

"Eulogy For A Postman"

Carroll County Times Article for 30 July 2000

By Jay a. Graybeal

Rev. Dr. Hugh Latimer Elderdice, Sr., was deeply involved with the Westminster Theological Seminary and Western Maryland College for many years. As a minister he was occasionally asked to make remarks at a funeral. Several of his eulogies survive in the Historical Society's manuscript collection, including one for Charles A. Gernand delivered on April 2, 1935:

"We are assembled in this house of mourning to pay the last tribute of respect to the name & memory of Charles Addison Gernand.

His casket covered with beautiful but fading flowers reminds us once more of the Trinity of Earthly Existence: Meeting, Loving, Parting.

For 73 years he lived, loved and labored in the flesh - Most of that time in Westminster - at first in private business, then for 31 years in Government Service, and finally 4 years in retirement.

As an employee of the P.O. his face & form were familiar & friendly sights on our streets and in our doorways for more than 3 decades. Sometimes driving the truck in Parcel Post Delivery and sometimes walking from house to house to distribute letters.

One of the most unique and pleasant memories I have of this mail carrier is that of seeing him climbing the Seminary Hill to my home. He was frequently followed by half a dozen dogs that stopped when he stopped, and started when he started: and this strange proceeding continued over the entire route in our section of the city. When asked how he fed or petted them to win such a faithful company of canine assistants, his reply was: 'They simply adopted me. When I lift the lid of the mail box at the corner of Main & Union Sts, the sound is heard by a dog at the other end of Union St. and he comes leaping toward me. This is the signal for several more along the way to join him.' A homely illustration, yet an idea to the trust & confidence and affection which he also won from human beings.

For proof of the esteem with which he was held by his employers, is the fact that after he had reached the age of retirement his time was extended twice. His record for efficiency and fidelity was such that both the Headquarters in Washington and the local P.O. in Westminster gladly unite in their final commendation; 'Charles Addison Gernand! Well done! good and faithful Servant!'

His 31 years of service were followed by 4 years of retirement. This was for him a sad and distressing experience. It was hard to wean him away from his accustomed tasks. So long as health permitted, he arose at the same early hour that had for so many years called him to his post of duty, and walked over his old route, looking regretfully at every familiar door bell.

He also suffered for years a physical affliction - deafness. Only those who are thus handicapped can understand and appreciate his anxiety and embarrassment. Not able to hear the conversation in their presence, they are sensitive-fearing that the speakers are making personal remarks. They stay away from public assemblies and even claim that church attendance is a discomfort. Outgrown his years of activity and unable to hear voices of friends or the song of birds, he lived in a world-almost alone. Lonesomeness is one of the heaviest burdens to bear.

Then came his last sickness - 5 weeks fighting an incurable disease - what then? 'When he is old and forsaken, Withered and shaken, What can an old man do but die?'

His record as a Citizen his standard of morality, his attitude toward the Church, his recognition of his relations to his Creator, all these are an open book - Known and read by all men who were his comrades. No word of mine can add thereto nor take therefrom.

Insofar as did justly, loved Mercy & Walked humbly with his God 'let us imitate his example; wherein he failed, let us try to avoid his mistakes.' 'Be to his Virtues very kind, Be to his faults a little blind.' We are to judge not lest we be judged.

We commit his house of clay to its original dust, and its guest for 73 to the God who loaned him to us. Assured that 'the Judge of all the earth' will do right. 'He's too wise to err, too good to be unjust' Death is the one touch of sorrow that makes all men kin.

So to the surviving members of his immediate family circle, all this assembly unites in expressing deep sympathy and prayers for that comfort which can come alone from Him who is the burden? bearer of every sorrowful soul. 'Cast thy burden on the Lord and He will sustain thee.'

To all of us here - in the enjoyment of health, employment, and the blessings of our home, comes this another warning - so often heard so soon unheeded: 'Be ye therefore ready for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man Cometh.' Therefore, 'What I say unto you, I say unto all watch'."

Following the service, Mr. Gernand's daughter, Lucile Bankard requested an autographed copy of the eulogy "to perpetuate them in our family Bible." Dr. Elderdice's remarks paint an interesting portrait of small town mail carrier. He also tells us that the stereotypical image of a postman beset by dogs was not always the case, especially for one local mailman.

Photo caption: Rev. Dr. Hugh Latimer Elderdice (center) posed with his family in front of their new home at 75 W. Green St., Westminster, in 1932. Several years later Dr. Elderdice presented a eulogy of Westminster postman Charles A. Gernand. Historical Society of Carroll county, gift of Dorothy Elderdice.