

**THE LIFE, WRITINGS, AND
CHARACTER
OF REV. THOMAS
STARR KING: A LECTURE**

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The Life, Writings, and Character of Rev. Thomas Starr King: a lecture by C. D. Bradley

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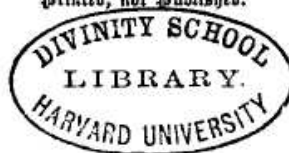
A LECTURE.

E. D. Davis

By C. D. BRADLEE,

PASTOR OF THE CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER.

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THE
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REV. THOMAS STARR KING.

I WOULD speak of the Life, Writings, and Character of Thomas Starr King; a man with whose splendid career we are all somewhat acquainted, and whose loss we none of us can cease to deplore.

Mr. King was born in the city of New York, Dec. 17, 1824. He was the son of the Rev. Thomas Farrington King, who, soon after his son's birth, became the pastor of a church in Hudson, New York. Of his father every one speaks in the highest terms; he is remembered as a man of great pulpit power, and of considerable scholarship, in all the places where he was settled.

"None knew him but to love him,
None named him but to praise;"

whilst his early death called forth great lamentation, not only from his immediate friends amongst the Universalists, but from people of all denominations who had the pleasure of his acquaintance.

We are not surprised, therefore, to find that the infant Starr was bathed in a holy atmosphere as soon as he entered the world; and the unconscious tuition that he received in childhood must have been immense. How his

father's prayers must have wakened in him the spirit of inspiration! How his father's sermons must have stirred in his heart the fire of eloquence! How his father's counsels must have roused in him high purposes, lofty desires, and a sacred enthusiasm!

He spent four years in Hudson, where Nature herself wears a garb of beauty, and is a silent educator to the waiting soul. And as the State of New York stands as the Empire State of our Union, is there not a reason of congratulation that he who was to become an imperial mind was one of her sons, and spent those years, when impression is so great a teacher, in just the place best calculated to develop thought and wonder?

In 1828 his parents moved to Portsmouth, N. H., that beautiful city so attractive in its blending of nature with art, where a joyous quiet, or a holy activity, can be so easily obtained. Here he remained six years. Rev. Mr. Fernald, who was a student in the family at the time, writes to me that the young boy grew rapidly in knowledge; was spoken of as very precocious; studied French and Latin, and was in all ways quite bright.

From Portsmouth the family moved to Charlestown, Mass., when Starr was eleven years old. Here, under the tuition of those excellent teachers, Wm. D. Swan and Joshua Bates,—gentlemen who have trained hundreds of noble young men, and who certainly must reap a sacred joy as they gaze at so much rich fruit springing out of their earnest labors,—here, under the twin power of these good men, the young King rapidly increased in wisdom and in goodness, becoming the pride of his parents, the marked pupil of the school, and was held in high honor amongst all who knew him. We pass over his experience in a dry-goods store; his early engagement as a teacher in Charlestown, in the very school where he was educated, and his pre-eminent success; his engagement at Medford

as schoolmaster, and the theological studies he pursued with Dr. Ballou; the death of his father, with the new strain upon his heart and efforts that this trial made,—to his engagement as a clerk in the Charlestown Navy Yard, in 1843.

We must remember that, up to this time, he was busy with books all the spare hours he could obtain, and that he became quite an adept in the arts and sciences. He sketched, one winter, the lectures of Dr. Walker that were delivered at the Lowell Institute; which sketches he placed in my hands at my request, whilst he was preaching in Hollis Street, and I read them with wonder at their accuracy, and with admiration for the reporter.

In this office under Government he gave great satisfaction; always prompt, exact, and attractive. Whilst here, and when about nineteen years old, he was asked one day to preach. I will give the account of the transaction, as nearly as I can, as he related it to me in his joyous way. He said:—

“One day a Committee of a neighboring parish called upon me, and asked me to supply their pulpit the following Sabbath, as their pastor was sick. They said that they had heard me speak at Conference Meetings, and that they desired to hear my voice in the pulpit. I replied, ‘I cannot think of doing it: I never preached in my life.’ They urged, entreated, plead hard, and finally got my consent, on one condition,—that not a word should be said to my mother. So, all the week, in my leisure moments, I put my thoughts on paper, and by Saturday night I was ready. On Sunday morning I said to mother, ‘Mother, I am going out of town to-day, and shall not return till night.’ A few days afterwards, when entering the house, mother exclaimed, ‘Starr, you went off to preach last Sunday: somebody, who heard and liked you, has been here to tell me.’ From that time,” said Mr. King, “I was employed nearly every Sabbath, till my call to the Charlestown pulpit, when twenty-one years old.”

