CT
275
.T52B3

www.libtool.com.cn

www.libtool.com.cn

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.
Chap. CT 275
Shelf .T52B3
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

www.libtool.com.cn

www.libtool.com.cn

www.libtool.com.cn

www.libtool.com.cn

www.libtool.com.cn

V Bartol

Tribute to the Memory

OF

Stephen Van Rensselaer Thayer.

www.libtool.com.cn

A Good Name:

www.libtool.com.cn

A SERMON

TO THE

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL SOCIETY IN LANCASTER, MASS.,
OCTOBER 22, 1871.

BY GEORGE M. BARTOL.

With an Appendix.

PRINTED BY REQUEST.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
1884
CITY OF WASHINGTON.

BOSTON:
PRESS OF JOHN WILSON AND SON.
1871.

www.libtool.com.cn

CT275
.T52B3

www.libtool.com.cn

IN MEMORY

OF

STEPHEN VAN RENSSELAER THAYER.

Born August 2, 1847.

Died October 10, 1871.

www.libtool.com.cn

www.libtool.com.cn

SERMON.

"A GOOD NAME." — Eccles. vii. 1.

ANY one's having a name, either good or bad in itself, yet a name of his own, signifies that he is a person; nor is it easy to conceive of men being sunk so low as to have no personal names at all, and knowing each other apart only by sight. When you call any man by his name, you speak to his very self; you single him out from all other human beings who have ever lived, or ever will live. And by answering to his name, as Adam answered to the voice in the garden, he confesses that he is a person, an immortal soul, who must answer for himself. His answering to that name through life is a constant reminder to him that he is his own self, has his own place in the world, and his own duty, which no one can do instead of him; experiences of his own, too; a history of his own; hopes, fears, joys, sorrows, temptations, sins, struggles, failures, successes of his own. The mention of any man's name to those who know him recalls

instantly to their remembrance the man, his personal appearance and his moral attributes. In short, "our name is ourself, in our own thoughts and in the thoughts of others; and nothing can separate it from our existence."

www.libtool.com.cn

In the beginnings of society, each name must have been original with the person bearing it, was probably significative, and not an arbitrary sound merely; and with rare exceptions it was a single one for each individual. But with multiplying populations and increasing refinement came repetition and complexity. Long since arose our present custom of joining to the name distinguishing the individual a second, or family name. We seem to think much more, in these days, of the latter than of the former, of the surname than of the name. Yet was there a period when only a few had surnames, and these were at first written not in a direct line after the fore-name, but above it, — an over-name; while alike in our most affectionate intercourse with each other, and in such solemn acts as baptism and marriage, — which, if any, ought to have the force of a sacrament with us, and in which the name is the thing in question, — we do, wittingly or unwittingly, give the proper consequence to that which is indeed the name, by pronouncing it and not the surname. The former being imposed according to the first of Christian rites, we call it

sometimes the given, and sometimes the Christian name, though it may have been derived from some other than a Christian source.

www.libtool.com.cn

As the object of individual names is to identify men and to distinguish them from each other, it is to be regretted that we should restrict ourselves to so small a range in our choice as we do. A multitude of names now almost obsolete, some of them "bearing a perfume in the very mention," might well be revived. It has been said that no English fore-name is distinctive of the people. There seems to be no reason why new names significant and comely should not be invented. A variety of motives seem to influence parents in their selection of names for their children, — a good sound, to mark good wishes, interesting historical associations, some possible connection between a happy name and a good fortune. An ancient sect taught that the minds, actions, successes of men were according to their names as well as their genius and fate; and Plato recommended great carefulness to give happy or fortunate names. It was once usual in baptism to wish expressly that the children might discharge their names: "Mayest thou increase, and mayest thou fulfil this name." Whatever may be the influence of names in the formation of character, any inevitable correspondence between the character or career of any person and his name has

been sadly disproved, from the time of the wise Solomon's Rehoboam (an enlarger) or David's Absalom (father of peace, or father's peace) down to the present day.

www.libtool.com.cn

Still let us be careful to give our children good names, happy names, — names which they will not seek to exchange from shame to bear them. For though the very purpose of proper names would be lost were they to be frequently changed, and though it may be that "neither good names do grace the bad, neither do evil names disgrace the good; the good having no virtue in them to make men better, nor the insignificant to make any worse,"—yet plainly no man should be bound, nor woman either, by any ridiculous, perhaps profane, choice which others may have made for them.

