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THE REV. WALTER AUGUSTUS BROOKS, D.D.

BY THE REV. HENRY COLLIN MINTON, D.D., LL.D.

The Rev. Walter Augustus Brooks, D.D., who was for a number of years and until January, 1913, the Recording Secretary of the Executive Council of The Presbyterian Historical Society, departed this life January 12, last. The immediate cause of his death, which occurred in Philadelphia, was a surgical operation from which he never rallied. The funeral service was held in the church of which he had been the beloved pastor, and the interment was in the beautiful Riverside Cemetery on the banks of the Delaware, just south of Trenton.

Dr. Brooks was born in 1849, in Genesee County, New York. He was a child of the manse, being the son of the Rev. Asahel L. Brooks, who was a Presbyterian pastor in New York, Connecticut and Illinois. His mother was Sarah T. Warner, of Revolutionary family and of Mayflower stock.

Dr. Brooks was graduated from the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor in 1872, and from the Union Theological Seminary of New York in 1875. His first pastorate was his only one. He at once took charge of a new enterprise in the western section of Trenton, New Jersey, and the new church, with its young pastor, entered upon a happy and successful career. In 1880 he was married to the eldest daughter of the late Judge John T. Nixon, who, with their only child, a recent graduate of Princeton University, sur-

A HISTORICAL SERMON,
DELIVERED SUNDAY, OCTOBER 20, 1912, IN THE FIRST PRESBY-
TERIAN CHURCH, TRENTON, N. J., ON THE OCCASION
OF THE TWO HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY OF
ITS ORGANIZATION, BY THE PASTOR,
THE REV. HENRY COLLIN
MINTON, D.D., LL.D.

“Lord, Thou has been our dwelling place in all generations.”
Psalm 90: 1

This ancient psalm, ascribed from the earliest times to the authorship of Moses, is one of the sublimest compositions in all literature. In the loftiness of its conception, in the depth of its feeling, in the boldness and splendor of its imagery and in its suggestion of the immortality of man which waited for centuries for its fuller realization, this prayer of the early man of God is altogether preëminent and unique.

Although in strict form it is a prayer to God, its theme is that of thoughtful and devout reflection in all ages; the Eternal as the background of the transitory, the permanent as the basis of the passing. The children of men are as the mist of the morning; they are like grass which groweth up.

But the beginning and background of it all abides. “Before the mountains were brought forth or even Thou hast formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God.” Who that has ever looked upon the massive piles of the Sierras or of the Alps has not wondered as he gazed how those mighty boulders first found their seats, with what tremendous geologic upheavals and convulsions those grand old cliffs and peaks first took their solid shape and assumed their silent, regal sway? No wonder we speak of “the everlasting hills.” Lord Bacon called the sea “fit emblem of eternity.” But back in primitive chaos, before the seas had found their bed, or the mountains had emerged and lifted their hoary heads, was the everlasting, everliving God.

The scope of this ancient psalm is broad enough to embrace

the most contrasting interests of human life. The primitive saint, who was also a seer, had no narrow or restricted vision. Neither eternity nor time alone can claim the whole of man. Although the one overshadows and indeed includes the other, yet each has its own place and its necessary bearing on the other.

Religion is no more exclusively concerned with eternity, to the neglect of the things of time than it is concerned with time to the neglect of the things of eternity. The materialist who ignores eternity—wrong as he is—is scarcely farther from the truth than is the mystic who holds that time is only a delusion and a dream. The stars of the firmament abide in the midnight sky while the mists and clouds may come and go, but the coming and going of the clouds is as really a fact while it lasts as is the steady shining of the stars.

This psalm of Moses derives its sublimity from the fact that it takes in both worlds, it covers both poles of human life and interest. The light of the eternal reflects its celestial beams upon the lofty peaks of time, while the lowly routines and humble tasks of time find their real dignity and divinity in the faith-disclosing landscapes of eternity.

Only from this point of observation do we get the right angle or command a clear view of the two hundred years of this venerable and beloved church. It stands for the eternal among the changing incidents of time. Its very existence on this consecrated spot for half a dozen generations is a proof of the faith of God's people in the things that abide and change not.

It is not my purpose this morning to preach a historical sermon. Dr. Dixon, as former pastor, may take occasion this evening to contribute to the historical data of the congregation. Few churches in America are richer in their past than this. Like most institutions of early origin, both in church and state, in this country, it was founded in the strenuous times of the frontiersmen whose life was so occupied with doing the things that make history that they had little margin of leisure left for writing it. And yet, fortunately it is true that, more than in most churches of this age, the early records have

been correctly made and faithfully kept; though in the Revolutionary days following 1776 the chain dropped some links and some of the records were destroyed.

In the early days of this frontier settlement, on the eastern banks of the Delaware, some little time seems to have passed before a definite church organization was effected. It is a beautiful fact in the early life of this community that the congregation of St. Michael's, of the Protestant Episcopal Church, and this congregation worshiped together and for a long time, coming up even to the present day, there has been a very close and cordial relation between that venerable church and our own.

And even after the Presbyterian form of organization was taken, this church was one with the mother church at Ewing, which was then known as the First Presbyterian Church of Trenton. And at a later day it was for years associated under the same pastor with the still more venerable church at Lawrenceville, then known as the Church at Maidenhead. It was twenty-four years after the date of original organization, that is to say in 1736, that the first pastor, the Rev. David Cowell, D.D., was installed.

What changes have taken place since that early day! What a wealth of accumulated history has gone into the making of this church! How many volumes would be required to tell the unwritten story and to write the unrecorded chapters! And what a precious asset that past becomes! The roots of this church have gone deep and spread far out in soil that has been worked and matured and trod by generation after generation. With roots like these, storms may beat and winds may blow but, kept by the grace of a covenant-keeping God, his promise cannot fail. It is said that when the late Senator and Mrs. Stanford, of California, planned to found in memory of their only child, the great university at Palo Alto, in the Santa Clara Valley, they visited Harvard, and, after seeing the halls and libraries and museums at Cambridge, the Senator turned to President Eliot and asked, "How much did all this cost?" There are some things that time only can bring to pass. There are some treasures that cannot be measured by

dollars, that cannot be bought with coin or set down by the bookkeeper in the columns of the daybook or the ledger. This church with its long history, has a precious inheritance of the sacrifice and gifts and prayers of centuries of Christian fidelity and service.

Since this church has stood on this ground, how the face of the world has been changed! The map of Europe has been made over again. The charter of the church was issued by Provincial Governor Belcher in the name of George Second of England. The life of this church covers almost one ninth of the time that has elapsed since our Lord himself was upon the earth. The French Revolution was eighty years in the future. George Washington was born twenty years after this church was organized. No man yet had any conception of the magnitude of the new continent which was destined to be the arena for such unimaginable developments in human progress and civilization. The awakening of the sciences was yet to come. The primeval forest was undisturbed by the shriek of the locomotive. Steam was yet a sleeping giant. Electricity was only lightning in the clouds and the common-places of our day would have been miracles to theirs.

Colonial government was scarcely more than an experiment. There was as yet no such thing as a distinctive American life or spirit. The age of foundation-laying had hardly dawned. The aboriginal Indian had his unchallenged habitat in the surrounding wilderness, and the door of opportunity was only beginning to swing open for the development into a great new world of an unknown land—*terra incognita*—of virgin soil and waiting resources.

Not less has been the change that has come in the thought and customs of the community. Read the late Dr. Hall's history of this church and see how great these changes have been. Large bodies move slowly and gradual changes are not perceived except when long intervals separate the observations. Not that it is for us to discredit or disparage the fathers. There were giants in those days. It takes grit and grace, conviction and initiative to dig deep and lay foundations, to cut jungle and establish precedents that become the easily accepted cus-

toms and laws of those that follow. We pay a tribute to the stalwart faith and rugged life of those days and appreciate the hardship and heroism, the privations and perils that give a somber but splendid coloring to the pictures of those times.

