

OUR MARTYR PRESIDENT,
ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

VOICES FROM THE PULPIT
OF
NEW YORK AND BROOKLYN.

ORATION
BY
HON. GEO. BANCROFT.

ORATION
AT THE
BURIAL,
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S E R M O N I X.

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“And the Lord blessed Abraham in all things.”—GENESIS xxiv. 1.

A FEW hours since, I came home from witnessing the resurrection of the flag over Sumter's walls, and on our way the arrow of fatal tidings met us and pierced us through. I came in tears to find you all in tears. And to-day I only seek to give utterance, in the broken language of grief, to the artless, spontaneous outgush of our every heart. “I cannot see to read in the valley of the shadow of death,” said Christopher North to his class, when he returned to them their essays unread, a few days after the death of his wife. Nor could I see to write under the shadow of this overwhelming sorrow. Let me, in the most unstudied language, just talk to you about that dear departed *father*, whose form lies but a few leagues off to-day, on its way to the burial.

It is more than two centuries since the civilized world has received a shock like this. I open the page of history and read, that on the 10th of July, 1584, William the

* The above report of an extemporaneous discourse, delivered in the Lafayette avenue Presbyterian Church, on April 23d, is mainly recalled from memory.

Silent, the founder of the Dutch Republic, was passing from his dining-hall to his private apartments, attended by his wife. Near the stairway was an obscure arch sunk deep in the wall, and almost hidden from view. The Prince of Orange had just reached the second of the flight of stairs, when a hired assassin darted out from the dark archway, and standing within a few feet of the prince, discharged a pistol at his heart. Three balls entered his body; one of them rebounded even from the wall beyond! William exclaimed, as he felt the wound, "Oh! my God, have mercy upon this poor people!" In a few moments he breathed his last in the arms of his faithful wife, Louisa of Coligny.

Gérard, the assassin, dashed out of a side door and endeavored to make his escape by a narrow lane to a spot where a horse stood in waiting for him. He stumbled over a pile of rubbish in his path, and before he could rise again he was seized by several halberdiers who had followed him from the house. He was brought at once before the magistrates, was subjected to the most excruciating tortures, and in a few days was condemned to die under the terrible triple agonies of burning, quartering, and decapitation.

No one can read the narrative of the murder of the deliverer of Holland, without being amazed at the coincidence between the crime of Balthazar Gérard and the crime of the brutal Booth. One could almost believe that the American miscreant had learned his horrible part from the Burgundian fanatic. The lofty and magnanimous character of the two illustrious victims—the same cowardly assault upon both when unarmed and unprotected—the same wea-

pon employed—the fact that both the victims were attended by their wives—the method of attempted escape—all these furnish a resemblance that is as startling as if drawn from the realm of a horrible fiction. The crimes were not more coincident than the characters of those who figured in these two foremost assassinations of modern history.

William the Silent was a noble representative of Protestant heroism, Protestant faith, and Protestant liberty. Gérard was the fiendish embodiment of all that was crafty, bigoted, and revengeful in Spanish Popery. Abraham Lincoln was the representative of American Republicanism in its most pure and primitive type. In Booth, the butcher, was incarnated the diabolical spirit of Southern slavery. He is a specimen of the pupils which the “peculiar institution” has graduated for half a century. Proud, indolent, dissipated, licentious, a slave of the wine-cup, and accustomed to the unbridled indulgence of his passions, he was the very man to step forth as at once the representative and the champion of the traitor-confederacy. What Preston Brooks more feebly attempted in the “Freshman class” of slavery, John Wilkes Booth achieved in the “Senior year” of its matured iniquity. This astounding tragedy at Washington is but the legitimate product of the same accursed system that tore down the nation’s standard at Sumter, that massacred the heroic garrison of Fort Pillow, that starved the thousands of Union soldiers at Belle Isle, Andersonville, and on the Charleston race-course, and had been for a century, maiming, and branding, and torturing God’s poor bond-children on innumerable plantations. Abraham Lincoln, holding the pen that

pierced oppression through with its edict of emancipation, is the embodiment of Christian democracy. John Wilkes Booth, wielding the assassin's weapon, is the embodiment of the bowie-knife barbarism of the slaveholding oligarchy. Thanks be to God that the days of that oligarchy are numbered!

But let us turn away from the harrowing crime to its illustrious victim himself. Let us, as a bereaved household, sit down and talk together, in the soft, low accents of affection, about the great, the good, the honest, the patient, the gentle-hearted, the beloved head of our national family, whom God has taken to himself. We are too near his coffin to criticise him; our hearts are yonder in that coffin with him. God knows that when the tidings of his murder first smote me through on that steamer's deck, I could hardly have felt a keener agony if I had heard that my wife or child were gone. So you felt; so millions feel; such will be the pang that will attend this tragedy in its circuit around the globe. No man of our time could be stricken from his orbit that would leave such a startling void; and no man of any time was ever followed to his burial by such myriads of mourners, or laid in a grave that was so literally drenched with a nation's tears. Yes! the poor ploughboy of a Kentucky homestead has a funeral that was not accorded to a Napoleon or a Wellington.

