

MAGILL (Geo. J.)

IN MEMORIAM.



Dr. David King,

BORN, MAY 12th, 1812.

DIED, MARCH 7th, 1882.



Magill (Geo. J.)

LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
MAY 10 1903
654

LIBRARY

SURGEON GENERAL'S OFFICE

JUN - 5 1900

654.

“Mark the Perfect Man.”

A SERMON

PREACHED IN TRINITY CHURCH,

NEWPORT, R. I.,

ON THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT,

MARCH 19th, 1882,

BY THE

REV. GEORGE J. MAGILL,

RECTOR.

NEWPORT, R. I. :
DAVIS & PITMAN, PRINTERS.
1882.

Rev'd George F. Magill,

REV'D AND DEAR SIR:—In behalf of the Vestry of Trinity Church, we would respectfully ask permission to print in pamphlet form, the sermon you recently preached in Trinity Church, commemorative of the worth and character of the late Dr. David King, who was intimately identified with this Parish and in the more active years of his life was prominent as a Vestryman.

Respectfully,

GEO. C. MASON, }
SAMUEL ENGS, } Wardens.

Newport, R. I., April 17, 1882.

“Mark the Perfect Man.”

“Mark the perfect man and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace.”—Psalms xxxvii, 37.

The Psalmist does not here set up a standard of absolute perfection. He was too keen an observer of human nature, and felt too strongly the tide of passion surging in his own breast, to claim for any mortal such unconditioned excellence. There was only one Man of whom it could be said that He was perfect, in every respect; and He came into the world unfettered by the chains of evil which hold in bondage every other child of Adam. He had to struggle with the most powerful temptations. There were times when, to the human eye, the conflict seemed doubtful; but He always triumphed in the end. And if

Christ is held up as a model for our imitation, it is not with the hope that we can walk on the same high plane where His victories were won. The Word of God abounds with the testimony of Him who knew what was in man, that no one of our race is "free from moral imperfection, and endowed with every virtue," which seems to be a proper definition of perfection. A modern writer has rather exaggerated the same idea. "Probably," he says, "there never was one thought, from the foundation of the earth, that has passed through the mind of man, which did not offer some blemish, some sorrowful shadow of pollution, when it came up for review before a heavenly tribunal." No, it is not absolute perfection of which the Psalmist speaks. Our Psalter translation is nearer to the Septuagist text, and more in accord with the early meaning of the word perfect. "Keep innocency": guard yourself from doing wrong: are phrases that allow a condition of positive excellence for which we should strive, but do not promise

its absolute possession. *Perficio*, the Latin word from which the word perfect is derived, means to carry through—to have a clearly defined purpose of good in life—and to work up towards that good, under all kinds of difficulty.

In this modified sense of the word we may point to many bright examples of perfection among our brother men. Their lives, from first to last, have been marked by one steady aim to reach some fair ideal. They have been misunderstood, no doubt. Their ideal has not been thought worth the seeking. Their persistency has been called obstinacy. But they have had the grace of perseverance, upheld by conscience; and posterity has recognized the value of their labors and applauded them. Perhaps the searcher for truth has followed only the light of an "ignis fatuus." If so, his energetic, conscientious aim absolves him from the guilt of wrong belief, and ought to screen him from the charge of folly. Unless we accept this conclusion, we brand with

shame, faithful scientific workers in past centuries, whose theories, honestly reached according to the light they had, have been overthrown by later investigation. And we put the stigma of impiety upon all religious faith, which, though defective, was, for the age or locality, the highest revelation vouchsafed from heaven; and was conscientiously held. We have surely more admiration for the heathen who, not having the law, does by nature the things contained in the law: than for the Christian, who, with the Gospel light shining brightly on his path, and the crown of eternal glory full in view; halts and vacillates and stumbles, and has not the energy to go on. Such a Pagan is a man of principle and convictions; such a Christian is not. Put the Pagan in the Christian's place, and he would carry all before him by the conquering power of the love of Christ. Now that is what the Psalmist meant by a perfect man. A man of strong convictions, tender conscience, reso-

lute will: whose purpose is to find out what is his *duty*, and the grand aim of his life to fulfill it.

