



BY J. A. HALL.

HUNTINGDON, PA., THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 1852.

VOL. 17, NO. 47.

A SERMON
SUGGESTED BY THE DEATH OF WEBSTER,
DELIVERED BY THE

REV. CHARLES WADSWORTH,
In the Arch Street Presbyterian
Church,

ON SUNDAY EVENING, OCT. 31ST.
[Published by Request.]

"THERE IS A TIME TO DIE."
ECCLESIASTES, III. 12.

You will have already anticipated our reasons for the selection of our text. He that would "rightly divide the Word of Truth," will seek in the volume of Revelations parallelisms to the present peculiar utterances of creation and providence.—Indeed, God's written and unwritten Revelations are never to be read separately, neither can be understood rightly alone—mutually they confirm and illustrate one another. Now, the utterance of our text is just now as well the peculiar utterance of God's special providence.

Since I last stood in this sanctuary that providence has rendered us a nation of mourners—a great light has been extinguished—a mighty mind has been called away. The great statesman and orator of our land and generation has passed in solemn glory to his grave—and the nation mourns as in sackcloth over the noblest and first born of her sons. And it were a mutilation of God's solemn oracles were we to pass such a providence by without solemn consideration. Do not mistake us though—it is with the simpler and more personal, and not the wider and sublimer lessons of this death we are just now to concern ourselves. We are not here in this holy place to utter words of praise of him whose eloquent tongue has failed—whose mighty intellect has passed away forever. Indeed, Eulogy has mistaken her province and her powers when she takes for her theme the name of the departed. His loftiest eulogy is in that profound regret which the sad tidings of his death have caused throughout the length and breadth of the land. Nor are we here the more to advert to this death in its aspect on the political prospects and interests of our country. Such discussion were unsuited alike to our province and our powers. Politicians come not to the pulpit for instruction in statesmanship—and the religious teacher has a nobler occupation than any lectureship on the principles of governments and constitutions. We are here to contemplate death in its teachings to ourselves. For us, higher than all political bearings, has this providence a personal and pressing significance. God hath stricken him in all the glory of his eloquence and intellect—not merely that his grave should be to us a nation's Mecca shrine—decked with our garlands and wet with our tears—but that a voice of earnest exhortation should come up from its depths in the mighty and resistless eloquence of death. He died to warn us—he died to preach solemnly unto us of the mortal and immortality. He died to make proclamation for our God of the insignificance of the glories of time, and the boundless splendors of eternity. He died to send unto every soul, more mightily than in all the pomp of his matchless living eloquence, a demonstration of the vanity of the things that are around us, and the magnificence of the realities that rise just before us. He died to cry startlingly in our every ear words a thousand times uttered, but never methinks before more eloquent in their touching and impressive sadness—"There is a time to die!"—"There is a time to die!"

I. This simply is our text then. Let us ponder it—desultorily and briefly—"There is a time to die!" If you will examine the context carefully, we think you will experience great wonder. The royal preacher is discoursing on the fitness of special times for special transactions; and the wonderful thing about it is, that, of all the illustrations he adduces, our text should be at once the most apparently truthful, and the least considered. Who questions either in his credenda or in his practice that "there is a time to speak?"—"and a time to build?"—"a time to laugh?"—"and a time to dance?" All this we believe—all this we act as if we believed—and yet who of us all acts as if he believed the truth of the more apparent and appalling utterance—"There is a time to die?" I say the most apparently truthful. O, what need of preaching on such a point? It seems the one great utterance of universal nature. The idling leaf—the fading flower—the setting sun—the revolving year—the tolling bell—the open grave—these, then, are the syllables wherein God utters his great oracles. And it is as if the great anthem of nature were attuned in requiem, and the entire universe took up the wild utterance and cried in the hearing of the great human audience—ever and only—"There is a time to die!" And the secret of our strange insensibility to a truth so loudly uttered, lies, perhaps even deeper than our unwillingness to dwell upon it. It arises from the instinctive feeling of the human heart, that death unto our race is