In selecting a passage for the motto of this unpremeditated tribute, I could find scores of lines in God's word that would be appropriate to the eulogy of our martyr-president. But none, perhaps, that could tell more briefly his history than these simple words—"The

Lord blessed Abraham in all things." In blessing our Abraham, God blessed our regenerated country, and the whole household of humanity. Let me point you to some of the crowning mercies of the Divine gift—with devout gratitude to the Heavenly Giver.

I.—And first, God blessed our President with a lowly birth. Abraham Lincoln was thoroughly a man of the people. The common people of America saw the very best that was in themselves when they looked at him. So plebeian a President we have never had. Benjamin Franklin has hitherto been the type-man of American democracy. For remember that our Washington came of gentle blood, and belonged to the colonial aristocracy of Virginia. He had many of the traits of an English country gentleman; his associates were such men as Lord Fairfax, and the patricians of the "Old Dominion." But Lincoln was made of that homely stuff that was wrought into Andrew Jackson and Daniel Webster.

Look for a moment at the career that is photographed in the following dozen lines:—Born in Hardin County, Kentucky, of farmer parentage, on the 12th of February, 1809; his boyhood spent in clearing forests with the woodman's axe; one year only spent in the rudimentary studies of a district school; at the age of nineteen toiling as a hired hand on a Mississippi flat-boat; then a clerk in a country store of Illinois; next a student of law from a few books borrowed in the evening, to be returned on the next morning; in 1834 a member of the State Legislature; in 1846 in the National Congress; through the year 1858 measuring weapons with Douglas in the most protracted and brilliant political canvass yet waged between Amer-

ican debaters; in 1860, chosen triumphantly to the Presidential chair; for four years the central figure in the most stupendous conflict of modern times; re-elected to the Presidency by a voice of the people "like the sound of many waters"; and from that lofty eminence, in the very moment of victory, translated through martyrdom to a seat in history beside our first Washington himself; I ask you, where is a record like unto this in our modern annals? Yet to the last, and through all his wondrous steps of exaltation, he is the same plain, modest, homely, simple-hearted Abraham Lincoln who hewed out rails in an Illinois forest, and "sorted" farmers' letters in a rustic post-office. Since the day when a Corsican lieutenant of artillery presided over a congress of conquered kings at Tilsit, history has recorded no such extraordinary elevation. Napoleon grew dizzy; but honest Lincoln's head never lost its balance. Lifted into the gaze of all Christendom, his calm spirit reposed in a majestic serenity; for he felt that the Hand that raised him thither, held him there with an infinite grasp until the Divine purpose was accomplished. Suppose that, when the coarsely clad boatman of Illinois was floating down the Mississippi in his rude craft, some prophetic angel had told him that he would yet make that river the scene of prodigious exploits, of which he should be the prime controller, and would one day sweep from all that river's bank the gigantic system of human bondage, would he not have smiled at the bare thought as the dream of an enchanter? Yet the dream was fulfilled. To Joseph's sheaf all the other sheaves made obeisance. I count it as an especial mercy that, through all his career, God blessed our Abraham with

true humility ; and kept him as free from selfish ambitions as the lowliest sentinel who ever paced his solitary rounds on a rampart.

Secondly, God blessed our good President with more than an unselfish heart ; He gave him a clear and vigorous head and a most marvellous sagacity. It has been too common to speak of Mr. Lincoln as merely a good, honest man, whom the "accidents" of politics made conspicuous—a man who merely drifted on a current of events that he was powerless to control. Such will not be the verdict of posterity. The next generation will acknowledge that the man who rose from a log cabin to the Presidential chair—who led a vast republic through its wilderness of perilous confusions, and its Red Sea of horrible carnage, with a patience that never gave way, a faith that never faltered, and a sagacity that made never a serious mistake, was a man who has no superior in the American annals. I predict that, fifty years hence, the foremost name in American history will be the name that was signed to the Edict of Emancipation. Napoleon's test of ability was a very simple one—"Who *did* all that?" We apply this test to our departed President, and ask—who has achieved more than Lincoln? who did his life-work better than he? The backwoodsman of Illinois did not lay claim to Hamilton's imperial intellect, yet Hamilton never read events more sagaciously. He did not claim John Jay's profound wisdom, yet Jay never decided more wisely. He did not pretend to Daniel Webster's massive and magnificent oratory ; but Webster never put more truth into a portable form for the common people. Lincoln's speech in the Cooper Institute of New

York, in 1859, was a master-piece of clear trenchant argumentation. With him, common sense did the work of genius. He clove at once to the root of the matter. Some of his homely sayings will live alongside of Benjamin Franklin's. His pleasant jokes had more meaning in them than many another man's pompous harangues.

