

DISCOURSE

9

MAINLY UPON

THE IMPORTANCE

OF

THE AMERICAN UNION,

BY

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DELIVERED

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STREUBENVILLE, OHIO, Nov. 29, 1850.

REV. W. P. BREED :

Sir :—Having had the pleasure to hear your Thanksgiving Sermon, delivered on Thursday the 28th inst., and being deeply impressed with the pertinency and truthfulness of the views presented, especially those relating to the blessings—social, political and religious—of the Union of the States, the dangers with which that Union has been and is now threatened—and the disastrous results which must follow its disruption ; and believing that a wide spread dissemination of these views at this juncture cannot fail to be useful, we respectfully request a copy of the Sermon for publication.

H. H. LEAVITT, CHARLES C. BEATTY,
WM. M'LAUGHLIN, H. G. COMINGO,
ALEXANDER CONN, JOHN S. DIKE,
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T. S. HENNING, S. H. MELVIN,
 S. H. SHEPLEY.

H. H. LEAVITT, C. C. BEATTY, &c., &c.

Dear Sirs : Your request for a copy of this discourse for the press took me quite by surprise, yet I am induced to comply with it mainly by my high regard for the judgment of those whose names are appended thereto.

Yours truly,

W. P. BREED.

DECEMBER 4, 1850.

DISCOURSE.

In the first chapter of the epistle of James, in the seventeenth verse, God declares that "*Every good gift cometh down from the Father of lights.*"

Have we now during the past year, in any of our various relations, enjoyed one good gift? That gift came to us from that Father, and to Him is due both gratitude in the heart, and a proper external expression of it.

And to a serious minded man, it cannot fail to be a work of solemn interest, as he reaches some milestone in his deathward journey, to climb, as it were, a neighboring hill and take a retrospect of the various stages of his progress through the preceding year, and especially to mark the advent of "good gifts" from "above." Such a view reveals in himself a cluster of miracles. "Has this heart of mine" might he ask "beat on through day and night its appointed *forty millions of pulsations*; passing all the blood of the system through its *one hundred and seventy-five thousand revolutions*? Have all these bones and muscles, all these mysterious nerves with their multitudinous ramifications (without which the now mighty will were powerless and the whole realm of feeling a blank;) this curiously wrought eye (without which the world were a dark cave, destitute of bright skies, blue oceans, rainbows, green fields, and silver streams;) and this strange, delicate adjustment of matter and spirit, soul and body, by which Reason retains the helm and steers its bark clear of all the shoals and breakers of lunacy; all these, been shielded from injury or serious disturbance; each organ executing promptly its task assigned, and all like converging streams meeting in confluence in the result expressed by that most significant term *comfort*; and this too, amidst scores of antagonising influences, extremes of heat and cold, amidst imprudences and exposures; and to crown all, when the wrong acting of any little one of these wheels might derange the whole and work out that dreadful product, agony? Truly my continued healthful existence is a "good gift," for which thanks be to the ever watchful superintendence of the Father of lights! Add all the other blessings temporal and spiritual each has enjoyed, and that tongue that has no song of praise, that heart that is not filled with gratitude, will experience another miracle from the most High, if He pierce not the one with the arrow of death, and make not the other cleave to the roof of the mouth!

To our *community*, the past has been a year of health, growth, and general prosperity. Seated here in this beautiful amphitheatre, upon the green bank of the Ohio, nearly seven thousand souls have been fed, clothed and furnished with all the necessaries, and with many of the luxuries of life—each sitting under his own vine and fig tree, none making him afraid.

Owing to the faithfulness of our city authorities, we have enjoyed a marked diminution of disorder and annoyance from a class of persons who find an inglorious and grovelling pleasure, in making the night hideous with their noise, and property and life insecure.

And these noble hills that rise around us, as "the mountains round about Jerusalem," have not only defended us from storms that elsewhere have prostrated alike the strong forest tree and the fragile grain stalk; have not only conducted off the electric charges from the clouds, receiving into their own bosoms the thunderbolts apparently destined for us, but have served to form a cordon of sanitary outposts, embosoming among them the elements of health, and shielding from the attacks of disease. And when the Almighty Sovereign bid the Pestilence down upon us like a dark bird of prey, He suffered it to bear away in its dread talons, only three of our citizens in a thousand!

Let us neither forget these mercies, nor mistake their source. They are *good gifts*, and they come down from the Father of lights.