die! Of man primitive and unfallen our text had not been true. Death is not the natural issue of life's long processes—it is their interruption! Death is an appointment! a dread infliction! a tremendous curse! The body, with its bright eye and noble brow, was not made to lie down with the feeding worm in the uplying grave. The soul, with its strong clings to life's cherished things, was not made to be driven forth from its shattered tenement a disrobed and disembodied wanderer to eternity! Death is not the natural transition of a soul in its ascent to immortality. It is the dread result of sin—it is the direful curse of God—it is the fruit of that forbidden tree which man dared to touch. "A time to die!" And what is death! I said it was not the natural issue of life's long processes; and herein lies its terribleness. The prophet's exodus to glory with whirlwind and fire was not terrible; but death is terrible—God meant it to be terrible. It is the severance of tender ties—it is the hushing of beloved accents—it is the mighty stop on all life's big and busy energies—it is the awful shadow on the bright eye—it is the wild farewell on the beloved lip—it is the appalling loneliness in the deserted home and the broken heart—it is the immense pang wherewith the heartstrings break—it is the earthquake shaking wildly to the dust the clay dwelling—it is the giant spring of the immortal guest from its shattered house the untravelled realms that spread through eternity. Death! Death! Alas, great monster! It breaks the heart—it desolates the home—it makes the child motherless—it makes the parent childless—it hushes forever the eloquent tongue, and quenches the earthly light of the mighty intellect. Yea, it tears the world away—it ends protection—it casts the beloved form to the uplying grave—it summons the undying soul to the pomps of the judgement. And it is unnatural—it is terrible—to die!

II. "A time to die!"—A set time—An appointed time—to every one of us appointed—we do not know it—but God knows it. In his awful book it is written that in such a year, in such a month, on such a day, in an hour—you—you—that man—that maiden—that child—you—you—shall die! And escape is impossible. As well might you stop yonder sun, or roll back the tides of a resistless ocean. We are prisoners awaiting the order for execution. Since we came to this house an hour of the reprieve is wasted. Since the sun arose a day nearer hath come the last agony. You may be on the very verge of death. A thousand human beings are dying this moment.—Every breath you breathe is a human death knell. This sky is the canopy of a great death chamber. This earth is a cavernous and mighty sepulchre. And our times are appointed—our days are numbered! For a set time and an appointed, is—"The time to die!"

III. "There is a time to die!" For whom? Oh, for all of us—for you to die, and for me. Difficult I know it is to realize this—most difficult to impress it on the living conscience. I can believe that others are mortal. I can believe that you are mortal. I can believe that the dearest ones on earth will lie cold, and shrouded, and coffined in the grave. But, alas, I can scarcely bring it home to my own heart that death will come to me—that that hand will soon be pulseless—this voice soon be hushed forever—this heart beat no more—this forehead be pressed down by the coffin lid and the cold, dark earth. But yet sure as God liveth, it comes—death comes—to us all! Youth, beloved youth, you will die ere the Spring brightens. Aged man—you whose hoary head is a crown of glory in our midst—a few more days, and those gray locks will be put away from that forehead for the mourners to look upon.—Dear child, you will lie in a little coffin, cold, senseless, silent as the dead lie.—Man—man in your noble stature and unbent strength—that flashing eye will fade—that mighty heart will break. Oh, I see it!—A darkened chamber—friends gathering silently and sadly—beloved forms pressing to the beds—a pale face—a convulsed frame work. Oh, I hear it—the wild farewell—the breath drawn gaspingly—the broken-hearted sobbing of the mother, of husband, of wife, of child. Oh, I see it!—The shroud—the coffin—the bier—the funeral train—the open grave! But whose? do you ask—whose? alas, yours!—and yours!—and yours. Oh, my God! what, what is life! A cloud, a vapor, a dream that vanisheth—a tale that is told—a walk blindfold amid open graves and on the brink of great precipices. Think of it—oh, think of it—"An appointed time to die!" In yonder prison there lies a man appointed to execution. All appeals for executive clemency have been vain. On such a day, in such a month, he dies. Oh, if he could come and stand in this place, how he would preach to you. How think ye time seems to him. How terrible these morning and evening bells that measure his being! How awful the slow movement of sunbeams along the dungeon walls! How wild each hourly stroke on the great time keeper. How every