If we had any doubt about the meaning of the word "perfect" in the text, the Psalmist sets it at rest, by using the word "upright" which follows. Remember, he is not alluding to two characters, but one. It is the same as if he said, "Mark the perfect and upright man." If he had had two persons in his mind, he would not have added "the end of that *man* is peace." The word *upright* is applied to motives rather than to actions, to the regulation of the conduct rather than to the conduct itself. A deed may be called honest when the motive is upright. Every upright man is honest, but every honest man is not necessarily upright. Law makes the standard of honesty, but conscience determines what is upright. And uprightness is superior to honesty, because it will move a man to do more than law sometimes demands. A debtor meets with adversity, and makes an assign-

ment. His creditors agree to release him from further obligation on the payment of a certain percentage of his indebtedness, because he has got into the strait through misfortune rather than misconduct. Now, when he has paid over the stipulated amount, he has done all that honesty requires. But the upright man is not satisfied until every dollar of the original debt has been liquidated.

The upright man is guided by principle. His motive is to administer by equity rather than formal justice. He is thoroughly impartial. His character stands erect. It is not bent by prejudice. It does not cringe and creep and let go of its convictions for the sake of popularity. Its judgment may be at fault, but its motives never. General Garfield stood alone in his conception of how the campaign in Tennessee should be conducted, and he fearlessly pressed his views upon the notice of the men in power, at the risk of misunderstanding and disfavor; because his whole heart was invested in his country's cause.

Athanasius did as much for the true cause of Christ, when the imperial power had its hands upon the throat of the Church, and unprincipled ecclesiastics became the easy tools of political usurpation. We are to look for the perfect man—i. e., the man who comes nearest to perfection—not among those whose vast achievements, though grand and historic, have been stained by motives of violence, vengeance and self-aggrandizement, but among those who, comparatively obscure, have preserved the integrity of conscience, and, by heeding its admonitions, have established, if not the reputation for, at least the imperishable consciousness of, an upright character.

Well may the Psalmist affirm "the end of that man is peace." The close of life reveals to a man his real inner self. However, in the flush of life, he may have reasoned himself out of his better convictions, suffered the storms of passion to drown the voice of conscience, cast the cloak of a false but ingeniously wrought charity over motives that could

not bear the light, had his vision distorted from inward self-inspection by the glamour of popular applause; he must yield, at last, to that inexorable power, which strips the gaudy raiment from the soul, discards its decorations of worldly honor, dispels the mists that made it glow with rainbow colors, and leaves it naked, face to face with God. How, then, shall it stand before Him? O, this is the supreme question we should be asking ourselves all through life! We can gather no satisfactory answer from the worldly things we have accumulated. The highest efforts of genius, the grandest intellectual achievements, the vast results of physical and mental energy will avail us nothing. All this will be swept away in that solemn hour, when, on the brink of eternity, we review the past, and the soul thrills to its very core, as God puts the question, not "What hast thou?" but "*What art thou?*" Then, if never before, the soul will look at its real self. Then will it see the utter uselessness of all earthly possessions for

the life that is before it, whither it can carry nothing but itself. Then only one thing can still its agitation, and give it peace—the approval of conscience.—This monitor, sitting in judgment on the motives of the heart, is not deceived by pretentious deeds or spasmodic exhibitions of devotion, but reads the character aright, discerns that its achievements, great or small, have been the result of godly principle; that, if conspicuous on account of its many noteworthy acts, it has not been sullied by mean, worldly ambition, or that its modest, steady, even progress has not been due to apathy or indifference. Yes, it is only *character* that will be put to the test of that last searching investigation, and he only can fold his hands restfully upon his breast, and peacefully close his eyes upon a vanishing world, whose character has been growing up unto perfection because of the uprightness of his heart. "Keep innocency and take heed unto the thing that is right, for that shall bring a man peace at the last."

My dear friends, I think it is no exaggeration, I am sure it is no merely graceful panegyric, to say that our late friend and fellow-parishioner, Dr. David King, made such a character the aim of his long and useful life. You know it is not my custom to preach obituary sermons, but it seems to me that the occasion demands that some reference should be made to the great and good man who has passed away, even if my heart, touched by his many tokens of kindness, did not prompt me to do so. The various societies, of which he was a member, have expressed regret for his loss, and reverence for his memory. They bear testimony to the deep practical interest he took in the objects for which they were organized, and the deference that was paid to his judgment in matters of importance. And in the fact that these societies differed in their aims, being literary, historical and scientific, we discover a breadth of culture, and versatility of mind, which the modesty of their possessor endeavored to conceal.

As a citizen, Dr. King was devoted to the welfare of Newport. Some of the societies, to which he belonged, were formed for the purpose of promoting its prosperity, and in these he wielded no small influence. But he was also, in a private and perhaps more direct way, instrumental in advancing the interests of the people. His large professional practice brought him into close and frequent contact with large numbers of our citizens, and, with their respect for his ability as a physician, and their strong personal attachment to him, there was coupled confidence in his judgment. In this way he was able to control opinion, and, I have been told that some very important measures, having secured his co-operation, were successfully carried out, because his advocacy, as a careful, conservative man, brought with it the support of others.

