

We can always judge of a minister's heart by his public prayers. He who exhibits no feeling in his addresses to God, and wakes to fervour only as he addresses his fellow-men, cannot have much of the vitality of religion. The devotional exercises of Dr. Mason, marked alike by dignity and fervour, correct expression and strong emotion, were proof in themselves that the object of his ministry was to preach not himself but Christ Jesus, and that the grand purpose of his heart was co-incident with that avowed by the great Apostle in these memorable words: "Whom we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus, whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me

mightily." A serious-minded, earnest man, who believed the truth, and loved the souls of his people, he could not be persuaded to any trivial topic, nor imitate the cruelty of the Roman emperor, who, in a time of famine, imported costly sands for his amphitheatres, instead of bread for his starving subjects.

A Presbyterian by birth, education and preference, Dr. Mason was too good and great a man to be a bigot. Many of his relatives and intimate friends were members of other communions. His brother-in-law is Bishop McCoskry, of Michigan. Kind and catholic, he was, nevertheless, decided, intelligent and consistent in his preferences for that church to which he was attached. No man was better acquainted with its history, polity and order; as no man, of his age, had greater weight in its counsels. Eventful has that period been, in which he was personally connected as a minister, with the Presbyterian church in the United States. Strong as was his desire to preserve the integrity of that body, which was dear to him by so many ancestral associations, when disruption was made inevitable by no act of his or those with whom he was associated, he did not hesitate for an instant to what body to give his adherence. From that adherence he never wavered, but lived and died in the belief that the right would one day be

vindicated, and that they who had suffered wrong would be honoured and blessed at the last. Though young in years, Dr. Mason, at that memorable crisis, was mature in judgment; and when Kent, Wood, Randall, and Meredith espoused and defended the cause of the church to which he was attached, there was no one more competent than he to aid their proceedings, none to whose advice they and his brethren paid so much of respectful deference. Frequently a member, for eight years he was the stated clerk of the General Assembly, by which means his acquaintance was extensive throughout the church, and he was made an object of general confidence and esteem.

In the judicatories of the church his manners were always retiring, and reserved; never obtrusive. He was willing that others should conduct the debate; seldom participating in it, save by some brief suggestion or inquiry, intended to give it direction, the wisdom and pertinency of which was sure afterwards to be vindicated. But when the matter in hand was becoming involved, and perplexity and trouble were likely to ensue, how often, like a pilot in a difficult passage, by the introduction of some resolution, or the suggestion of some amendment, did he contrive the very relief which was needed, covering the entire case, extricating the subject from all embarrassment, and leading the

minds of all to an issue of complete harmony. The records of our ecclesiastical bodies will prove that this eulogy on the soundness of his judgment is not exaggerated; and when he died, the general impression throughout the church was, that a standard-bearer had fallen.

The person of Dr. Mason, of full size, and good proportions, was the expression of manly vigour and dignity. Inheriting a sound constitution, he enjoyed, through life, more than ordinary health. He knew but few of those ailments to which his profession are liable, previous to that illness which terminated his life. Invited to the presidency of the Theological Seminary in this city, and to other pulpits in his denomination, we have seen how steadily and perseveringly he addicted himself to the studies and toils of one pulpit. In the year 1846, at the request of his own people, who generously provided their faithful friend and pastor with the means of relaxation, he passed several months in Europe, returning to his ordinary occupations with renewed vigor of body and mind, and fresh resources for instruction. Every thing appeared to promise a long life. One year before his death no one would have suspected that an insidious disease had already begun its secret ravages, by which his labours were soon to be closed. Returning from his annual visit to the