And if we climb these hills, and look away to the north, or trace the river as it forms our eastern or southern boundary, or turn our eyes towards our western border, we see the smoke ascending from a rapidly growing multitude of dwellings, towns and cities. There lie the fields from which the scythe has this year gathered more than *thirty millions of bushels of wheat*, almost fifteen bushels for every man, woman and child in the commonwealth, worth, it may be twenty millions of dollars; besides thirty millions of bushels of corn, to say nothing of other products. On every stream is a line of mills, working on day and night, to complete what Nature has begun, transforming into flour what Nature has transformed into grain. And yonder in those towns and cities a ready market rewards the husbandman for his toil, and through him pours the life blood into every vein and artery of industrial activity; making the hammer to ring on the anvil, the shuttle to hum through the loom, the plane to go merrily over the boards, and the ploughman to sing with joy and hope as he turns again the soil with his bright share. Thus Ohio, with her fast swelling population, rising importance and influence, vanishing debt; her advance in the mechanic arts and agriculture, her public schools and colleges, art unions and observatories, Ohio, but yesterday the coarse-clad daughter of the backwoodsman is become a Queen among the Commonwealths, hardly now condescending to take the second place and that only for a time.

All these blessings form an object upon which our eyes should be fixed in heart-felt gratitude.

But after all they are, as it were, but a single grape of a cluster. A grape in its spherical form and native purple is a beautiful thing, and constructed of elements wrought into curious, wonderful combinations. All the wisdom and chemistry of mankind could not give us a perfect imitation. Yet whence all its beauty and glory? Comes it not all through that little stem by which it is linked to all its round-cheeked sisters of the cluster? Break up that cluster, scatter its members, and how soon they wrinkle and decay! If then at the end of a stormy week, a swelling purple grape should lift its voice in thanksgiving to its maker, would not the chief item of its praise be that the cluster was unbroken, that the full tide of health and life poured through the whole?

When then Ohio, at the call of her chief magistrate, lifts *her*

voice in thanksgiving, what shall be the burden of her loudest, sweetest song? Is it the large additions to her population, wealth and refinement, advance in the arts and sciences; the health of her citizens, or of her finances; increase of flocks that bleat upon her hills, kine that low in her valleys, the crops that bristle in her fields, or the immense coal beds that underlie the whole? Is it even that the altars of religion are multiplying within her borders and the crowd of worshippers on the increase? No! No! Not one, not all, of these combined. It is, with every christian patriot, that our cluster is unbroken, our Union undestroyed! It is that yet, (though assailed by malignant diseases, by fevers of various character and degrees of virulence,) the great heart of the nation when it beats, sends the national life-blood through all the old veins and arteries from Ohio to South Carolina, from Maine to Louisiana.

For our individual life is merged in the general life. If Ohio be a right arm or a right eye of the nation, what were a right arm, or a right eye, without the rest of the members? If some earthquake had submerged our sisters of the Republic and left Ohio a solitary islet, from whose shores the scattered relics of the wreck might be seen floating by, would it be her glory or her ruin?

Oh! my brethren, whatever else is doubtful, of one thing we may be sure, that only in the integrity and prosperity of the whole, can there be prosperity or safety for any one State, or any individual citizen of a State. Disunion opens before the eye an abyss from which every one must shrink back in horror. For us, Disunion and desolation are synonymous terms, and all disunionists are desolationists.

We are but one ship, stately and mighty it is true; but let no one be so credulous as to dream that its very wreck, its scattered beams and spars would yet be stately and mighty!

I seem to see the exultation beaming in the eyes of despotic colossal Russia, of the dark-minded red-handed land of Haynau, as, standing like great political wreckers, they wag their heads at the mighty fragments of our broken bark. I seem to hear their shouts as they bear away our national banner torn by the gales, to hang it as a precious trophy above the altar of their God of despotism! I seem to hear their taunts, "How art thou fallen mighty one! How art thou cut down to the earth! Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, the worm is spread under thee, and worms cover thee!"

And well might St. Petersburg and Vienna light all their lamps in illumination to see the chaos which must follow civil war and disunion here. With what zest would they enjoy our controversies about a *dividing line*. This of course we must have if we are to separate. A joint committee of the Northern and Southern confederacies must undertake the delicate task of dividing the Ohio and cutting the Mississippi in two.

This done, the North now separated from the South upon the very question of slavery, could not help feeling, besides a strong inclination, a kind of natural right to favor, in every possible way, the escape of slaves across that line. Hence every point of that line must be strongly guarded by the South. But still slaves would escape, and they would be pursued. Hence in self-defence, the north must meet every Southern garrison with another. And I ask, in the name of common sense, how long would northern and southern troops, in the spirit enkindled by the slave question, look each other inactively in the face?