But it is less difficult to find "a good name" in this sense, than as the phrase is used in Scripture; far less difficult to get a name than to establish a character.

"A good name," says the sacred proverb, "is rather to be chosen than great riches," and shows what it means by "a good name" in the parallel line, "and loving favor rather than silver and gold."

And the Ecclesiastes, in our text, declares that it is better than "precious ointment," or perfume; adding elsewhere that "as dead flies corrupt the savor of the ointment, so doth a little folly his that is in reputation for wisdom and honor."

We may well be thankful, my friends, for every name known, perhaps familiar to us, which is "good" in both meanings of that word. Such a name is in our thoughts, and not unfittingly on my tongue to-day, of which I may speak, not for mere propriety's sake, but under the pressure of many tender and precious memories, out of the abundance of my heart to all your hearts; for it is a name intimately associated through two generations with the highest welfare of this town, and with which the honor of this sanctuary is fragrant; remembering, indeed, that the place where we stand is of a dedication so high and holy that it should sound but seldom and lightly with our eulogy of human names. And yet it may rightly so, whenever this is to the quickening of any good in us, and to the praise of God in the virtues and graces of His children.

Nearly a quarter of a century ago I came here to be ordained as your minister. I brought to the home which was opened to receive me, as freely and affectionately as if it had always been my own, the joyful tidings of the birth of an heir to the name, and, if God pleased, to the virtues of the house; of the good and venerable man, already translated, but whose praise was in all the churches, and whose influence was yet quick and strong, even as in life, — to those survivors on whose ears from

childhood's memory the harmony of his voice, with no equal, yet lingered, as it still lingers; of her virtues, too, whose spirit had not then entered into the heavenly recompense of the faithful, who carried every member of this parish in her mind and in her heart, who looked with such tender love as well as so wisely and carefully to the ways of her household, and whose children forsaking not her law, it was "an ornament of grace to their head, and chains," not of slavery, but "of glory about their neck," and who arose, as they rise up this day, and we with them, to call her blessed.

www.libtool.com.cn

Since I last spoke to you here, it has been my lot to be the messenger to that house of the end of the earthly life of which I announced the advent. I have also stood at the grave, as I stood at the cradle, with a keen sorrow and a disappointed hope, a sense of our personal loss, — for this good name was part of ours, — yet grateful for so much fruit from the early promise; grateful that the holy tradition of such an ancestry should have reached and been so fulfilled in its posterity, — that the original savor had flowed down into this latest offspring in our own day, of those whose seed it is declared shall be blest.

Than the other line that mingled with this honored one in the paternal descent of the young man of whom I speak, few, if any, in the country run

further back in the history of its landed proprietors; and from this branch of his family he received his truly Christian name, coupled with his maternal, — a name long associated with the title, even after its outlawry, of Patroon, and illustrious for patriotism, statesmanship, leadership in great works of internal improvement, and the patronage of various educational and charitable enterprises; for public munificence, and social position and relations; but not less for private worth and conduct.

www.libtool.com.cn

Truly our young friend had entered into the possession of "a good name," so far as this can be a matter of inheritance, and of every outward good which men are apt to desire. But the inherited name and position, gifts of fortune, physical superiority, whatever these may be worth, are not what have stirred more and more, from his early years, our growing love and respect for him. No; but that he had so soon learned to value these things at their true price, and see them at their real value; that, alluring as the pride and pomp and circumstance of life must have been to him, even as they are save in our better moments to us all, he had turned away his eyes from beholding vanity, and that he preferred the "loving favor" he everywhere won from old and young, from high and low, to "silver and gold."

He must have felt the full force of the outward temptation, by how many in such a situation yielded

to, to become an idler or a mere seeker of pleasure. Yet not so did he luxuriate in his place, or wanton in his advantage. Neither did he boast of his place, nor view his commanding position with self-complacency, but with a grave and manly solicitude. The modesty with which he sought to do kind deeds, and so many where these would be unnoticed and unknown, except by the persons whom his generosity blessed, is assurance that he meant no barter of his benefits for popular applause, but that he would rather "do good and lend, hoping for nothing again," would own his debt to humanity, and regarded himself not as an original proprietor, but as the steward only of a great trust, principal and interest, to be accounted for.

www.libtool.com.cn

He had good but not shining talents. But though one person may have received more faculty than another, more various and greater in amount, we judge no man by that original endowment, but every man by the use he makes of what he has. And as the honor and respect we pay must thus depend always on how any one has occupied his place and employed his gift or opportunity, so in the case before us our tribute is to the noble intention and the earnest endeavor with which he of whom we are speaking was going forward to acquire

> "The reason firm, the temperate will,
> Endurance, foresight, strength, and skill,"

with which to "discharge his name" and fill the influential and responsible station to which it called him.

www.libtool.com.cn

Let me not even seem to represent him, however, as if he never showed any imperfections. Faults, doubtless, had at times appeared in him; but they were not the faults of selfishness, — rather the superficial ones of a frank, unsuspicious, affectionate, trusting, and generous nature, from which "our tears can wash him pure as he was born."

"What is the chaff to the wheat?" "Speak nothing but good of the dead." Of what worth, now that they are dead, is any thing but the good that can be spoken? And so we instinctively weave the best wreath we can from their life to throw upon their grave. Their human frailties and infirmities seem to vanish amid the dust in which their forms are laid; and never have they been so dear or so near to us, never has their example shone so brightly before us as now. We gather up their incorruptible part: whatever virtue and whatever praise there is, we take it all up without loss, and cherish it and remember it, bearing it in the living urns of our hearts. Sometimes this may be little, but that little we recover.

As we stood so lately at the solemn committal of the body of our young friend and companion to the earth, as it was, we felt how much indeed of him

was not there in that senseless clay; how much that consumption could not waste, or the grave cover; how much of the man was in himself, not in his fortune, — in his soul, not in his accidents.

www.libtool.com.cn

The flowers strown upon his bier were soon to wither: but the fragrance of his own generous deeds blended with, as it outlives, those transient odors; and the grateful tributes that mean more than outward beauty, abide in many a loving and never-forgetting heart.

The leaves were falling with every breath of wind to the ground; but as each of these has only dropped away from the germ of a new bud, and will itself help to form the matter of the vegetation to follow, so, though his leaf has fallen, the soul that dwelt in it survives, and another body associated with the former, but not the same, shall be raised spiritual, incorruptible.

The leaf sometimes falls before its time. Thus has he fallen, — as we say, prematurely, — though not so in the view of the All-wise; fallen just as he was beginning to run the race of his young manhood with alacrity and joy: and we must weep, if not for him, yet over the earthly hopes and expectations of him, which we must bury within our hearts, as we have consigned his dust to the sepulchre. But his good name is now sealed for ever here; and the "new" name that shall be given to

him beyond, while it will express and mean all the thoughts of love and self-sacrifice that are written nowhere but in his own heart and in the books of God, — and so no other shall know the full meaning of it but the man himself, because none but he knows the secret experiences, struggles, and longings which went towards the making of it, — must it not also have some trace in it of the outward connections and experiences that have obtained in this life; and so shall it not express and mean all, not only that has been, but what, with continued opportunity, would have been still further well done?

www.libtool.com.cn

I have said, my friends, that this good name is part of ours. For let us not forget that as every single man has, more or less, a good or bad name, so has the town of our birth or adoption, so has the religious society to which we belong, — a name and repute of some sort, a certain character and standing, of which we should be jealous as of our own. What this is, or shall be, depends on ourselves; on our integrity, industry, enterprise, high-mindedness, manifested at home and abroad. We think with honest pride of what it has been. Is its "time-honored" standard rising or falling in our hands? As we bless the memory of those who have preceded us in the places we occupy, let us not give our successors cause to think meanly of us.

Every man has his own gift to use for his own benefit and for the benefit of others; let him diligently and faithfully improve it: every man his own place to fill; let him fulfil it, fill it full; and let us all be joined with a common interest in whatever may promote the common welfare and advancement.

www.libtool.com.cn

Let no one say that what he can accomplish is insignificant. Nobody, no thing, is insignificant. Nothing good is ever lost. Our names may die, but it lives and grows and spreads, and goes down to unborn generations. The real difference of men is not in the largeness or dignity of their station or occupation. No man is blessed or saved, no man blesses or saves others, by his outward conditions, but by the qualities and dispositions of which he makes these the channels: through any condition the highest virtues man is capable of may flow. We are none of us so small that we cannot do our duty by God and our neighbors, and leave, when we die, a spot of this town somewhat better than we found it.

Let me appeal especially to you who are the younger members of this ancient parish for your thorough loyalty to its precious and sacred trusts. These every year brings more and more into your hands. The fathers give place to you. Bear on the ark which they have borne. Be faithful to the principles which they have espoused. Yet let

your law be one not of any stationary contentment with the present, but of constant improvement in all good things. Do as your fathers would do,—wise and good men,—were they in your position. As the world grows not only older, but,—as we hope and believe,—in many respects, wiser, let us use our liberty, as they used the same, to change, improve, develop. They, and those who ministered to them as pastors and teachers, waited in their service of the old truth and the new, honestly yet discreetly on the circumstances and needs of their times; and so long as those who come after them are as faithful and wise to use their own opportunities, as they, in their day, were to use theirs, the continuity shall remain unbroken of that common corporate life, common history, common allegiance, common interest,—of that "good name," in the thought of which we feel such a high and honorable self-respect. Amen.

www.libtool.com.cn

www.libtool.com.cn

www.libtool.com.cn

APPENDIX.

[From the "Daily Evening Traveller," Oct. 14, 1871.]

STEPHEN VAN RENSSELAER THAYER.

BEFORE the same altar at which Mr. Thayer had pronounced his marriage vows his funeral bier has been laid in less than a twelvemonth; so quickly has the joy of the bridal been succeeded by the grief of the burial.

After a short sickness of a few weeks, that fine form, the type of manly strength and beauty, has passed from human sight. Death has rarely struck a more shining mark in our community.

Just entering upon the pursuits of active life, Mr. Thayer was rapidly developing those capacities which would fit him admirably to fill the position of influence and responsibility which he seemed destined to occupy hereafter. He had passed through the stages of early youth and a college career without a blemish on his name, or any stain of vice, and at the last was fast realizing the hopes of the most partial friends, giving the world the promise of an intelligent, upright, and useful man.

He was of a singularly amiable and affectionate disposition, and never failed to secure the esteem and strong attachment of any with whom he had to do in

any sphere of life, high or low. He won those of his own age by the cordially fraternal sweetness of his spirit, and he won his elders by the charm of a modest and deferential but manly bearing. He could not have had an enemy, and few of his age had more or warmer friends. Always genial and warm-hearted, he diffused sunshine and cheerfulness in both his homes, and in whatever social circle he entered.

He was successful in gladdening the lives of those whose happiness was the object of his dearest wish and constant endeavor, and he seems never to have been the occasion of a sorrow to them except now, — the immeasurable one of parting with him. He has left behind him deep grief, but also many bright and precious memories, and none others.

The rich and tender nature of this young man, fostered by the well-known influence of his immediate surroundings, developed itself into a fine generosity of heart and a prompt and open-handed charity. There were some who wept in sorrow over his grave, who had wept before, with very different emotions, in surprised thankfulness for the wealth of his sympathies, and the largeness of his bounty. He took delight in showing kindness and rendering service to whomsoever he might, preferring — such was the delicacy of his nature — that his left hand should not know what his right hand did. He will be missed by some who have never known how much they have owed to his secret hand.

His life has been short, but favored and happy. The fruit-buds of a noble and beautiful character were well set in him, and fully opened on earth: they are transplanted to the Garden of the Lord above, for the ripening and the harvesting.

Let the Hebrew sage interpret for us this hard experience: "He, being made perfect in a short time, fulfilled a long time. His soul pleased the Lord, therefore hastened He to take him away."

G. P.

www.libtool.com.cn

[From the "Christian Register," Oct. 14, 1871.]

STEPHEN VAN RENSSELAER THAYER.

VERY few of the many friends who feel so profoundly the death of this young Christian gentleman really know how much has been lost or how much is left to them. His genial and hearty manner, his insatiable generosity, his complete integrity, and his ready sympathy are remembered, indeed, by numbers which few of his age have been privileged to bless. The shock of the sudden loss is felt far beyond the large circle of his family and his intimates. Unspoken sympathy with those most bereaved flows in the tears of hosts of young associates, and rises in the heart of every one who ever met him.

The almost unexampled change from the peculiarly brilliant hopes which his character, his constitution, and his circumstances seemed to make so sure, to the double affliction which leaves two households supported only by his memory instead of his presence, and by their faith in God instead of their hopes of him, — this sudden and fearful contrast makes sympathy especially intense and wide-spread.

But the noblest and the truest thing that can be said of him is, that those who admired him so heartily and who

mourn for him so deeply never knew his best life. His generosity was too real and his sympathy too sensitive to be either paraded or even allowed to be known. Not one, I think, of all the classmates who recognized him as their leader throughout their college course, and unanimously chose him as their favorite at the end of it, ever knew how secretly and indirectly his charity was constantly administered among them. Not long ago, he regularly met a class of the most outcast children in an obscure mission school. It was only after months of this work, which he begged to be allowed to do, that even his immediate family discovered where his Sunday afternoons were spent. "It would seem so foolish," said he, "for me to be setting up to be good."

The life that was seen of all men has left, indeed, a memory and an inspiration which make death no withdrawal of his influence; but what is lost, and what is left, the affliction of his death and the inspiration from his life, grow greater for those mourners who know that the beautiful life that shone for the world to see was only the reflection of a more spiritual one; that the life before men which won him so many friends was but one side of the life before God which has won him heaven. By his going away, the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, the knowledge of the real and full beauty of his life, has come to us; and it will stay.

www.libtool.com.cn

www.libtool.com.cn

CLASS RESOLUTIONS.

THE following Resolutions were adopted at a meeting of the Class of 1870, Harvard University, to pay respect to the memory of their beloved classmate, Stephen Van Rensselaer Thayer, October 12, 1870:—

Since God has been pleased to call away from this life him whom we loved as our friend, and honored more than young men usually honor one of their associates, let us bow with submission to His will.

In this bereavement it is with comfort that we call to our minds those virtues and that generous character through which he has so much endeared himself to us. A Christian man, always cheerful and genial as a companion; ready and even eager to assist those who required assistance; ever truthful himself, and disdainful of meanness on the part of others; as a classmate, generous and charitable, — he was esteemed by all. With his intimate friends full of humor and kindness, bringing cheerfulness and welcome wherever he went; always exerting a good and kindly influence.

Though full of sorrow, let us not forget those upon whom this affliction falls most heavily: his parents, from whom he inherited so many noble traits of character; her whom he took as his wife, less than one short year ago (and who has watched over him in his last illness with such patient and tender care, at the same time bringing cheer and hope to his anxious and sorrowing relations and friends); his brothers and sisters, to whom

he was so good a friend and adviser. To all these we offer the deepest sympathy of our hearts. Let us also hope and pray that his young son, who now bears his name, may also possess the character of his father, the loss of whom we now so deeply mourn, and whose memory we so highly prize.

www.libtool.com.cn

Although cut off in early manhood and when the future looked so bright, we learn how much good he has done in so short a life; and we feel that it is by the number of good deeds, and not by the number of years, that life is made valuable.

T. Parsons, *Chairman.*

A. A. Lawrence, *Secretary.*

www.libtool.com.cn

www.libtool.com.cn

www.libtool.com.cn

www.libtool.com.cn

www.libtool.com.cn

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0 029 785 206 1

www.libtool.com.cn