

Dr. Beecher's three Sermons on *Wm. Jenks.*
National Prosperity.

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Go....Teach all Nations....Matt. xxviii. 19.

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VOL. III.

SERMONS LIV. LV. & LVI.

By **LYMAN BEECHER, D. D.**

BOSTON.

THE GOSPEL THE ONLY SECURITY FOR EMINENT AND ABIDING NATIONAL PROSPERITY.

JEREMIAH, ix. 23, 24.—*Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches : But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth : for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.*

At the time this inspired admonition was given, the Jewish nation had become uncommonly wicked. Instead of relying on the favor of Heaven, they confided in their knowledge, wealth, power, and political wisdom. Their prophets warned them of the divine displeasure and of approaching judgments, but these warnings passed unheeded as the idle wind. What, said they, has a nation, so wise and powerful, to fear? Let the prophets mind their trade, and take care of the world to come, and we will take care of this; for religion and politics have no sort of connection.

To rebuke such impiety the text was spoken. "Thus saith the **LORD.**" It is no philosopher that speaks; but **GOD.** No doubtful theory is announced; but eternal truth. No vain experiment is recommended; but the wisdom which is from above. "Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches : But let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth : for in these things I delight, saith the Lord." Cease from your vain confidence in learning, wealth, and power, and put your trust in that knowledge of my character and government, which shall purify the heart and secure my protection and blessing.

The same propensity to confide in man for national prosperity, and to forget God and the influence of his government, has manifested itself in every age. And no nation was ever, by its location, government, and great prosperity, more tempted to do this than ours. Our territory is vast, our soil bountiful, our institutions free, our intellect unshackled, our physical power vigorous, our enterprise untiring, our numbers multiplying beyond example, our fleets and armies are skilful and brave, while our colleges and schools are

multiplying, and our attainments in science and the arts fast coming into honorable competition with the first nations of Europe. Indeed we possess the elements of the most powerful nation that ever lived, with ample room to grow, and nurture to sustain. Our relative condition is also sublimely interesting. We are surrounded by the ruins and the shaking of other nations, who have gloried in themselves and not in God,—whose monitory exhortations come to us across the deep, that we trust not in man, but in the living God. The text inculcates the doctrine,

THAT THE MORAL INFLUENCE OF THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT IS INDISPENSABLE TO EMINENT AND ABIDING NATIONAL PROSPERITY.

In the illustration of this doctrine we propose to consider,

I. *The inefficacy of some of the common grounds of confidence ; and,*

II. *The certain efficacy of the Gospel to secure eminent and abiding national prosperity.*

I. The cultivation of intellect has been relied on. Theorists have said, that knowledge and virtue are the foundation and security of republican institutions ; but they have taken it for granted, that knowledge and virtue are inseparable. Hence, throughout our land, a great enthusiasm for learning has gone forth ; and legislators, and philosophers, and poets, have vied with each other in praise of schools and literary institutions. And truly they are means without which no nation can be free and happy. But, for purposes of restraint and reformation, mere knowledge is nugatory. There are no moral qualities in intellect ; nor is there in science any moral power to govern or purify the heart—the source of all the evils which afflict humanity, and which hitherto have baffled all human efforts. Those countries and ages which have been most distinguished for science and the fine arts, have also been distinguished for voluptuousness and crime ; thus evincing that the era of moral dissolution may tread hard upon that of the highest intellectual culture. This indeed does not prove that knowledge corrupts ; but it demonstrates its impotency to purify, amid the powerful temptations which attend the ascent to national greatness.

2. Reason, upon which, from age to age, the hopes of so many have hung, has given equal evidence of its impotency to unite moral purity with national prosperity. It has never been able to develop the character of God, or the precepts and sanctions of his moral government, nor to preserve even the knowledge of a revelation, or repel the invasion of idolatry, and imposture, and superstition. What can reason accomplish, now, towards dispelling the darkness which for ages has rested on three fourths of the human family ? It is, compared with the moral illumination of the Gospel, the effort of a rush-light to compete with the orb of day in scattering the darkness which enshrouds the earth. The efforts and failures of reason to elevate nations to permanent prosperity had been protracted through four thousand years, when, “ after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.”

