

*Mrs D. S. Taylor*

## Address

DELIVERED AT THE FUNERAL OF

ABRAHAM SCHUYLER NEILSON,

(Born Sept. 10, 1792, Died June 30, 1861.)

ELDER IN THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF

NEW-BRUNSWICK, N. J.

BY

THE PASTOR OF THE CHURCH.

JULY 2nd, 1861.

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Job

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## Address

BY

REV. HOWARD CROSBY, D. D.

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The religion of Christ does not make us Stoics. God loves the broken heart, for it promises to be the abode of truth, and God loves the tearful eye, for it is a token of dissatisfaction with this world of sin.

The man who can look upon death without emotion is not to be admired or envied. God sends death among us to stir up the depths of the soul. He desires us to feel the infliction and mourn the stroke. Only through weeping do we receive and understand the lesson of God's providence, and in this tenderness of the heart we recognize its impressibility. To make us know in the *heart* that life is short, that death is certain,—to teach us to withdraw our affections from a worldly absorption—to urge us to lay up enduring treasures in heaven—these are the ends of the visitation, which opens a grave at our feet. The coffin and the corpse have a voice louder and more searching than the voice of the living preacher. The spirit shudders as the screws fasten down the lid that hides

forever from our eyes the form so long loved, and the fall of the earth upon the narrow house adds a new pang to the struggling soul. Does God delight in human agony? Does the Framer of these bodies and the Father of these spirits take pleasure in seeing these earthly tabernacles laid waste and these spiritual occupants tormented? Why, oh why is the tomb and the parting? Why the crushing weight of the sad reminiscence? A luminous answer reaches and satisfies the soul, when we hear of sin and its ravages on this earth, of heaven and its joys and purity, of God's desire to save us from the pollution of sin in order to enjoy the purity of heaven. We then feel that a violent remedy was necessary for the violent disease, that the best surgeon is he who cuts boldly into the gangrened limb, that a loving father can use the rod, that affliction is a mercy. While we weep as the heart bleeds, we can through the pain acknowledge the necessity and the love. Earth is constantly weaving its meshes around us, and were it not for these heavenly interventions, we should become hopeless victims of its coldness and depravity. These are the signal guns from heaven's battlements, that waken us from deceitful dreams, reveal to us our true position of danger and summon us to our only fortress, our God and Saviour. Such then, is death to us who witness its stroke. It is thus most true, that it is the survivor who dies—it is the living who feel the wound and cry for help.

But what is death to the dying Christian? Here a very different prospect opens upon our view. To him,

whose faith is fixed upon an Almighty Redeemer, death comes as a soft-voiced angel from the throne of God. It whispers to the saint "Thy trials now are over—thy work on earth is done—I have come to lead thee out from the land of shadows to the brightness of thy father's kingdom—there hath thy Saviour, Jesus, whom thou knowest, prepared for thee a palace, a crown and a throne. Start not at the thought, for it is his love and mercy which hath done this and which hath sent me. Thy sins cannot hinder him, for he hath pardoned them all—thy weakness cannot hinder him, for he giveth thee his strength—thy worthlessness cannot hinder him, for he clotheth thee in his own righteous merit. Come, then, thou saint of the Lord, whose name is written in heaven, come, enter into thy glorious, thine eternal home." Thus comes death to the Christian and his soul rises up at the divine message. The body, loth to part company from the spirit, may struggle awhile, but the momentary pain over, the released soul is enveloped in the welcome that all heaven sends forth to greet it. Truly "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints."

The cry of Jesus, when his sacrifice for sin was completed upon the cross, "It is finished" is now echoed by the soul that feels that redeeming work accomplished in itself. There, in the sinless, sorrowless world the child of grace enjoys the society of the worthies who have gone before. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,—Samuel, David and Elijah,—Peter, John and Paul,—Luther, Melancthon and Zwingle,—Wilberforce, Haldane and Monod—and a myriad others who have

lived on earth a life of faith receive into their pure companionship their brother who has reached them from the vallies of this world. And Jesus, the Shepherd, stands in the midst of his own flock. The glimpse given us on the Mount of Transfiguration is now realized, and face to face the Saviour and the saved are brought into eternal converse. Once again to earth will the redeemed in glory come, when that Jesus will himself come at the last great day. Then he will come "with *all* his saints." "Them which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him," and accompanying the voice of the archangel, will sound aloud the shouts of triumph from these ransomed children of the Lord.

Such is death to the Christian. And is there not in this view of death a power to assuage our grief and plant the smile of thankful, hopeful joy among our tears? And such, my friends, is the death which brings us together to-day in this house of God. A Christian has gone to his rest and his reward. His body lies before us, to be by us consigned to the grave to await its resurrection. We look down upon this body and weep—we look up to the exultant spirit and rejoice.