that creeps through that gloomy cell—seems the footfall, the whisper, the shadow of that dread thing, Death! And yet is he nearer to death surely than we? Why where is Death—away yonder? Nay, sirs, he is here—here—sitting in these seats—walking through these aisles—his shadow falls between speaker and hearer.—Death is here! Where is eternity—years away?—Nay, here—just behind the curtain. Hark! this little knock sounds through—death and in eternity are here. We sometimes picture life as a great path, leading to a precipice. But this is not true; it is a narrow path, right along a precipice! The verge crumbles now! The awful abyss yawns at your feet just now! Oh my God! write it on our hearts—send from the grave of the glorious dead a voice to bring the mighty truth in thunder on our slumbering souls—"There is a time to die! There is a time to die!"

IV. "A time to die!"—A fitting time—An appropriate time. And here let me turn a moment from these simple and personal moralities to consider this truth in regard to the departed great man whom our land mourns. At first thought it may be we question the wisdom of this dispensation. Admitting that as an evolution of Divine providence every man dies at the very time when, all things considered, it is best that he should die—yet here, at least, we feel the heart rising up the cry—that surely this was no fitting time for the burial of our great statesman.

We have seen one mighty man, and another mighty man taken from us; and now the very last of our mighty men, and the noblest and mightiest of them all, has fallen away from the midst of us. And who is to fill their places—where find we champions of like girth and stature to stand forth for our land in the hours of her sure coming trials. Alas, alas! the prophet's mantle falls on no fellow of prophecy—and our cry in despondency and fear is—"My Father, my Father—the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof." Nor is this an unfounded despondency. Great statesmen are the bulwarks of free nations; and a nation that knows as little as we how to value and to repay the gifts and the consecration of great statesmanship, deserves never again from our God such gifts and such consecration.—Nay more than this—it has been observed in all time that when Providence is about to work vengeance on any people, the infliction is begun in taking away from her places of rule her ablest men: and then, of wise counsels, public affairs fall into confusion and result in disaster. Nor is this the result of observation only—it is the express oracle of Revelation as well—for thus saith Jehovah, "Behold the Lord, the Lord of Hosts doth take away the mighty men, and the men of war, the judge, and the prophet and the prudent, and the ancient, the captain of fifty, and the honorable man, and the counsellor, and the cunning artificer, and the eloquent orator. And following fast on this removal of her bulwarks comes the curse impotent governors and foolish counsellors, and ruthless anarchy." For the oracle adds—"I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them; and the people shall be oppressed every one by another, and every one by his neighbor, the child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient, and the base against the honorable."

Alas, alas! my hearers, when we look forth on the stormy seas, over which in tremendous national progress we are rushing with such startling and terrible velocity, and know what seamanship is needed, we look up from this great shadow of death, with hands clasped in despondency, crying in the track of the ascending chariot—"My Father—my Father." And yet, mourning as we do for our great loss, we mourn not as those without hope. Though the Moses whose rod was for the dividing of the sea hath gone up to Pisgah, yet blessed be God, His ark is yet in our midst for the rolling back of the Jordan. Our trust in the Lord who made heaven and earth, that as an eagle beareth her young, we shall be borne still upward and onward on the wings of His all-sustaining providence. And with this hope ever in regard of our land, we can see how, for her noblest champion, the present was—"The time to die." He died as a candidate for our great national office, in the hour of our great national election—and methinks the glorious shadow of his death falling on the nation that is mingling in the strife—and the smaller men that await its great issue—will be subduing and sanctifying. He died, too, when his greatest work was accomplished, and the fretted chord of our national brotherhood had grown strong again by the twining of his self-sacrificing and heroic consecration. And surely, in the shadow of such a death, this saved nation will rise up in its strength, and trample into dust that foul and frenzied fanaticism that would sever again with its reptile tooth a cord strengthened by the very heart strings of those mighty men, who, together, that it might be immortal, have

Ay, it is well that the funeral train of a giant is borne through a weeping land, with its colossal shadow and its overwhelming eloquence, in an hour like this.—But be this as it may, sure we are that in regard to the great statesman himself—so far as the full measure of his earthly glory was concerned—the hour of his summons to the immortal was—"The time to die!"