3. Alike impotent have been the efforts of philosophy to reform mankind.

The philosophers did not reform even themselves. "Do you think," says Cicero, "that those precepts of morality had any influence, except in a very few instances, upon the men who speculated, wrote, and disputed concerning them? No: who is there of all the philosophers whose mind and manners were conformed to the dictates of right reason? Who of them ever made his philosophy the law and rule of his life, and not merely an occasion of displaying his own ingenuity? On the contrary, many of them have been slaves to the vilest lusts." The boasted illumination of their philosophy extended only to a favored few of the wealthiest in society; while for the mass of mankind it had no instruction, formed no plans, indulged no hopes, expressed no desires.

Socrates, according to Plato, says, "You may resign all hope of reforming the manners of men, unless it please God to send some person to instruct you." And Plato himself says, "Whatever is set right in the present ill state of the world, can be done only by the interposition of God."

The testimony of such men is unanswerable. We are surrounded by the effects of Christianity; but they felt the midnight in which they were enveloped, and the impotency of mere human efforts to restrain the depravity of man. The middle and lower classes of society were out of the question, until the Gospel brought its glad tidings to the poor, and originated institutions for the efficacious instruction of the world.

4. Again, national wealth has been regarded as the perfection of prosperity. But, instead of being able to give perpetuity to the golden harvest, it has, in all ages, been the most active and powerful cause of national corruption and ruin. The power of voluntary self-denial is not equal to the temptation of an all-surrounding abundance; and no instance has yet occurred, in which national voluptuousness has not trod hard upon the footsteps of national opulence, destroying moral principle and patriotism, debasing the mind and enervating the body, and preparing men to become, like the descendants of the Romans, effeminate slaves. All which is done to stimulate agriculture, commerce, and the arts, is, therefore, without some self-preserving moral power, but providing fuel for the fire which is destined to consume us. The greater our prosperity the shorter its duration, and the more tremendous our downfall, unless the moral power of the Gospel shall be exerted to arrest those causes which have destroyed other nations.

5. Nor is military power at all a safer ground of confidence than wealth. It is at best, in this world of wrong and violence, but a necessary evil. An evil, too, of awful magnitude in its influence upon national morality; and an engine which may as easily be applied, and has as often been applied, to overthrow, as to defend the liberties of mankind.

But were the resources of knowledge, wealth, and power, even more efficacious, an hundred fold, than experience permits us to believe, still they could not shield us against the retributions of that government which God administers over nations, according to their deeds. What can the most powerful nations do to avert the just judgments of the Almighty? Where are the nations of antiquity?—Gone—dashed in pieces as a potter's vessel. The walls of Babylon—the treasures of Egypt—the might of Alexander—were no defence. Once the Pope could wield a force equal to that of ancient Rome. Did he but stamp his foot, all Europe awoke, and rushed to arms. He held the world in vassalage. He sat as god in the temple of God. But the

arm of his power is now palsied: and, shorn of his locks, he is comparatively weak as another man.

The military despotism of France threatened once the liberties of the world. If ever there was a mighty man who might glory in his might, it was Bonaparte, when he drove upon Russia the most powerful force ever wielded by one man. But Russia, sustained by her armies and her climate, stood, while the stars in their courses fought against the invader.

6. Political wisdom, the boast and confidence of nations, is on many accounts unavailing to secure and perpetuate national prosperity. It aims only at secular results and not at moral purity, and must ever be attended with great uncertainty in regard to the effect of measures on the innumerable multitudes of minds that are to be influenced. So that political science, so called, is often but a series of ingenious conjectures. The younger Pitt formed two gigantic coalitions to check the power of Bonaparte, both of which were dashed, and ended in its augmentation. The dependance of great events on trivial circumstances which no human foresight can perceive, renders, often, the wisest plans abortive: while the agency of God in the government of the world may in a moment baffle and turn to foolishness the best-concerted schemes of man. Haman planned wisely for the destruction of Mordecai; but the hand of God brought the mischief intended for another upon his own head. The brethren of Joseph planned wisely to prevent the accomplishment of his dreams; while, in the hand of God, the very things they did to hinder, secured their accomplishment.