Abraham Schuyler Neilson, (youngest son of Col. John Neilson, an officer of the Revolutionary army,) was born in this city, in the very room wherein he died, in September, 1792. Last Sunday evening, when the holy exercises of the day were closing, he left the body, which had been his tabernacle for nearly 69 years to enjoy the everlasting Sabbath of the skies.

The illness which terminated fatally was first noticed by him about six months ago, but it was not until the 31st of last March that he was constrained to absent himself from his place in church. He then thought that his disease was Rheumatism, but a few weeks thereafter its true and fatal character was developed. His disease was one that is always accompanied by much bodily suffering and which has a natural tendency to depress the spirits. Mr. Neilson experienced both these effects of his complaint, but it is the satisfaction of our hearts to know that his soul rose triumphant above both, as his Saviour supported him in the hours of his trial. Mr. Neilson became a member of this church by profession of faith in the year 1844, and for 17 years he exhibited the graces of a renewed soul. In the year 1845 he was made an Elder of this church, and this responsible office he filled with characteristic faithfulness and efficiency.

In this city where every child knew him to love him—in this church where his example and his efforts were felt and prized for a score of years,—why need I describe the character of this saint? From my childhood it was my privilege to know him, and my testimony will be confirmed by all, when I speak of his gentleness, his modesty, his kindness and his liberality. His manner was winning toward all. Although possessed of a sound mind and excellent judgment, he patiently listened to the opinions of others and deferred to their wishes. He was eminently a man of peace. No one ever heard him utter a harsh or uncourteous word. He hid his own high merits

behind his disinterestedness. He always thought of others and lost sight of himself in seeking their welfare. His loving heart was ever overflowing, and gave its influence to all the actions of his life. In his family he was a devoted husband and father, and to his fellow-citizens he was the sympathizing counsellor, the affectionate friend, the Christian gentleman. The poor found in him a helper, the sick and afflicted a comforter, and the church a judicious and exemplary officer. Our loss is great. We can scarcely realize that we shall not see his noble form again enter yon pew, where he was ever found at the time of Divine Service—and that we shall never again on this side the grave see that sweet smile, with which he always recognized a friendly salutation. A father in Israel has fallen! Well may we mourn, for no one among us had won a more hearty confidence, a more profound respect, a more intense affection. But we mourn not as those without hope. Our departed father leaves behind him the memory of a bright example of Christian virtue, which will be a witness for Christ and his gospel to all this generation who loved him. And we know that our loss is his gain. We know that Jesus has taken him to himself. On last Sunday week, I had just prayed by his bedside with him, when he clasped my hand with great fervour and exclaimed "Precious truths—precious truths," referring to Christ's presence and salvation, which had been the burden of the prayer. On Thursday last, when President Frelinghuysen and Dr. Davidson called upon him, he answered their inquiries regarding his

trust in Christ with the firm words "Not a doubt—not a doubt!" His Saviour had made the future clear and glorious to his eye of faith, and, without the character of an enthusiast, he calmly testified to the all-sufficient support of his God and Redeemer. In this enlightened trust, upon the day before his death, he exclaimed in a distinct voice, (almost the last words he used) "My dear blessed Lord and Saviour, come and take me to thyself, to be with thee through all eternity." Oh! is not this a triumph worth a thousand worlds! To meet death, the last enemy, as a friend—a welcome messenger of love! To stand upon the banks of the swollen Jordan and exclaim, as the foot is raised for the march, "not a doubt—not a doubt!" Oh! my Christian friends, let us follow our beloved father and brother, as he followed Christ—Let us imitate his meekness, his modesty, his generous affection and his godly consistency. Such a life is given to encourage us—such a death to chide us.

And to you, who gather in love and respect unfeigned around this coffin, without appreciating the great principle of Christian faith which moved the life whose end you mourn—to you let this cold clay speak with an eloquence more potent than words. *Your* grave is before you—*your* last hour is at hand, and the Saviour, who gave peace and fullness of hope to this dying saint, is ready to be *your* Saviour too. To any announcement of this Saviour's readiness to save you and to give you an inheritance with them that are sanctified, this mouth now stiff in death would cry, if it could, "precious truths—precious truths,"

and as I urge you to flee from sin and ruin and follow his Saviour to his heavenly home, I think I can hear his spirit in advance upon the other bank shouting in confirmation of my message "not a doubt—not a doubt."

Let us, with these lessons inscribed upon our souls, my friends, carry the body of our friend and father to its burial, sinning not, nor charging God foolishly, but saying in submission and in faith, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord."