

**THE PERFECT MAN: A SERMON
ON THE DEATH OF HON. JOHN
DAVIS, PREACHED AT
WORCESTER, MASS., APRIL 23,
1854**

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The Perfect Man: A Sermon on the Death of Hon. John Davis, Preached at Worcester, Mass.,
April 23, 1854 by Alonzo Hill

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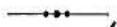
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ALONZO HILL

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THE PERFECT MAN.



A SERMON

ON THE DEATH OF

HON. JOHN DAVIS,

PREACHED AT

Worcester, Mass. April 23, 1854,

BY

ALONZO HILL, D. D.,

Pastor of the Second Congregational Church in Worcester.

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S E R M O N .

Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace.—PSALM xxxvii: 37.

I do not know, my brethren, when I have ever risen to address you under a deeper sense of personal insufficiency. The perfect man!—The poet's theme, the Christian's aspiration, the enthusiast's dream! Under any circumstances, it would task the human powers, and try the human sympathies, adequately to trace the noble lineaments, to lay open the mines of intellectual, moral wealth, to unfold the essential qualities which belong to the man whom we are directed to observe and mark, and to note that combination of delicate and nicely-adjusted properties which, in the end, when human strength gives way, and earthly resources fail, shall bring peace. But when, as now, the providence of God is passing before us in a sudden and startling visitation, and we assemble under the burthen of a heavy bereavement, how shall we find ability to analyze, and language to express, the great thought suggested by the words which I have read? And yet we must dwell upon it, however inadequately, now we have come together into the temple where our

honored friend who was borne from these portals yesterday was wont to worship, and must seek in it the appropriate lesson for the day. The contemplation of that providence which has overtaken us with so little of preparation, and of that life just now closed among us, so much of which was passed in the public service, and before our own eyes in the familiarity of private intercourse, is the appropriate lesson; and your own hearts, before you came here, must have selected the appropriate text: "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace."

The perfect man! Perfection, of course, we cannot understand in an absolute and unqualified sense; for in this sense there is no one perfect, no one good, but God. He who sits upon his throne of unrivaled glory, from whose perfections nothing can take, and to which no length of years can add—God in the Heavens is perfect; and there is only one being that ever trod this earth, these realms of weakness and temptation—the spotless Son of God—of whom with any degree of propriety we can say, "Behold the perfect man." But there is another sense in which the words may be used. They mean not an absolute freedom from sin; they express a perfection that is not inconsistent with imperfection; they are employed not to indicate the man who has escaped all defects, and reached a height of goodness beyond which he cannot go; but rather to express that balance of the character, that completeness in all the parts, which grows out of a seated moral and religious principle, a profound conviction of responsibility, and a sincere aim and an

honest endeavor to know the truth and do right in all things. The perfect man and upright is he who, faithful to his inward principle and thought, with constancy and courage, by night and by day, carries the homage of his allegiance into all the relations and duties of life, private as well as public; who willingly lays open his inmost bosom before Him from whom no subterfuge can hide, and fears not to proclaim his most secret motive and act in the ear of Him who leaves no deed unexamined and no wrong unrebuked. He is the perfect man.

So understood, you will not deem it unmeaning eulogy when we apply the words to our endeared and honored friend, whom we mourn to-day,—who, in the language of one of his cotemporaries, “seems to us now, as in truth he is, not extinguished, or ceasing to be, but only withdrawn, as the clear sun goes down at its setting, not darkened, but only no longer seen;” so suddenly has he passed away. For to whom will they apply with more of justness than to him who, for more than the third of a century, has had associated with his name that comprehensive and deeply significant word “honest,” and will bear it onward, in the fair record of history, as long as that name shall be read? Who has a better right to those appellations than he who, through years of public service and party strife, never incurred a suspicion of the purity of his motives or the integrity of his life, but who, through all political changes, retained the profound respect of those who opposed him most? Who is more worthy of the title than he who has won so largely the confidence

and affection not only of those among whom he has lived, but of those who have never seen his face or heard his voice? For when, on Wednesday last, the tidings circulated through our city that John Davis was no more, a sudden shock, an overpowering sense of bereavement, passed from bosom to bosom, as when some dear and honored personal friend has been stricken down; when the same sad tidings were borne upon the electric wires, from city to city and village to village, the mournful expressions have come back to us on the printed sheet, "a great and good man has fallen," "a shining light among the resplendent luminaries of the republic is extinguished," "the honest man and politician is gone." Let me endeavor, then, to show—feebly and imperfectly it must be; for how can the mind, amidst its pressing cares, and after such a shock as we all have received, recover at once its tone of calmness and its capacity to do justice to a subject like this?—let me show some of the grounds of this wide confidence and affection which he inspired. Your own familiar acquaintance with the peculiarities of his character and the habits of his life, will supply the rest.

Born in the neighboring town of Northboro', January 13th, 1787, he was fortunate in the condition of his birth, and in every circumstance of his early life. For, although this condition did not differ from that which is common, and these circumstances were no better than those of hundreds among us, they were precisely such as are adapted to form the finest traits of the New-England character. Influences from with-

out and within, home and its associations, the changing aspects and occupations of the country, the habits of an intelligent and thoughtful community,—all served to give a direction to this character, and develop it into manly dignity and proportions. Descended of a strong-minded, sober race, simple in their manners, and softened by the more cheerful modes of life which had been engrafted on the sterner practices of the old Puritans, he received those impressions which remain through every period and every change of our being. Under the parental roof he acquired that reverence for the great truths of our religion which lies at the foundation of all consistency and uprightness of character, without which virtue is but an empty name, and religious sensibility a momentary impulse. From a child, a profound reverence for the Creator was an element of his life. Reared in the principles and the spirit of a simple and rational religion, his admiration for the character of the Savior was perfect, and his respect for that religion profound. I have not heard that an idle or irreverent expression ever fell from his lips. I do not believe there was ever a time when a lie, in any shape and for any purpose, was not an impossibility with him, and when an immoral or a mean action was not his abhorrence.

Here, then, he grew, in the midst of country scenes, with associations and memories and attachments to country life which never forsook him. His habits, and the influences by which he was surrounded, were well adapted to develop his best powers. The daily occupations of an agricultural life hardened his frame, and