But the world is growing better; indeed were it not so, their prayers were unanswered and their work were all for naught. Neither St. Michael's nor this church to-day would dare to challenge public opinion by proposing a lottery to raise funds for building a house of worship. About a hundred years ago, it is recorded that in providing entertainment for the Presbytery here and at another time at Maidenhead, items are charged for wine and spirits and rum, and it is a stretch of credulity as well as of charity to believe that all this was exclusively for sacramental purposes; certainly, in providing for the coming of Synod this week, we should raise a storm about our heads by making similar provision for the visiting brethren. In 1783 Dr. Cowell, a nephew of the first pastor, bequeathed to this congregation "my negro man, Adam," as one of the chattels of the congregation. To-day any church in this country would justly be regarded as belated and benighted which did not stand four-square to all the winds that blow, against lotteries and slavery and rum.

I cannot believe it wrong or improper to-day to remind ourselves that this venerable church has had a most honorable place in the social and civic life of this community, and even in the wider spheres of the State and of the nation. It stood like a rock in the very center of the storms of Revolutionary days. It had nearly reached the venerable age of three score years and ten when the Declaration of Independence was formulated in the neighboring town of Philadelphia. Its pastors were chaplains in the field and patriots everywhere. Tories were not unknown within the borders of the Jerseys, but Presbyterianism rung true to the cause of liberty. The manse of this church, which stood, I believe, on the present corner of Broad and Hanover Streets, was pillaged by the British soldiers, and some of the household goods were appropriated or destroyed while a price was put on the head of the minister.

The officers of this church were enlisted in the war and some of them bore high commissions and won splendid laurels on the field. The attendance at church for some years was very light, though the services were not at any time discontinued as they were for several years in St. Michael's. There are few churches on the continent more intimately or honorably connected with the stirring events of those trying days than this, which witnessed the fate-deciding battle of Trenton and saw the haughty Hessians put to confusion and defeat by the masterly strategy of General Washington.

It is a source of humble pride to-day to recall the distinguished men who, in church and State, found their religious home within the walls of this old church. Few of us realize how many of those whose names give luster to the annals of the past worshiped here. Generation after generation, these pews were occupied by men great in courts of justice and councils of State, in business enterprises and in educational work. Four of the ten installed pastors of this church have been moderators of the supreme judicatories of American Presbyterianism. Dr. Cowell was moderator of the Synod of Philadelphia in 1744, forty-five years before the General Assembly was formed, and Drs. Yeomans and Armstrong and the present pastor were moderators of the Assembly. It is worth remembering also that a son of this church was moderator of the General Assembly in 1891.

Dr. Cowell, whose body reposes in the church yard, was one of the founders of the College of New Jersey at Princeton, and for a season was acting president of the college, between the incumbency of President Aaron Burr and that of Jonathan Edwards. Dr. James Francis Armstrong was likewise one of the founders of Princeton Theological Seminary in 1812. That institution is just half as old as this church, having observed its centennial last May. The ministers and members of this church have had no small share in the work of founding and fostering and financing the educational institutions at Princeton, and the history of neither the College nor of the Seminary could be written without recognition of that fact. One of the greatest scholars that ever gave distinction

to the name of Princeton was a child of this congregation. From these pews there went forth a lad who was destined by the blessing of God to render conspicuous service in the defence of the faith—and to lead the forces of Christian scholarship against the nineteenth century assaults of rationalism and skepticism. I need not say that I refer to the late William Henry Green, D.D., LL.D., ex-moderator of the General Assembly and one of the acknowledged leaders of Hebrew scholarship in all the world.

While I must refrain from personal and particular mention, I am sure you will allow me to speak of the ten brief and happy years of my own pastorate, only that I may pay the tribute of our common love to the memory of the five faithful elders who have fallen asleep in these years.

I can never forget how, shortly after I came to Trenton, Dr. William Elmer, the beloved physician, repeatedly came with his carriage to take the new pastor to visit some of the aged and invalid shut-ins to whom it was perfectly evident that he was not more physician than friend. The genial and smiling session-clerk, Hugh Henderson Hamill, courtly of manner and princely of heart, always busy and yet never too busy to listen to the complaints and share the burdens of the suffering and the sorrowing. Edward Shippen McIlvaine, pure as gold and true as steel, with convictions not less clear and strong because he was quiet in holding them and modest in speaking them. Moore Dupuy, wonderful in public prayer and noble in unselfish spirit, whose whole life was a contribution to the great work in New York City of helping the needy and befriending the friendless. Oscar Woodworth, modest, diffident, faithful, generous and gentle. But again history repeats itself and, as for generations it has been, a worker falls, but the work has gone on, a builder lays down his trowel and his hammer, but the graceful building has continued to rise; so when these strong men of God were called to their reward other men faithful and true came in to receive the falling mantle and to carry on the age-long work.