The call to the Charlestown parish he accepted, and remained there two years, with perfect satisfaction to his people and with great credit to himself. He received several calls to other parishes at this time; wrote his first Lecture on Goethe, and became quite well known as a gifted writer and speaker.

It was whilst Mr. King was at Charlestown, that Dr. Bellows and Dr. Bartol became acquainted with him.

Dr. Bellows says that, in September, 1847, a slender, boyish stranger called at his door, in New York, and introduced himself by the unsuggestive name of Thomas Starr King. He says, "Against all my rules and precautions, being interested in the stranger, I invited him to preach for me the next Sunday. After much reluctance, he consented. The evening came, and we ascended the pulpit together. He conducted all the exercises; and with such perfect self-possession, earnestness and eloquence, that in a very few moments I discovered that in place of a novice, a promising young minister, we had, in those youthful proportions, a finished thinker, scholar, and master, at the altar of God. A universal surprise and admiration filled the congregation. 'Who was this boyish Chrysostom, whose vigorous thoughts ran in such minted tones through our aisles? In what Unitarian Church was he settled? When did he graduate at Harvard? When leave the Theological School at Cambridge? Which among the familiar names of our rising Eastern clergy belonged to him?' His name was King. He was no Unitarian minister at all; he had never been through any college, much less Harvard; never enjoyed the advantages of any theological school; was unknown to our clergy or people!"

Dr. Bartol says:—

"In the summer of 1848 a young man was brought by my friend Dr. Bellows for introduction at my house. He had the

golden hair and ruddy complexion and fair skin, which are thought by some to betoken an uncommonly spiritual nature. A singular modesty, gentle self-denial, and beaming good-will were in his countenance and air. The sweetness of his voice, when he spoke, added to the clear intelligence of every word; while attending the tones were looks so transparent that they served but for expression."

In the spring of 1848 Mr. King received a call to become the pastor of the Hollis-street Church, Boston. I well remember the surprise that this invitation caused among the conservative clergy and laity at the time. It was looked upon as a dangerous experiment; as rather an impeachment of the Unitarian clergy; as too high a compliment to another denomination; as unwise, unhealthy, unsound, unsafe. Mr. Henry H. Fuller, one of the committee of the Hollis-street Church, had to bear a great deal of questioning, hear a vast number of objections, and listen, I expect, to many hard speeches. But he bore it very quietly; insisted upon it that the move was a good one, and invited objectors to take a seat in his pew at any time, and hear the new minister.

Mr. King, after much hesitation, and after a voyage to Fayal for his health, accepted the Boston call, and was installed at the Hollis-street Church in December, 1848; and was married the Sunday evening following, by Rev. Father Streeter, to Miss Julia Wiggin, of East Boston, — a young lady of rare personal attractions, and of considerable intellectual culture. One present at the council told me that the examination was a splendid justification of the call; that all who attempted to overawe Mr. King by questions of doctrine were most manfully and eloquently answered in a way that won the hearts of all present. The same person remarked that a large number of the congregation heard this day, for the first time, Dr. Chapin, of New York. All eyes, he said, were fixed on

the speaker, and it seemed as if Dr. Holley had returned to his own pulpit to electrify once more his hearers by his surpassing eloquence.

During Mr. King's ministry in Boston a wonderful success attended his steps; not that his church was overflowing; not that his hearers fully measured his excellence,— but his success came through the power he exerted upon the clergy, the respect he forced from scholars, and the admiration he invoked from philanthropists.

It was during this period that his great talents as a lecturer were made known; when "Socrates," "Substance and Show," "The Ideal and the Real," "Washington," "Patriotism," and his other brilliant lectures, were written. Now he became the great traveller over his own country, visiting large cities and little villages, and sending sunbeams everywhere. From Monday to Saturday he would be on the cars, and in lecture-rooms; and on Sunday he would enter his pulpit as fresh as if he had remained in his study all the week, and deliver a discourse that would thrill, elevate, and sanctify, the whole congregation. But this constant strain upon his body and mind wore him down; whilst opportunely, as he thought, came several calls at once for him to settle in remote parishes. "Now," he said to me, "I can rest, use material already collected, and write, at leisure moments, a book on a subject that has long interested me."

At last amongst his numerous invitations he selected San Francisco, and stated to his people, one afternoon when I had the good fortune to be present, his reasons for so doing. So far as I can remember, the reasons stated for leaving were ill-health, complete exhaustion, a desire to try the invigorating atmosphere of a new climate, a need of more financial support, and the necessity that an outside parish should secure some one well acquainted with the clergy and the churches.