Dr. King was eminently a lover of books, especially of those that were rare. A visit to his library—a most choice and valuable collection—would convince the connoisseur of

his exceptional taste and judgment, and provoke surprise that with so extensive a practice, he could find time for such close attention to literary pursuits. He was methodical and industrious. He had the gift of utilizing odd fragments of time, which too many waste. This habit of diligence clung to him to the end. I believe the last time he left his sick room, shortly before his decease, he made his way to the library in order to consult some of his books; and even as the shadows of the great change were gathering round him, he sat up in his bed engaged in correspondence.

But his chief devotion was to his chosen profession, in which he was so eminently successful. There is many a household that will lament his absence, when the day of sickness comes, an absence for which his protracted illness has hardly prepared them. His extreme modesty, and his reticence about the case he was treating, while they might have impressed some unfavorably, never weakened the confidence of those who knew him in his ability;

while his tenderness and gentleness and unselfishness endeared him to all. There is many a living voice to bless him for his kindly ministrations, and I am sure there are souls both here and in the world of spirits, that treasure up his Christly words of hope and consolation.

As a member of this parish, he was always interested in its good estate. For many years, he took an active part in the management of its temporalities, and presided at the meetings of its corporation. Conservative in all things, he was especially so in regard to the antiquity of this building. He regarded it as a heritage of the past, which, in these days of vandalism, should be jealously preserved. To him, as much as to any one man, we owe it that Trinity Church is substantially the same today as it was a hundred and fifty years ago. His religious life was unpretentious. Professional duty kept him often from the public services. But I believe he had Christ in his heart, and that he died trusting in Him as his Lord and Saviour.

I wish to put on record here, the fact of his great kindness to the poor. It falls within the sphere of my labors to be much among this class of God's people. I would like to relate some incidents of his goodness, so as to inspire others with a kindred ambition, but it is perhaps juster to his memory to leave them in the privacy where he wished to have them.

We dare not invade the sanctuary of the home, where that gentleness and loveliness of character shone out most clearly in congenial atmosphere. It is not a picture for common gaze. It is not a story for common words. But our hearts may steal in unawares to sympathize with those who will "pine for the tender grace of a day that is dead, and long for the sound of a voice that is still."

I feel, my dear friends, how utterly inadequate is this brief reference to our departed brother, to describe so noble a character as his. But I remember that I am speaking to a congregation, the majority of whom knew him longer, and some more intimately than I.

And having had his character in my mind from the beginning of this sermon, much that I have said about the perfect and upright man, whose end is peace, belongs to him. For his was that quiet, steady, even life that made its progress towards perfection noiselessly, guided by conscience, never deserting principle, never losing sight of its goal, abounding with acts of goodness and kindness; and yet to be judged rather by its inflexible purpose to do right, and the sweet sincerity of its motives. And his was a death where all the tokens of peace were present. This servant of God literally fell asleep in Jesus. The church will reverence his memory as that of a sincere, devoted Christian. His unobtrusive virtues and the peaceful end that crowned them, shall admonish us to serve God, with a pure heart fervently.

The most lasting monument which perpetuates the memory of departed worth, is not the stately column or triumphal arch that records some single bright achievement, or some tran-

sient victory. To live in people's hearts, where the record of quiet virtues has been engraved, is better far. The day may come when the pyramids of Egypt shall bow their haughty heads, and lie low in the dust, like the haughty kings whose memories they have failed to preserve. The glory of the Cæsars may not survive the monuments of marble which Romans erected. But as long as the world shall last, the modest virtue, the unpretentious love and service of the woman who poured ointment on our Saviour's head, shall be proclaimed for a memorial of her. And we shall treasure in our hearts the memory of our departed brother. We shall miss his well-known form from our houses and our streets; we shall miss his cordial welcome at the door of his home, but his genial spirit shall abide with us still, and keep ever green in our hearts the remembrance of his Christian graces.

"Mark the perfect man and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace."

Let us endeavor, dear friends, to make our lives what God would have them to be. Let us get under the surface, and examine the springs of action. Let us see what is the motive power that sends us forward on our daily round of duty. It must be God's hand that guides us: it must be the spirit of His dear Son that sustains our life; if our end is to be peaceful. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above," the gift of uprightness in our day and generation, the gift of that peace which passeth all understanding, when the toils of life are over.

