

MOORE (Jos.)

FUNERAL DISCOURSE

COMMEMORATIVE OF

DR. JOHN PORTER,

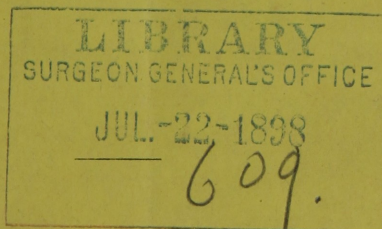
Dr. Med. Coll.

BY

1820

REV. JOSIAH MOORE. *1826*

Delivered in the Unitarian Church, Duxbury, on Sunday, April 2, 1865.



PLYMOUTH:
MEMORIAL AND ROCK PRESS.
1865.

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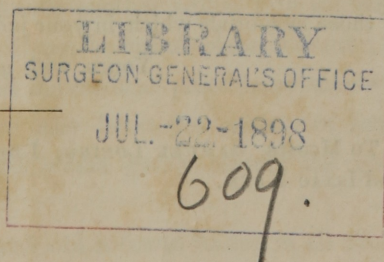
COMMEMORATIVE OF

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DUXBURY, May 1st, 1865.

REV. JOSIAH MOORE :

Dear Sir —

To preserve fresh in our minds the valued recollections of our "Beloved Physician," and give more permanent form to the touching tribute of a Pastor and Friend to his memory, in behalf of his many friends, we request a copy of his Funeral Sermon for publication.

SAMUEL LORING,
CAPT. EDEN WADSWORTH,
BENJ. ALDEN,
ISAAC KEEN.

DUXBURY, May 4, 1865.

GENTLEMEN : —

Although averse to coming before the public through the agency of the press, I cannot refuse your request for a copy of the Discourse preached on occasion of the death of Doctor JOHN PORTER, as your object I understand to be simply "to preserve fresh the valued recollections of 'the Beloved Physician,' " independently, I presume, in some measure, of the intrinsic worth of those memorials which, in your judgment, may serve this purpose.

Yours, with much esteem,

JOSIAH MOORE.

TO MESSRS. SAMUEL LORING, EDEN WADSWORTH, BENJ. ALDEN,
and ISAAC KEEN.

DISCOURSE.

COLOSSIANS, 4 : 14. "Luke, the beloved Physician."

The beloved physician was a man, we are happy to know, who had embraced the Christian religion on account of his conviction of its Divine origin and the unparalleled character of its Teacher. In the Gospel in which he wrote, as well as in his Acts of the Apostles, this physician has left to the world a delineation of his own character and attainments, without a word of himself, which reveals the secret of the appellation of beloved. His character and attainments it would be of much interest to delineate, but the occasion which calls us together, and the time reasonably to be appropriated to the public services of the hour, will not permit such indulgence. Our thoughts instinctively gravitate nearer home, and impress upon our hearts another name, with the same appropriate appellation. It will not be out of place, however, to look into the relations in which the medical practitioner stands to a community, as therefrom we may learn the reasons of those strong and peculiar attachments which gather around the good doctor.

The physician has been found and is found to-day in all climes and among all people. His profession grows out of those unchangeable conditions of human life under which the Creator has

seen fit to place his children during their sojourn upon this earth. There are countless ills to which flesh is heir, ordained of Heaven or induced by the violation of the laws of Nature. These are designed to remind mankind of their weakness and dependence, or by a sad experience to teach them to walk in the paths of truth and soberness. Yet all these visitations are made subject to alleviation; even that sickness which is unto death may be modified so as to ease the way down to the grave. What the termination of these visitations may be is in the main uncertain; and, to the eye of those who are sick, there is the vision of the grim king of terrors in the vista, who will sooner or later come to take them hence to return no more.

Death, even under the promises and hopes of Christian truth, is and always has been a subject of fear; consequently, when the almost invariable forerunner thereof invades the citadel of life, we hear the constant inquiry: "Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there?" And if the balm and the physician be at hand, under what circumstances does he visit his patients? God is no respecter of persons, and he has wisely ordained that his children shall not be deprived of those lessons best calculated to remind them of this fact.