The dominion of the passions, also, over reason and judgment, renders human foresight and policy a matter of uncertainty. Wisdom is no certain guarantee against passion. Nothing is more common than for a sudden gust of anger to shipwreck every hope of the most judicious calculation. Those whom God would destroy, he can give up to infatuation:—a state of mind in which passion guides the helm, and swells the sail, and drives furiously to destruction. Nations, like volcanoes, possess within themselves the materials of ruin: and for God to take off his hand, and give them up, is certain destruction. These, however, are dangers incident chiefly to the connection of nations with each other, or to times of revolution and civil commotion. But even in seasons of tranquillity, there are evils in every community, which no human laws or municipal regulations can control. Laws cannot compel benevolent dispositions, or purify motives, or repress selfishness, or ambition, or avarice, or envy, or pride, or voluptuousness. They are restricted to the government of actions—and of these, to such only as can be commanded and enforced, or forbidden and punished—constituting but a small portion of the good or evil on which the prosperity or destruction of social enjoyment depends. And in the event of transgression, such actions only can be punished as are capable of proof. The law has no omniscient eye to detect, no almighty hand to arrest and punish transgression. Nothing but the government of God—its laws—its sanctions—its dispositions—and its universal and infallible administration—is adequate to the emergencies of this sin-destroyed world. The malady is in the heart; and nothing human can expel, or subdue, or stand before its power. Throw obstructions in its course, and its impatient floods accumulate, and press upon their barriers, till they undermine, or overwhelm, and sweep them away. Bind with green withs or new cords the giant depravity of man, and they are sundered as flax touched by the fire. Try by amuse-

ment to divert the monster from his work of death, and you do but fill the cup of oblivion to all that is good, and raise in the house of mirth the syren song that allures but to destroy. Set in array, as Papal and Pagan lawgivers have done, the terrors of superstition, and, in the despotism which follows, you form a beast of seven heads and ten horns, whose infernal wisdom has amplified all antecedent modes of debasing and tormenting mankind. And if, to expel from the earth this anomaly of mischief, you send out a crusade of atheists and infidels, experience has evinced that their reign of terror so much surpasses other forms of wickedness and modes of torment, as to render popery and a military despotism comparative blessings. God, my hearers, the omniscient, the almighty God, can alone administer an efficacious moral government over nations—and he only by that Gospel which is “glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and good-will to men.”

We are now to show,

II. *That the Gospel is able to conduct nations to eminent and abiding prosperity.*

It was devised and bestowed upon mankind for this purpose—containing in its ample provisions the promise of the life that now is as well as of that which is to come : and it is, in all its moral tendencies, eminently adapted to the ends for which it was designed.

It addresses powerfully the most efficient springs of human action—hope and fear—the desire of good and the dread of evil. The rigor of law would exasperate and drive to desperation a world of sinners ; while the Gospel—with the sword of justice and the sceptre of mercy—enters the world to preach deliverance to the captives, and to set at liberty them that are bound. It throws upon the hopes and fears of men an intensity of motive, in the mingled and balanced influence of justice and mercy, severity and kindness, affording the highest moral excitement which can possibly be applied to the human mind. The glories of heaven allure, and the terrors of the Lord alarm. The terms of pardon—filial sorrow for sin and affectionate reliance on Christ—preclude despondency and elevate hope ; while all the spirit-stirring truths of the Gospel are secured from oblivion, and made permanent and plain in a written revelation—capable of translation into every language of man, and containing, in its ample provisions, an institution for the religious instruction of mankind, simple, cheap, and efficacious—reconciling the religious education of the world with the avocations of labor, by setting apart one day in seven for that end, and an order of men who shall be exclusively devoted to the work ; securing in this way the continuance and repetition of that instruction upon which the moral purity of the world so eminently depends, and by which the Holy Spirit operates to restrain, to convince of sin, and to reconcile an alienated world to God.

The Scriptures confirm the views we have given of the adaptation and power of the Gospel to reclaim and bless mankind. It is described as the power of God and the wisdom of God ; as the highest possible exhibition of his goodness—the riches of the goodness of God—the brightness of his glory—as the exhibition of all the power of motive which is possible—rendering, when the Gospel fails, reformation hopeless.

Already has the Gospel given good evidence of its power, and an earnest of its future achievements. No other moral cause has made so great and

so benign an impression upon this dark and miserable world. Commencing in the ministry of a single individual, and sustained by the enterprise of twelve disciples, it urged its silent career, amid flames, and tortures, and death, until, at the close of the third century, it triumphed.

The effect produced upon the laws and institutions of the Roman empire by Christianity is the greatest which was ever effected without violence. Partial as was the spread of Christianity—imperfect as was the knowledge of it—and limited as was its efficacy upon the heart—and transient as was its lustre—so soon eclipsed by superstition and the return of barbarian ignorance, yet, to this day, is the difference great and manifest between the worst portions of Christendom and the total darkness that rests on all the earth beside. The hideous spectacles of Pagan impurity and cruelty have given place to monuments of Christian love. And if this partial, momentary experiment produced such changes, what may not be expected when the religion of the Gospel shall pervade every palace, and cottage, and heart on the globe?