If such a man must die at all, let him die as he did. We thank God on his behalf, that the tumult of the coming conflict will fall only on his grave. Had he passed through that election a living man, yet a defeated man, then upon the depths of that mighty heart the bitter sense of a land's ungratefulness would have fallen as a great shadow. Had he passed through it in triumph to the high place of the nation, it could have added nothing to his honor; and his tomb will be more glorious in all future time, that official distinction dared not mar with its tinsel the everlasting sculptures of his own great fame. Ah, the only fitting procession of such a man, through these paltry feuds of partisanship, was the bier borne so gloriously to his majestic grave. He died, moreover, as he wished to die—gazing on a scene his own devotion had helped to realize, and his eloquence to paint.

"Gazing not on the broken and dishonored fragments of a once glorious Union—on States discovered, discordant, belligerent—on a land rent with civil feuds, and drenched, it may be, in fraternal blood—but beholding with their last feeble and lingering glance, rather the gorgeous ensign of a republic known and honored throughout the earth—still full high advanced—its arms and trophies streaming in all their original lustre—not a single star obscured—bearing as its motto every where, spread all over in characters of living light—blazing on all its ample folds, as they float over the sea and over the land, and on every wind under the whole heavens—that sentiment dear unto every American heart—Liberty and Union—now and forever—one and inseparable."

Ah, me, what hath earthly life to offer for a death like this! What are the poor lustres that brighten for a short time the abodes of official placement—to the great light that shall abide serene and forever on his glorious grave! Verily, our heavenly Father dealt tenderly with his mighty man-child—for, it was—"His time to die!"

V. But let us pass from all this again to the plying our simple and personal moralities. Unto us all, well the fitting time, to die, is, when God's great purposes shall be the answered by our putting off the mortal; and this only known to God—we know it not, nor can know it. What can happen to us, at any time, may happen to us now. Death may come to us in manhood—it may come to us in childhood—it may come to us in bright and happy youth; and as we know not what is the appointed time, the appropriate time should be absolutely always.

Oh for wisdom on this point like children of this world! You depart on a journey. You say to your servant, on such a week I shall return. And how that servant watches—to every bellring, and every roll of wheels. Your house is kept ready—all your usual comforts prepared—your servant expects you! So shall it be with Death! Watch! for you know not its hour. A constant expectancy is the only proper state—

"Leaves have their time to fall,"
And flowers to wither at the north wind's breath,
And stars to set—But all,

Thou hast all seasons for thine own, oh Death!
Death's, time—"The time to die!"—is
—when? Now! And we should never be found in places unsuited to his coming. And, alas! tell me how Death would look in at his skeleton and ghastly terrors sitting in the dress circle of a theatre!—mingling with the gay dressed dancers of a ball-room!

Two professing Christians stood by the door of a fashionable theatre, when one of them proposed to go in and witness the appearance of a celebrated actor. The other refused. The friend urged; but his resolute refusal was in these reasonable words: "Suppose I should go in there, be called away to eternity, and coming up to the gate of Heaven, it should be asked, 'whence come you, my brother?' oh, I should be ashamed to answer."

Go no where were you would not dare to die! That is the rule. It is well enough to die in life's common business. In the dark day of Connecticut, in 1780, the people all thought the day of judgement had come. The House of Representative in Hartford adjourned. The Council proposed to adjourn also; but Col. Davenport objected. Said he—"Mr. Speaker, the day of judgement is either coming or it is not. If it be not, then there is no need of our being alarmed. If it be coming, I for one choose to be found doing my duty."

He was a wise old Puritan. I had as lief die in a workshop or counting-room, or a social circle, as in a prayer-room or a pulpit. But then it must be a zodly work-

shop—an honest counting-room—a social circle not gathered in a dancing parlor.