country, in August 1850, he gave signs of debility, which at first were regarded but as trifles soon to pass away, but which, continuing from day to day, at length excited the most serious apprehension. When it was first whispered about that Dr. Mason was in a state to warrant solicitude, he in the full prime of life, it was with difficulty that the rumour could be credited. Weeks and months passed by, and his friends, brethren and people were gladdened by his apparent recovery. He was intensely desirous, should God so will, to resume those occupations to which he had been so long and pleasantly devoted. Having sufficiently recovered for the purpose, in the last of December he prepared a sermon from the text, "I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days," the same which is now published as the first in the accompanying collection. Though no one who heard that sermon could fail to apply the utterance of its text to himself, yet, with his characteristic modesty, the preacher made not an allusion to his own case. Unable to endure the fatigue of standing, during its delivery, a chair had been arranged in the pulpit, seated in which, with a voice tremulous with emotion, he preached his last sermon. There was eloquence in the occasion itself; and the simple utterance of the text was enough to start the tear in the eye of those who heard it with

mingled gratitude and foreboding. Such was his last "New Year's Sermon," such his last entrance to his pulpit. It was soon apparent that he was gradually sinking under occult and insidious disease and that his work was finished. Deprived of the privilege of glorifying God in active duty, he was now called to the higher and harder testimony of passive endurance. Confined to his chamber he was not without hope and desire of recovery. Strongly did he desire to live; and who has juster views of the value and desirableness of life than a faithful Christian minister! How abrupt the change from the "midst of his days," from plans of study and action yet incomplete, to the silence of the sepulchre! How could he bear to say to his loving, trusting family, hanging about him, that he must leave them without a husband, father and head! For their sakes, rather than his own, he desired, if God should so be pleased, that he might be spared, even as king Hezekiah prayed because of the church and the country which he loved that he might live, even after the prophet had told him he should die. The conduct of Dr. Mason, during his long confinement, was characterised by that calmness and firmness which always belonged to him, but now more than usually softened by the filial resignation of a religious sufferer. More than the splendours of genius, more than the gifts of

eloquence are the simple words which reveal the peace and safety of the Christian believer in his last hours. "I have had a long season of trial," said he to a friend, "but I trust it has not been unprofitable. I have had many clear and delightful views of divine truth."

Moved even to tears, he said, on another occasion, "I have had the most glorious and elevating views, such as I never expected to enjoy in this world. It was in the watches of the night, and I feared to sleep, lest I should lose them. But a dark cloud has since intervened—less dark now than it has been. This, however, I can say at all times, Though he slay me, I will put my trust in him. I have no greater comfort than when, under a sense of utter unworthiness, I lie at the foot of the cross."

"A matter of unspeakable thankfulness, is it," said he, "that we are not left to find a place of safety when the hand of disease is upon us. I trust that my eternal interests are safe, and that in the future I have nothing to dread. I have had, in common with all Christians, sore spiritual conflicts; but I believe that the most useful of my labours have been in connection with these scenes of perplexity and trial. Trials, I am sure, were designed to teach us to live by faith."

The evening before his decease he was informed

that, in the judgment of his physicians, he could not survive many hours. He inquired on what facts his medical friends had based their opinion. He differed from them in judgment as to certain particulars. "However," added he, "it matters but little as to time. I am not now to begin and make my preparations. All is safe—all safe."

A friend at his side repeated the familiar words, "The Lord is my light and salvation, whom shall I fear." Taking the sentence from her lips, he completed it—"The Lord is the strength of my heart, of whom shall I be afraid." Again she said, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace,"—when he instantly finished the sentence with a decided emphasis—"whose mind is stayed on thee ; because he trusteth in thee."

In the evening he engaged in cheerful conversation ; with the utmost clearness and calmness of mind made certain dispositions of his estate, signed his will, and sat waiting for his great change to come. Early in the morning he summoned his children about him, and gave them his last counsels. Commending them in solemn prayer to the Father of Mercies, he told them that oftentimes, after preaching in the pulpit, he had retired to his study, and with inexpressible anxiety, had implored in their behalf the blessings of the everlasting covenant.

On the same occasion, addressing his only son, (fourteen years of age) he inquired, "Have you thought what you would wish to do in the world?" The reply of filial simplicity and affection was—"Father, I will do whatever you wish me." "It may not be as I wish," said he, "but if you are prepared for it, my son, my wish is that you may preach the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the greatest work, and the best work. But beware of becoming a minister, unless, by the grace of God, you are prepared for it."