Besides would a politico-geographical line prevent boats from crossing it? Have not the States from Pennsylvania to Iowa, both a deep interest in the waters of the lower Mississippi, and an inherent right to the navigation of them? And that right they must and will exercise, so long as there remain in them one spark of enterprise, and one grain of energy. Still in case of division it is certain there would be no scrupulous avoidance of tampering with the slaves, and assisting in their escape. And here opens a wilderness of discussions and adjustment of terms with this State and that; separate systems of treaties, made only to be broken, and broken only to produce bickering and war.

Nothing can be more certain than that even if we could peaceably set out, as we certainly cannot, with, say, two separate confederacies, war would follow and be their perpetual curse and final overthrow.

A southern Senator, intellectually one of the greatest of men, declared openly in the Senate that he never spoke to, nor noticed in any way his anti-slavery fellow-members; holding them as his foes and the foes of his country. If such feelings find residence in the bosom of honorable Senators in times of union and external peace, tell me if you can, how fiercely passion would rage in times of disunion and war! The bloody records of Spanish history for the last twenty years, the commotions and ruin of South America, and the dreadful chaotic anarchies of Mexico, would all be naught in comparison with the horrid scenes which our hills, valleys, and plains would be doomed to witness.

Ah, well might the Spirit of despotism rejoice as the ship appeared upon its shores fraught with the precious tidings that American fields, but yesterday waving with golden harvests, were now running with crimson streams from American veins, poured out by American hands! that our hill-sides that so lately echoed back the bleating of flocks and lowing of kine, the whistle of the plough-boy, and the sharp ring of the woodsman axe, were now echoing the fierce battle shout, the crack of musketry and roar of artillery!

An instructive chapter in the history of disunion is given in the Bible. Under David the Israelitish name became a terror from the Nile to the Euphrates. But in half a century after, in an evil hour, the North and South were divided, and Jerusalem and Samaria became the capitals of distinct governments. The consequence was that, one time or another, every plain between Samaria and Jerusalem flowed, not with "milk and honey," but with the blood of the sons of Abraham, shed by Abraham's sons. At length Nineveh came down and carried Israel into returnless captivity, while Judah sat smiling by; herself soon to be carried away by Babylon to hang her harps upon upon the willows and dig her graves upon the banks of the Euphrates.

The history of Greece furnishes another chapter not less instructive. Athens and Sparta dwelt in the same lovely country, under the same blue skies, breathing the same balmy air, twin-sisters by nature, and, in union, omnipotent among their neighbors. But here, too, the North and South quarrelled, and Persia sent supplies to one, until she had well nigh overwhelmed the other, and then changed sides and joined the other; and thus she played off one against the other, rejoicing to see them weakening and destroying themselves, until at length they were both ready to fall before the first powerful assailant.

And how gladly would more than one foreign state replenish the coffers or ranks of the North against the South, or the South against the North, until both became a desolation!

That there would be no lack of readiness both to invite and to grant European interference is beyond the reach of doubt. Already such things are talked of by incendiary politicians. Already the monstrous proposition has been made to transform our Republic into an Oligarchy to secure a *balance of power*.

And on the other side of the Atlantic, angry words have been uttered in high places in reference to certain American doctrines. Not infrequent manifestations appear of both jealousy and apprehension, in view of our almost magical advancement in power and influence. Whisperings have been heard of even a European Diplomatic Convention to consult about American conduct and claims.

Further: We have now an army comparatively of mere nominal magnitude. For now the nation has only to utter her voice, and an army of volunteers will speedily plant our national banner upon the walls of Monterey, Vera Cruz, and even of Mexico herself. And the whole expense of this small army is divided among our thirty-one Commonwealths. But draw the line of disunion, and the army of each fragment, must be very largely increased, and the burden borne by each fragment alone.

And the expenses of all the other branches of government would be the same or greater for each separate part, as for the whole, the burden of which, each alone must bear.

We may thus see, even at a hasty glance, that disunion, among its infinitude of ills, must oppress us with that incubus that crushes the life out of a nations comfort, a heavy, burdensome taxation. And it is equally obvious that while grim Taxation would come looking in at every door and window, at every turn thrusting in our faces its multitudinous demands, our ability to meet any one of those demands would be greatly diminished. The same earthquake that opens an abyss between the North and South, must shatter our commerce. We should no longer be able to say with the united voice of twenty millions, to England, France, and the rest, "such and such are our terms of commercial intercourse with you." But divided, and hostile, each portion must be a *begger* for favors which now we *demand*. Each would be tempted, and each compelled, to make great sacrifices in order to outbid its rival for European favors. Trade in every town and village of our land would receive a ruinous shock; and the sovereign American mechanic, who now does his work, and with a feeling of manly independence boldly looks his employer in the face, be he lord or duke, and *demand*s his pay, would be transformed into the cringing sycophant of other lands, who first begs for an hours employment, and then begs for the pitiful recompense.