The brother of the great statesman we mourn fell dead in a crowded court-room, in the midst of an important trial which he stood up to advocate. And yet, written, in the midst of a scene so exciting, they found on the desk he had just quitted a prayer, written in a spirit of humility, and fervent piety, and devotion to his God, perhaps never excelled. And such a death was as glorious as Moses' on the heights of Pisgah, in the great presence of God.—Oh go no where unprepared to die! Oh, go no where, where death would appal you! This, this is the law of true wisdom. God, send the lesson into every heart from the voiceless tongue of one once so matchlessly eloquent—"There is a time to die!"

VI. "There is a time to die!"—"A time," i. e. "one time," i. e. "only one time." We can die but once, and we ought to die well—nobly—gloriously. It is the end of all life's great enterprises and activities, and they ought to end majestically. In all other matters mistakes may be rectified—an unsuccessful experiment may be repeated—a mal-adjusted enterprise remedied; but here mistakes are remediless. The whole of time! the whole of eternity! heaven! hell! the soul! all! all staked upon one single chance of the terrific game! If we could die twice, mistakes might be rectified. The unbeliever, the sceptic, the scoffer, might test his principles in a dying strife, and if they failed him, come back and change them.—But with only one time to die, we ought to die well—nobly—gloriously. And who dies well? Brethren, learn we here a lesson from the deathbed of the departed. I am not here to eulogize the character of the dead. To say that he had not great faults, were to say that he was not human. But to say that the blessed Bible was the most familiar book of his scholarship, and that the breath of prayer was his daily sacrifice—and that his last words were of a trust in a crucified Redeemer—to say this, if we could say no more, were to fling a moral glory round this great man's death, in the light of which the mined and paraded scepticism of the pigmy and emaculated statesmanship he has left behind, seems as a reptile in the golden flush of the day-spring.

But be our opinion of his religious character what it may, we would have you remark here a great fact—that of enquiries about his dying moments, this has been on all hands the most earnest—men making no pretence to religion, enquiring first of all if he died as a christian. Public journals, filled daily with stale ribaldry upon religion, parade it—in italics and capitals—as the most important point in the sad record:—"That his last words to his last breath was spent in prayer for forgiveness through Christ Jesus, and in the utterance of an assured reliance on the staff and rod of the Great Shepherd! And what learn you from all this? Why, that, spite of the world's neglect of religion—yes, spite of the world's scorn of religion—there yet exists in every man's heart a consciousness that true religion can alone dispel the gloom of the grave, and prepare the soul for its upspring to immortality.

Ah, no man dies well, save overshadowed by the Divine wings and resting on the great sacrifice of the Redeemer. And if our great statesman died well, it was not because he reposed amid his beautiful home, watched by trustful eyes and loving hearts. It was not that he died in the full possession of the powers of his mighty intellect, and the glory of his great, majestic patience. It was not that he died in the loftiest height of his great fame, amid the roused pulses in the heart of a great nation beating as the heart of one man, in prayer for his deliverance. No, sirs—no, sirs. It was only because he walked through the valley of deep shadows leaning on the Shepherd, "that rod—that staff"—the comforting him. Oh, that God would send it back eloquently from those seated lips—"A time—one time—only one time to die!"

VII. "A time to die!" i. e. "A time only to die"—do nothing else but to die!—A time not to make preparation for the monster, but to meet him! When the summons comes, there is no advantage for preparation. Alas! if there be one madness mightier than another, it is the procrastination to a dying hour of the soul's life work. The gathering unto the sad hours of a sick chamber, and the pressing upon a poor, convulsed framework, and a spirit weakened and tempest tost, all the momentous interests that take hold on eternity. Alas, religion is not a spasmodic feeling; a tear in a dying eye; a prayer on a dying lip. No sirs, no sirs. Religion is a journey!—who ever heard of a man starting forth on a journey when death struck! Religion is a warfare!—who ever read of a dying warrior bracing on mail over a winding sheet in a nation's champaign! Religion is a race course!—who ever heard of a dying man leaping from his death chamber to compete with strong men for a glorious chaplet! No, no, believe me, "the time to die" is no time

for preparation. The impenitent death bed is a good place for sorrow—it will convict, it will arouse, it will alarm; it will fill the eyes with tears, the lips with prayer, the heart with terrible agony; but terror is not love; terror is not trust in God; terror is not saving faith in Christ! Oh, believe me, believe me, ye will want an attained religion in the dying hour. The chamber will be dark; ye will want the burning light—the lip will be parched; ye will want the living water—the tempest in the sea will be dashing the poor bark into shipwreck; ye will want the Almighty Master to walk the billows and to still the storms.