We have another evidence of the life-giving power of the Gospel at the Reformation. Gradually it had been sequestered, until, under the abused name of Christianity, a system of idolatry had been reared up, as impure almost and as fierce and cruel as Paganism itself. But no sooner did the Bible reappear, in the translations made and scattered by the reformers, and the system of evangelical instruction, so long suspended, go into operation, than half Europe burst her chains, and experienced a moral resurrection.

Other instances are now multiplying upon us of the civilizing and purifying power of the Gospel, among heathen nations, and those too the most debased. In South Africa, among the Hotentots, the purities and charities of civilized life are rising up under evangelical culture. At Sierra Leone, also, orderly, decent, and happy settlements are formed, and churches too are established, giving evidence of elevated piety—composed of beings rescued a few years since from the chains, and darkness, and moral corruption of slave-ships.

The change at the Sandwich Islands, also, is as unquestionable as it is wonderful and joyful. A nation has been born in a day. A reverse of secular and moral condition has been achieved, greater, and more entire and benign, on the whole population, than was ever before witnessed on earth in so short a time.

But we need not go abroad for monuments of the benign influence of the Gospel upon the temporal condition of man. Our pilgrim fathers came hither that they might enjoy religious liberty, and make a fair experiment of what the Gospel could do to bless mankind. And the religious, civil, and social prosperity of New England is the result. The poor we have ever with us—but among them who are the *virtuous* poor? Precisely those who venerate the Sabbath, and attend stately upon the worship of God. While the *vicious* poor will be found, among those whose religious education has been neglected, and upon whom the Bible, and the Sabbath, and the Gospel have exerted little influence: and if you traverse the whole land, those portions most distinguished for Bibles and a devout attention upon Gospel ordinances, will be found proportionably distinguished by whatsoever things are pure, and lovely, and of good report.

The reforming influence of the Gospel, as developed in Sabbath Schools, also gives triumphant testimony to its power. The Recorder of London stated, at a public meeting, that of two thousand children educated in Sao-

both Schools, only seven who had been in them over fourteen days had ever been brought before him for crime; and that too among a class of citizens peculiarly degraded.

These fruits of the Bible are in perfect accordance with its predictions. I need not repeat them at large. They are many and express. It is predicted that God will destroy the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil spread over all nations—that his knowledge shall cover the earth as the waters the sea—that all shall know him from the greatest to the least—and the people be all righteous—that wars shall cease—that benevolence shall supplant selfishness and ferocity—and that the earth, exuberant in its supplies, shall nevertheless be filled with purity and joy.

I have only to add, that all other systems of moral influence depend simply upon their own unaided strength; while the Gospel is attended by the special presence of God and the power of his Holy Spirit—giving to it an efficacy infinitely beyond that of simple argument or eloquence. Thus attended, the Gospel wrought its wonders of mercy on the day of Pentecost, and during the first ages of Christianity. Thus attended, it has, in these latter days and these ends of the earth, often, in the course of a few weeks or months, changed the entire aspect of a neighborhood or town—introducing a moral elevation that gladdens angels. And thus attended, this same Gospel is capable of breaking every chain of oppression, and renovating a ruined world. Who then, that loves his country—that loves mankind—would, by example or otherwise, hinder the progress of this Gospel? and not rejoice rather in every effort made for extending its blessed influence?

SERMON LV.

PROPRIETY AND IMPORTANCE OF EFFORTS TO EVANGELIZE THE NATION.

JEREMIAH, ix. 23, 24.

If, as has been shown in the preceding discourse, the Gospel only is able to conduct nations to abiding prosperity,—then,

NOTHING IS TO BE FEARED, BUT MUCH IS TO BE HOPED FOR, FROM THE EFFORTS OF PATRIOTS AND CHRISTIANS TO EVANGELIZE THE NATION.

Infidels and profligate men affect great trepidation, lest the efforts made to spread the Gospel should lead to combinations dangerous to our liberties, and rear up another hierarchy, and bring back priestcraft and the dark ages. But do they *really believe* any such thing? Do they fear *any such thing*? Do they not *know*, that wherever the Gospel and its institutions have been most revered, men have been most intelligent, most free from superstition, and most incapable of ecclesiastical domination? Do they not *know*, that superstition and priestcraft have in all climes and ages increased, just in proportion as the moral energy of the Gospel has declined? It is the testimony of history, that principles of civil and religious liberty have always accompanied evangelical religion, and made their most desperate resistance to arbitrary power and achieved their most glorious victories under its auspices. And it is equally true, that there never was a religion