For example, when Mr. Lincoln wrote to a Kentucky friend these simple words "if slavery is not wrong, then nothing is wrong," he answered in one sentence all the detestable logic of Thornwell and Calhoun. When he said in 1858, "it is impossible for this Union to exist, one-half slave, and the other half free," he announced a truth which previous statesmen had either failed to perceive or else failed to utter. His brief address on the battle-ground of Gettysburgh is sublime in its pathos. His last memorable "Inaugural" will take its place beside the Farewell Address of Washington. The carping *London Times* did not dare to sneer at that. When I read it on the street in a daily journal, I said to myself, "God be praised for a President who can utter God's Word from a Presidential chair!" There are few finer passages in the English language than this oft-quoted sentence, so sonorous in its roll, and so severely true in its portent. "If it is the will of God that this war continue until all the wealth piled by the bondman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn by the lash shall be repaid by another drawn by the sword, then, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, that the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."

Scoffers at home and secessionists abroad have been wont

to flout at Mr. Lincoln as a "jester," a "clown" and a "buffoon." As well denounce Washington as a cynic because he seldom laughed. Lincoln's humor was as natural to him as breathing. It was a happy gift. It kept his temper sweet, and lubricated his mind, that might otherwise have been worn into sullenness or into despondency by the tremendous friction of care and overwhelming anxieties. None of his jokes were ill-timed or malevolent. Some of them were exceedingly adroit. For instance, when an inquisitive visitor questioned him too closely as to the destination of the Burnside expedition, the President inquired with mock gravity, "my friend, can you keep a secret?" "Yes, Sir," he eagerly replied. "Then," said Mr. Lincoln, "I will venture to inform you that the expedition *has gone to sea.*"

The shrewd sense that made this ready answer was the same shrewd sense that dictated every Presidential message, that aimed the emancipation-edict at slavery's guilty head, and guided his every footstep along the dark dangerous way that duty commanded him to tread. I do not claim for our beloved President a profoundly philosophical mind. I do not claim for him brilliant genius. But I do claim that when the Almighty made Abraham Lincoln for this great national crisis, *He did not make a mistake.*

III. Let us look now a moment at another blessing which God gave to our beloved and martyred ruler. Beneath that manly head He gave him a woman's heart. Did you ever hear that our Father Abraham ever spoke a harsh word to one of his children? Did you ever see his now dead hands stained with cruelty? With almost unlimited power entrusted to him, did he ever play "the

tyrant?" He loved everybody, and wanted everybody to love him. Nobody was afraid of him—except rogues and traitors, and he was too lenient even toward them. The humblest "blue-jacket" that entered the White House was sure of a hearty grasp of that open honest hand, and if the soldier's child came along, the tall ungainly form would lift it up for a kiss. He never could stand a woman's tears; they were almost certain to melt down a death-sentence into a pardon. His last act was one of clemency to a notorious traitor; if he had lived, he was in more danger of surrendering to rebel prayers than he ever was of surrendering to rebel swords.

All the common people had felt of Lincoln's heart, and they loved him. His political foes were his personal friends: "he is a kind honest man after all" was the confession that followed even the bitterest assault upon his public policy. The popular names given to great men are a clue to the popular estimate of their characters. We once had a resolute piece of stuff in the Presidential chair whom the people styled "Old Hickory." We had an "Old Tippecanoe"—so named from his principal battle; we called another gallant veteran "Rough and Ready." But this plain homespun kind-voiced President was so near to every one of us—so like our own relative that we were wont to call him "Uncle Abe" and "Father Abraham." There was no disrespect in this; but rather a respect so deep and honest that it could afford to be familiar.

Did this abounding kindness of heart ever warp his sense of right, and lead him to compromise his principles? This was his danger, but I think that in the main he

avoided it. Not for a moment did he yield to the false counsels of the treacherous, the bribes of the corrupt, or the weak fears of the desponding. Abraham Lincoln's religion, as far as the world saw it—lay in two cardinal principles—a rigid sense of right—and an unfaltering faith in the Providence of God. He was a child of Providence. “If I did not seek help from God every morning I could not stand up under the load laid upon me,” was the substance of a remark made to an intimate friend during a gloomy period of the war. What was the degree of our President's heart-faith in Jesus Christ is known only to the Omniscient. He worshiped in God's sanctuary; he once taught in the Sabbath School; he was rigidly moral; he practised abstinence from the wine-cup as well preached it; he set a noble example of industry, continence, fortitude and integrity. He never made any public confession of his faith in the Redeemer. This I regret from my inmost heart. Would to God that the lofty philanthropy which made him our *Wilberforce*, had also been coupled with Wilberforce's devout, tender and fervid piety! Praises be rendered too unto God for the faith in an overruling Providence which dwelt in Lincoln's great kindly heart; and for the beautiful law of right which guided his glorious career! Never had a public man a harder path to tread; but he never lost his way—for he simply and steadily *kept to the straight road*. After issuing the proclamation of freedom he said to a friend, “I did not think the people had been educated up to it; but I thought *it was right* to issue it, and so I did it.”