We have recently been told, that even in the proud court of St. James, no one among the great crowd of jewelled, titled, ambassadors attracts so many eyes, as the simple robed representative of our Republic. But let Satan in the form of Disunion come, and our rival Ambassadors would soon find themselves occupying the lowest seat. Seven of them would be seen clinging to the skirts of some proud Minister, beseeching his influence for them with the Queen.

Now, under the benign influence of our government, the three millions of communicants in evangelical churches, and their friends, are able and willing to contribute annually some *ten millions* of dollars for the various purposes of religion. Now, in every foreign field, the American name is known and loved by many happy converts in christian

churches, and children in christian schools. And as our commerce increases, our trade becomes more flourishing, our immeasurable fields come more and more under the dominion of the plough, and yield larger and larger tribute to the scythe; and upon all the spirit of God comes down in power, the American church will go forth into all the world and win victories for the Redeemer, with a high hand, and an outstretched arm.

But let disunion and civil war come, and her right arm will at once be shattered. It is a common result of earthquakes to open fissures in the earth, which drink dry, streams that hitherto had watered and blessed the country for many a happy mile. And to the streams of benevolence, especially those streams that pour themselves over heathen lands, all civil commotions and revolutions are fatal earthquakes. The last French Revolution dried up in that land many such streams.

We are not alone then, this day, in thanking God that no civil earthquake has spread desolation in our land. I seem to see the whole company of American Missionaries in Asia, in Africa, in the isles of the sea, among our red men of the forest; all the converts and the great multitude of children in their schools, lifting their hands this day with us, rejoicing with joy unspeakable, in the continued existence and prosperity of our united nation!

There is one more phase of this great subject, which I would present. What if a separation should result in the dreadful overthrow of the South, heaping master and slave together in one common ruin? Is this desirable? Is it preferable to even slavery itself? Now slavery is doomed. But then the doom would be the slave's. No! it could gratify no one with the proper feelings of a man, as he turned his eyes southward to see the smoke of that fair portion of our Republic ascending up like the smoke of a furnace, and to know that beneath its dark shadow, master and slave were engaged in mutual destruction.

South Carolina by means of exhausting vigilance, by means of a police system that converts every citizen into a soldier, (in times of excitement not excepting even the minister of the gospel) together with the knowledge that in case of emergency the power of the arm that laid Mexico prostrate at our feet, would be added to that of the master, is able to hold her three hundred thousand slaves in check.

But let them have their southern confederacy, burdened with all the expenses of government, and they would find their arm shorn of three-fourths of its power, and the slave correspondingly encouraged to rise in insurrection.

Besides, northern efforts, impeded now by many checks, would then leave no point in the borders of that confederacy unvisited, assisting slaves to escape, or exciting them to rise, and together cast off their yoke.

And that they are capable of enthusiastic excitement beyond all control has been demonstrated. Some years ago a plan for insurrection was discovered in Charleston, South Carolina. Some twenty of the conspirators were executed. But so filled with enthusiasm were they, that they went up to the gallows and put the ropes about their necks, with exultation, shouting, "now we are going to a land of freedom!"

So powerfully and so generally did this spirit infuse itself into the minds of the negroes, that they went in crowds through the streets of that city, singing and shouting in almost a phrensy of excitement, and some of them even falsely accused themselves of participation in the scheme, in order that they might be hung with their brethren!

Now with three millions of material so inflammable, increasing in rapid ratio, awed no longer by the power of the Union, and urged on by every means northern ingenuity could desire,—adieu to peace and safety! May the time never come when one half of this country shall be called to look upon the other smoking in ruins! We desire the liberation of the master and the slave, but not the destruction of either by the other. *devise*

Upon this thanksgiving day then, let us lift our voices and bless God that we are yet on the hither side of the dread work of disunion; that not one link of the blessed chain that binds the members of our beloved country together is yet snapped; that not one fatal drop of blood has yet been shed in civil war.

Some have been able to look with calm confidence upon the occurrences of this stormy year and say "There is no danger. The storm-spirits are on the keen look-out for extremities, and are ready to retire upon the first appearance of real danger."