Still, we should not forget that two hundred years of a church's life are quite enough either to mark the attainment

of a vigorous maturity or to show the feebleness of a decadent senility. The blight of old age, with its unmistakable symptoms of second childhood, gives scant call for congratulation. The past must not have had monopoly of faith and service and consecrated enthusiasm. That church has become a mausoleum whose life was all lived, whose service was all rendered, in the dead past. A church has outgrown its usefulness and outlived its tenure, if it cease to be faithful to the mission entrusted to it and to be responsive to the ceaseless call of human need.

There have been changes in the methods and measures of Christian work. Modified accents and shifted emphases without number have come in. New phrases fall from our lips and new watchwords and catchwords fill the air. Cowell and Kirkpatrick and Spencer and the Armstrongs would find many conditions to-day of which their liveliest imaginations never conceived. But new names sometimes only serve to disguise old things. Church union is in the air to-day but we are not yet much ahead of the days when old St. Michael's and this congregation could worship God in peace and harmony together. Changed social conditions put new emphasis on social service to-day, but those old patriot saints shouldered their muskets and knew service in the camp and in the field for the freedom of the people, and the safety of their families. We have ideas, by them undreamed of, concerning educational method and technique, but it is at least a debatable question whether we know our Bibles or sound doctrine any better than they.

But we do no dishonor to the past when we thank God that, without dispute, we hold a place far in advance of our forefathers. "They have labored and we have entered into their labors." We have seen visions our fathers never saw; we have heard voices our fathers never heard. Every advance in the world's true development is a new commentary upon the word of God; every new step forward is a fresh revelation in the unfolding of his eternal purpose.

The world is both larger and smaller than the world of 1712. To-day we read the Gospel in the light of illuminating

world-units. The atom is the convenient but invisible figment of the scientific imagination; and what the atom is to the material mass, the individual is to society. The insulated individual, sealed against his neighbor, is an absolute impossibility. Modern life is complicated and sensitive and many-sided, and just because it is so the individual is dependent and extremely susceptible to every social force of the time. Every man is neighbor to every other man, for no man liveth unto himself. With this larger and later view of social need and Christian service, the church of the twentieth century, while conserving all that is true of the past, must gird her loins, thanking God and taking courage. The world lies waiting at the church's door. Africa and the Orient and the American Occident are all new since 1712. If we have grown to greater things we face greater needs and are called to greater tasks.

The future was the solicitude of the founders of this church and if we are their worthy sons, while we keep our eyes set on the days that are to come, we will cherish the past as our pride and our joy. We, without them, would not have had our inheritance and "they without us would not have been made perfect." But the blessed identities endure. The church of 1912 stands on the same foundations as that of 1712. We read and cherish the same infallible word. We observe the same sacraments and honor the same ordinances and the same holy day. We sing the same old songs of praise and bow in humble prayer at the same mercy seat. We honor and exalt and love and adore the same Lord Christ, the man of Galilee, the crucified of Golgotha, the risen Lord, the ever reigning King, "the same yesterday and to-day and forever."

We are in a broad church, indeed, to-day. It embraces not only all races and nations of men. It covers not only all ages of earthly history. The grace of God has for its crowning triumph that it conquers the grave and takes away the sting of death. We are one with all the redeemed people of God on earth and in heaven. The fellowship of believers embraces the people of God in every age, from Adam and Abraham to the end of time, for in the presence of the ever-living

God there are none dead. The communion of saints is as wide-reaching as the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ our Lord, and so we join with the hosts above who have crossed the bar and with the hosts below who linger a little longer till their day's work is done and their sun falls into a cloudless and peaceful west, all crying out in grateful and adoring acclaim, "Blessing and honor and glory and power be unto him that sitteth on the throne and unto the Lamb forever and ever."