Sickness calls in the thoughts of the proudest, as well as the humblest, from all worldly distinctions, and forces them to contemplate their naked self alone. It humiliates while it exalts, teaching the unsatisfactory nature of earthly things and the infinite worth of God, and of those great truths, emanating from his existence, to the soul of man. Sickness, next to faith in the Redeemer, is the great revealer of man to himself. From it he learns what is priceless and what is valueless; the worth of the knowledge of a future life to one who is soon to be deprived of the present by the loss of those powers that place the soul in rapport and in sympathy with this state of existence.

No less powerful and beneficent is sickness upon the social nature. None can experience it, even in its mildest forms, without recognizing the dependence of man upon man for a large share of those things that constitute true earthly enjoyment. Those in high places may turn to the broad-cast eminence of their name, and those whose coffers are full, to their worldly wealth for health and strength; but they are as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. They yearn for the gentle and unjeweled hand to be laid upon the throbbing head; for the services the humble can best render; for the balm that Nature provides in abundance for all; for the good physician to allay the burning heat or restore the failing strength. The good doctor then visits his patients, when, if ever, their religious sensibilities and faith are alive; when their sense of dependence upon God and man forces itself, however unwelcome, upon the thoughts; and those genial kindnesses, sympathies and services which no class and no condition can monopolize are met with emotions of gratitude and humility.

Hence the need that those whose calling it is to deal with the ills to which flesh is heir, should, like the Evangelist Luke, the beloved physician, be Christians in faith, in character, and life, that while they prescribe for the pains of the body they may administer to the troubled soul. To them are offered opportunities which not even the minister of Christ may possess, for impressing upon their patients a sense of religious truth and obligation; a regard for the welfare of humanity in all conditions, best met under the exercise of the Christian virtues and a conviction of the necessity of faith and hope in immortality to satisfy the longing soul.

With all classes of people the medical practitioner, from the necessities of his calling, becomes familiar. Few are wholly exempt, for any length of time, from the visitation of disease; few families

that have not frequent occasion for his services. He thus becomes familiar with all. When blessed with the boon of health, he is always welcome at their firesides, and at the social board; his counsel gladly received, not only in the line of his profession, but in other matters unseen by the public eye, and unknown even to confidential inmates. He is the depositary of many a secret grief, that he may not disclose; many a sore trial he must retain as a sacred trust. With the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the young and the old, he stands in the relation of equal, — brother, father, and friend; none more accessible by night and by day, in sunshine and storm.

Who can wonder, then, at the interest so manifest, when a vacant place is to be filled, or at the deep-seated grief so widely felt when the good doctor is removed. Without his presence and prescriptions, fail as he may in consequence of the limitations of human knowledge and the power of the Divine decrees, fail as he must without the power to work miracles, how greatly would human suffering be multiplied and how unspeakably intensified; how largely the number of the dead be increased and the sorrows of the bereaved extended and deepened. Resolved, as the nations still are, to right their imaginary or real wrongs by the sword, how terrible would the carnage and the agonies of the hospital and the battle-field become beyond what they now are were the physician excluded therefrom, and the oil and wine of the good Samaritan denied to the wounded, the sick and the dying soldier.

But I may not pursue this fruitful topic into further detail. I am reminded, by the gathering here on the morning of this holy day, of the scenes that here transpired on the last Sabbath; of the still form and the placid face that lay in their last quiet repose before this altar, and of the immense congregation collected within the walls of this church, in numbers, in devotion, in interests and

affection seldom or never equalled in this community or this vicinity ; never since the form of our great Statesman was wrapped in the flag of his country, which he had so long and faithfully served, and borne from his home to the tomb, where he now rests, undisturbed by the storms that have so shattered the ship of State since his hand was palsied at the helm, and his watch forever closed.