Upon all such I call to give thanks to God that the cords that bind us together are so strong, so adamant, that all the trying scenes of this eventful year have not been able even to *endanger* them! Thanks be to God if this be so! For we may well hope, that if we have passed this year, without *danger* even, the future will roll upon us few burdens too heavy to be borne. We may feel assured almost as if an audible voice from heaven declared it, that a nation such as the world has never seen, is rising to power around us.

But when I consider the power and effects of excited passion, how under its maddening influence men will sometimes, to avoid a few ills of earth, plunge by suicide into the acknowledged horrors of the bottomless pit; when I remember the susceptibility of our southern brethren to excitements that for the time outstrip the reason; the mad zeal of demagogues laboring to blow passion into blazing fury; the unparalleled excitement under which Congress assembled, how long before the time the members began to gather, how anxiously every coming car was watched, and with what acclamations each new comer was hailed by the fellows of his faction; the protracted and disgraceful period preceding the organization of the House, during which scenes occurred that called the blush to the cheek of every one who loved his country; the tedious dreadful months that elapsed before a single law was passed, during which madness itself was hardly more violent than the spirit exhibited there, men calling themselves patriots going into the House armed to the teeth with knives and pistols, threats of murder uttered against the man who should propose a certain measure; when I call to mind, that not merely angry and indecorous words were uttered, but even weapons of death drawn in the Senate chamber, hitherto another Areopagus; and finally when I reflect how small a thing, the resolute withdrawal of a single state, the spilling of a single drop of blood, might bring us to the brink of ruin and even cast us in, I cannot feel that we have not been in danger! I feel that our bark has been tossed upon a very angry sea, and that the rocks and breakers have been very nigh!

And if now every spar is safe, every sail unbroken, our banner yet floating untorn at the mast-peak, even though the rocky shore be not yet out of sight, I thank the God of nations who holds the winds of passion also in his fist, and says even to them "thus far and no further."

Yes, let us bless God that we are yet one nation, and that yet the

inexhaustible mines of power and glory may be opened and enjoyed by us.

And may we not trust that the day is breaking? True, men misled or wicked, are still laboring away at the bellows of excitement, willing apparently to set every thing we hold dear in flames, if there remain for them only the prospect of finding a little molten gold in the ashes. But let them hold their conventions and kindle their legislative fires.

“The earth hath bubbles as the water has,
And these are of them.”

The time may come when these men will be viewed in their proper light. The time may come when the actors in these scenes will appear no more comely in the eyes of patriots, than certain “weird sisters” of whom we read,

“So withered and so wild in their attire.”

wreathing their infernal charms around cauldrons bubbling with ingredients no more disgusting than those which fill the cauldrons of weird disunionists. They may do good as standing warnings, a kind of political Lot's wife upon the pages of our history.

We were for a moment startled with the fear lest the sad Fugitive law and the unwise haste of southern pursuers, should kindle even in the cool North, the flames of “Nullification,” (a word as barbarous in Philology, as heterodox in its signification;) lest the people, the source of law and with full power at the ballot box to amend or abolish at will, should arm themselves against an acknowledged law of the land, and thus become the trampers under foot of their own majesty.

But these fears are dissipated. The great mass of the most determined opposers of that law now declare, that while, on the one hand, they will not lift a finger to carry it into active execution, determined rather to suffer all its pains and penalties, neither will they on the other engage in active and treasonable resistance, but in their efforts in opposition confine themselves to means not forbidden by the constitution.

Brethren, we have passed an eventful year. For a time fears were entertained of at least an interruption of our peaceful relations with our ancient ally France. But the cloud passed away. Our President by the confession of all pure-minded, strong-willed, honest and patriotic was cut down in a moment when we least expected it, and an event which sometimes has rent nations with convulsions, the transfer of Government from hand to hand, has taken place without the slightest shock. A new state has been added to our family, uniting the Pacific with the Atlantic, and in her golden soil shadowing forth the golden harvests our Union is destined to gather through the agency of her Pacific children, from the spicy islands and golden shores of the Orient.

But time warns me not to trespass upon your patience: simply let me say in conclusion that if by any of the considerations here suggested—if by means of the subject here and thus presented, our love for the Union shall have been awakened to any new degree; if any here feels stimulated to make additional effort, or offer an additional prayer for its preservation, I feel that something has been done for the cause of patriotism, for the great cause of human rights, for the cause of humanity throughout the world, and for the greatest of all causes, that of the religion of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen and Amen!