And now that great, generous child-like heart has ceased to throb! Those deep, melancholy eyes—deep wells of

sorrow as they always looked to me—are dimmed forever. Those gaunt ungainly limbs with which he strode along his patient way under the burthen, are laid to rest. The hand that broke four million of fetters is lifeless clay! Lincoln in his coffin has put a world in tears. Never was a man so mourned; never before did all Christendom stand mourners around one single bier. That pistol-shot at Washington echoes round the world in the universal wail of humanity. God pity our noble friends abroad when they hear the tidings! Kossuth will weep as he wept for the lost crown of Maria Theresa. John Bright's heart will bleed as it bled but yesterday over the grave of Cobden. Garibaldi will clasp that little grandson to his bosom with a tenderer love, that the child bears the name of "Abraham Lincoln." Our missionaries in Syria and China and the Pacific Isles will drop warm tears on the pages of those Bibles that they are rendering into heathen tongues. Here at home I see the sorrow in every eye; the air is heavy with the grief; "there is not a house in which there is not ONE dead."

Intense as is our grief, who shall fathom the sorrow of those to whom he brought the boon of freedom, when they shall learn of the death of their liberator? What wails shall mingle with the voices of the sea along Carolina's shore! Miriam's timbrel in a moment drowned in Rachel's cry of anguish!

Last Saturday morning I addressed one thousand freed men's children in the doomed city of Charleston. When I said to them, "May I invite for you your father Lincoln to come to Charleston and see the little folks he has made free?" a thousand black hands flew up with a shout. Alas! at that moment a silent corpse lay in the East Room

at Washington. On reaching Fortress Monroe,—under the first stunning blow of the awful tidings, I went aside to a group of poor negro women who were gathered about a huckster's table, which was hung with a few coarse strips of black muslin. "Well, friends, the good man is gone." "Yes, sah," spake out a gray-haired Aunt Chloe—"yes, sah! Linkum's dead! They killed our best friend. But God be libin yet. Dey can't kill Him. I'se sure of dat!" How instinctively the childish faith of those long-suffering hearts reached up to the Almighty arm! In that poor freedwoman's broken ejaculation, "Linkum dead—but God still libin," I find the only solace for your smitten heart and mine.

Did Lincoln die too soon? For us and for the world he did; but not for himself. It is all sadly right. God's will be done! The time had come when, like Samson, our beloved leader could slay more by his death than in his life. He has slain the accursed *spirit* of slavery yet lurking in the North. He has slain the last vestige of sympathy with the discomfited rebellion in every candid foreign mind. That pistol's flash has revealed the slave-drivers' conspiracy to the world—

"Not only doomed, but damned."

Our father died at the right time; for his mighty work was done. He lived to see the rebellion in its last agonies; he lived to enter Richmond amid the acclamations of the liberated slave, and to sit down in the arch-traitor's deserted seat; he lived until Sumter's flag rose again like a star of Bethlehem in the southern sky, and then, with the martyr's crown upon his brow, and with four million broken fetters in his hand, he went up to meet his God. In a

moment his life crystallizes into the pure white fame that belongs only to the martyr for truth and liberty! Terrible as seems the method of his death to us to-day, it was after all the most fitting and glorious. He fell by the hand of the same iniquity that slew Lyon and Shaw, and Sedgwick and Rice, and Wadsworth and McPherson. In God's sight Lincoln was no more precious than the humblest drummer-boy who has bled away his young life on the sod of Gettysburgh or Chattanooga. He had called on two hundred thousand heroes to lay down their lives for their country; and now he too has gone to make his grave beside them.

“So sleep the brave who sink to rest
By all their country's wishes blest.”

When that grave that now opens for its illustrious victim on yonder western prairie shall finally yield up its dead, glorious will be his resurrection! Methinks that I behold the spirit of the great LIBERATOR in that judgment scene before the assembled hosts of heaven. Around him are the tens of thousands from whom he struck the oppressor's chain. Methinks I hear their grateful voices exclaim, “we were ~~an~~ hungered, and thou gavest us the bread of truth; we were thirsty for liberty, and thou gavest us drink; we were strangers, and thou didst take us in; we were sick with two centuries of sorrow, and thou didst visit us; we were in the prison-house of bondage and thou camest unto us.” And the KING shall say unto him, “inasmuch as thou hast done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, thou hast done it unto me. Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of thy Lord.”