The prayers of many have ascended to God in behalf of this orphan son, that he may inherit his father's gifts and graces, and that he may prolong and transmit the ancestral honours, with which he is enriched, in the ministry of our Lord.

His last day on earth has dawned, and his heart is beating feebler to its rest. "Have you doubts and fears?" whispered a friend. "Doubts! No. Faith is every thing. It is all bright and clear. Have faith." So gently faded his life into the vision of God and the Lamb. About twelve o'clock on Wednesday, 14th of May, seated in his chair, without a struggle, he breathed out his life into the hands of his Redeemer.

On the Friday following, his funeral was attended from the church in which he had officiated so many years. There needed to be no such

signs of mourning as those which draped the pulpit, now deprived of its faithful incumbent, to proclaim the sorrow of the occasion. A large concourse of people, with unfeigned grief in their hearts, pronounced his eulogy by testifying that his death was a public bereavement. There, in front of the pulpit, lay the calm remains of the Pastor, who had been brought to the house of God for the last time, to address his brethren, people and friends in speechless tenderness.

The dirge was sung, prayer was offered, some words of consolation were uttered, and devout men bore him to his burial. The early spring blossoms were opening and falling as he was laid in the sacred spot he had, a year before, prepared at Greenwood. The sun had gone down before the act of interment was finished; but we knew that it would rise again; and as we gazed, through our tears, upon the descending form with which were associated so many memories of friendship, love and religion, this was our only consolation, that he would live the life everlasting.

Through the generous regard cherished for his memory by his parishioners, a beautiful monument of white Italian marble, chaste and simple in design, but highly finished in its execution, has been erected on the spot where sleep his remains. On one side is the following inscription:

## MEMOIR OF THE AUTHOR.

ERECTED

BY THE BLEECKER STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

IN MEMORY OF

THEIR LATE PASTOR,

REV. ERSKINE MASON, D.D.

DIED 14 MAY, 1851,

ÆT. 46.

AN ELOQUENT MAN, AND MIGHTY IN THE SCRIPTURES,

IN DOCTRINE

SHOWING UNCORRUPTNESS, GRAVITY, SINCERITY,

SOUND SPEECH THAT COULD NOT BE CONDEMNED ;

A PATTEEN OF GOOD WORKS ;

*LOOKING*

FOR THAT BLESSED HOPE, THE GLORIOUS APPEARING OF THE GREAT

GOD, AND OUR SAVIOUR, JESUS CHRIST.

On the reverse side :

**DESCENDED**

FROM ANCESTORS ILLUSTRIOUS IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH,

**He was Himself****AN ORNAMENT**

TO EVERY DOMESTIC AND SOCIAL RELATION.

In the Spanish gallery of the Louvre at Paris, there hangs a celebrated picture by Murillo, founded on an old legend, which represents that a certain monk was

called to die, when engaged in writing his own biography. Grieved at the abrupt termination of his unfinished task, the fiction goes, that he sought and obtained permission to return to the earth to complete his work. Wonderful is the power with which the immortal artist has embodied the conception. There is the monk seated in his cell, intent on his solemn toil. It is not the ghastly face and form of the dead, but the conception of a man who has been dead, and who has returned etherialised and vivified through and through with the life and motives of Eternity.

That legendary fiction will have no reality with any. No one who goeth hence returns to finish the work of life. But there is intensity of motive enough in the sober truth that every man is actually engaged day by day in writing that autobiography, which neither time nor eternity will efface. It may be written in high places or in low, in public remembrance or in the honest heart of domestic affection, but we are writing fast, we are writing sure, we are writing for eternity. Happy is he who, through the grace of God assisting him, like the subject of this memoir, records such lessons of kindness, truth and wisdom, that when he is gone, he will be held in grateful remembrance; happier still to have one's name written in the

Lamb's Book of Life, that when every memorial and monument of his earthly history has perished, he may ascend with the Son of God, to Honour, Glory, and Immortality.