In the passage of Scripture — which I have placed at the head of this Discourse, as a not inappropriate introduction to the thoughts which press upon my mind, and to which I cannot give suitable utterance, or clothe in language to do justice to the feelings of many or all present here to-day — we are told that Luke, the Christian, the Evangelist, the beloved physician, sent his salutation to the church at Colosse ; but John, our beloved physician, has left with us his parting adieus, to meet with us no more upon earth in visible form. We cannot yet realize that he has gone, to return no more ; no more to cheer us with his welcome presence at our firesides ; no more to share with us the social meal to which he was always so sincerely welcome, not so much as a guest as a member of our households. We cannot yet feel that when sickness shall visit us, our children or friends, we may not summon him to our own or their bedside ; and when he comes, put aside the anxious thought and cherish in its stead the conscious conviction that with him to direct all will be well.

But our reason tells us that we shall see him no more, although the unwilling heart refuses to believe it. His memory remains, and for this we may be grateful, and to this we may essay to do justice, while the affections gather around it as a shadow when the form is no longer visible. Yet do not expect of me, my friends, any elaborate eulogy or any extensive analysis of the character of Dr. Porter. The former would be a work of seppererogation among

those who knew him so well, and by whom he was so highly esteemed; and from the latter I shrink, not only from incompetency, but as savoring too much of the painful duty sometimes devolved upon the surgical operator, of dissecting the remains of a friend.

My main purpose, in what I have said and in what I may say, is to render my humble tribute of grateful recollections to one with whom, for thirty years, I have had pleasant social intercourse, to whom I have been indebted for many a gratuitous professional visit, and for much good counsel in other matters.

Dr. JOHN PORTER was born January 25th, 1795, at Voluntown, in the State of Connecticut. He was a son of the Rev. Micaiah Porter and Elizabeth, his wife, whose maiden name was Gallup, and who was of highly respectable connections in her native State.

During the early youth of Dr. Porter his father removed with his family to the town of Plainfield, New Hampshire, and was installed over the Meriden parish. It was here, under the tuition of his father, that he was fitted for the medical department of Dartmouth College, from which he graduated in 1820. This institution, at that period of time, had attained a high reputation under the instruction of Dr. N. Smith, well known throughout New England for his great professional attainments, especially on account of his skill as a physician and surgeon.

In 1836, Dr. Porter became a member of the Medical Society of Massachusetts. His father and mother died at Plainfield; the former in 1829, aged eighty-four years; the latter in 1841.

Dr. Porter first located himself in the neighboring town of Kingston, but soon removed to Duxbury. He established himself in this place about the year 1820, at the age of twenty-five. He had consequently been in practice among the inhabitants of Duxbury and the towns in the immediate vicinity, at the time of his death, forty-five years.

July 19th, 1829, Dr. Porter was married to Ann Thomas, daughter of John Thomas, Esq., of South Marshfield. His widow, six sons and one daughter, survive him to lament his loss, to cherish his memory, gratefully to remember the deep interest he felt in their welfare, and profit by the counsels which, as a dying bequest, he left with them.

Dr. Porter died on the 23d of March, at the close of a bright and genial day. He breathed his last as the sun, which had been shining upon his couch, sunk behind the western forests. He died in his parlor, of whose cheerful surroundings he was unwilling to be deprived, in the midst of all the members of his family who could be summoned together; his venerable brother, of the same profession, sitting by his side and watching his fading pulsations. He died, as he wished to die, without a struggle, with scarcely the movement of a muscle, retaining the full possession of his mental faculties, and with the calmness and submission of the Christian philosopher; with his finger, as it were professionally, laid upon his wrist almost to the moment when his heart ceased to beat. He was a lover of Nature, and he had expressed a desire to live until the trees should be in foliage, the grass become verdant and the birds resume their carol; and although his hour had come before the inanimate world had put on its robes of green,—as if to gratify his wishes in all other respects, a feathered songster perched itself upon a bough by the open casement, where had been placed some favorite plants, and warbled its cheerful notes until the spirit of the dying man was released to return to the God who gave it upon its music; leaving the body with which it had been associated for seventy years, and through the agency of which its work had been accomplished, to be returned to the dust out of which it was formed, by his kindred and friends.