Oh, speak to us, our Father in heaven, in the last utterance of the dying; tell us how "That Rod, That Rod,"—"That Staff, That Staff," are the only support of the death struck—"That is what they want—that is what they want."

Oh tell us, by all the wandering thoughts and wild agonies of the dying strife; tell us, when death struck, man can prepare well for death; tell us if the last sickness be not ever and only "a time to die!"

"There is a time to die." Oh that God would give me power to plead with you all earnestly in behalf of a truth like this. If there be a time to "speak," we get ready for it; if there be a time to "build," we get ready for it; if there be a time even to "dance," alas, some of us get ready for it. And why, oh why, in respect of the mightiest only of all these interests, should we be so regardless?—Beloved Christian disciples let me plead with you. We, even we, are not ready to die—God knows we are not. There are beautiful and blessed things in heaven—crowns, that we are scarcely fitted to wear; thrones, that we are scarcely fitted to ascend; social circles, that we are scarcely fitted to enter; hallelujahs, that we are scarcely fitted to sing. Are we doing our duty to ourselves? What say our family altars—our closets—our social prayer circles?—What record is there written in the great book of God? Oh, God hath placed us in this world to win great spoil for eternity. From the sands by the stream of time ye can gather brighter treasure than they dig from the golden streams of the south. Oh foolish heart! To slumber thus when the treasure is washed away and the dark night cometh! Yes, and more. Are we doing our duty to others? Fathers, mothers, Sunday school teachers, Christian men, in the midst of a dying world, is your great work accomplished? Are ye ready to part with all below and go home to glory! And yet those beloved ones are dying creatures. They may die suddenly—they must die soon. Live with them then as with the dying. Go get some great artist to paint those dear forms stretched upon a death bed—those beloved features convulsed in the death agony; and hang the picture in your home circle, and right above your class in the Sunday school, and it shall be unto you as a preaching spirit in all the resistless eloquence of love and death, crying earnestly and ever, "There is a time to die!"—"There is a time to die!"

"There is a time to die!" Oh, my impenitent hearer, where, where is your heart, your conscience—the wisdom and wifeness of your immortal mind—that ye will not be roused to the consideration of a truth so terrible. That dying hour will come.—You have no time, you say, to become religious: "have me excused," you say, "go thy way for this time: oh do not talk about death: do not uncover the grave: let me enjoy life while it lasts; I cannot attend to your call now." But, beloved, death will be attended to—he will not have you excused. The mighty and the noble die. Oh, speak from the dust, thou departed, and tell us if there be any power in earthly love, in earthly glory, in the tearful watchings of professional sagacity, in the nightly cryings of a whole land, pleading earnestly to save thee—if there be any power in them all to turn back death from his awful pathway. Nay, sirs, death will not have you excused—you cannot put him off—he comes but once—he never calls again. Yes, and he is coming; his hour is near; the fever which heralds him may be already flashing in the eye, bounding in the bosom. "The time to die" is near. You will soon make your last bargain, finish your last earthly business, join in your last party of pleasure; you will part with every friend; you will bid adieu to bibles, and Sabbaths, and sanctuaries. Oh, it is coming—the last sickness; the sad farewell of wife, and child, and parent, and young companion.—It is coming—the glazing eye, the wild spasm of agony, the grave, the judgement, the long, long eternity—coming—coming! Lay your hand upon your heart—mark its bounding pulse well. Each one is but a stroke on the great bell of your prison-house—a footfall, sad and sure, of death, the great monster.

"There is a time to die." And would to God this were all of it; but, alas, alas, have ye not read, have ye not heard, hath it not been told you, how a sinner's hopeless death bed is a death agony? Think of it, oh think of it; dying agonies prolonged for ever! Body, and spirit, and soul, [Concluded on fourth page.]