A ruling sentiment with Dr. Porter was the desire to benefit his fellow beings, not only in the line of his professional business, but in all ways open to him. He was ready at all times to answer the calls made upon him. In his practice he never consulted his own convenience, comfort, or even safety. During the darkest and most inclement nights he would be threading our streets, or feeling his path through the forests, when all others were enjoying the boon of quiet and refreshing repose; and at all hours of the day, in sunshine or storm, might he be seen making his way to some sick bed, or returning, after having administered to a body or a mind diseased.

We should be astonished could we ascertain the number of professional visits he made, within the limits of his labors, during the almost half-century of his practice; the number of different patients to whom he was called; the many who under his helping hand he had restored, from sickness unto death, made whole; the number who now slumber under the sod whom he attended to the very gates of the grave; and the number of those whom he was the first to introduce to the life and light of this world.

Dr. Porter never put off the harness; he sank down in it. For many a month his strength was inadequate to meet the demands upon his professional labors, but he refused not to go when called, even to the last few weeks of his life, when he had to be wrapped up as a child and borne by strong arms to his carriage; and even to the last day of his life, it is no exaggeration to say, that he refused not to give his professional advice to such as sought it with pressing urgency. He could never be justly charged with neglecting his patients. Murmurings might have been heard from the lips of the over-anxious, but he, better than they, knew when they had need of him, and when not; and all, I think, will justly acquit him of any desire to multiply his visits for the purpose of

emolument. Few can know how extensive have been his charities in the way of his profession, and what sums he virtually distributed, as he had not the heart to press the collection among those whom he considered as not well able to pay.

Of his professional attainments and skill it is not for me to speak; those of his own cloth know what they were much better than I. Yet we all know that he had the confidence of the people among whom he practiced; and public judgment so long exercised, under so many experimental tests, seldom fails of reaching true results.

I believe Dr. Porter, both in head and heart, to have been a religious man. His early lessons were of the Calvinistic creed, but the influences of a truly Christian home are much the same under all forms of faith. Those doctrines which he was convinced were not in accordance with the Christian Scriptures or human understanding, he had the independence to discard; but beneath all these was a solid stratum of faith and trust based in the emotions of the heart and cherished as the work of a pious father and a tender Christian mother. He had a firm trust in God; a well established faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and in the immortality of the soul. He said that his Heavenly Father had taken care of him through life, and he could trust him in death. He despised all cant, affectation and hypocrisy in religion; but where he found the spirit of Christ, he appreciated and honored it. He was not a man to boast of his attainments in anything, yet he knew what he knew, and how far he was justified in placing confidence in himself, and how far his judgment ought to be relied upon by others. Hence that humility and acquiescence in regard to the opinions of those whom he considered better informed than himself, and the positiveness and demand for consideration with which he pronounced his own in cases where he felt he had a right to be heard.

But the one thought is earnestly pressing upon us that he is gone from among us in bodily form to visit our families and our bed-sides never again. The physician cannot heal himself when it is God's will that he cease his labors and go to his rest. He died as he had lived, a man and a philosopher; may I not say a Christian man and a Christian philosopher? yet no stoic, no cynic. He had a heart to feel for other's woes, and a disposition to alleviate where he could not heal. Hence the interest so universally felt in the progress of his decline, the affection with which his name was pronounced, and the respect that was allowed him by young and old, by the strong and the weak, by high and low, by rich and poor. Hence the impressive solemnity that pervaded the large assembly here gathered on the last Sabbath, on occasion of his burial; the sadness manifest in the countenances of all who passed this altar to take a last look at that benign face which they should see never again; and the touching tenderness with which many a female hand was gently laid upon his placid brow.

And now, my friends, I have said my say and contributed my offering, poor as it is, to the memory of John, the beloved physician. I have no improvement of the subject to make. Your own hearts will suggest all that it might be necessary for me to say. We are all mourners; and the stricken soul, left to its own reflections, will best provide for its own instruction and consolation. Let us turn our reflections from our bodily ailments when we can, and the engrossing thought of those who have power only to prescribe for corporeal diseases to those moral distempers, trials and sorrows that reach the inner man, and to the Great Physician, who alone can remedy these, who alone can heal the wounded heart, who alone can give the oil of joy for mourning and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

