

OUR MARTYR PRESIDENT,  
ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

VOICES FROM THE PULPIT  
OF  
NEW YORK AND BROOKLYN.

ORATION  
BY  
HON. GEO. BANCROFT.

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## SERMON XV.

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REV. J. E. ROCKWELL, D. D.

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“All ye that are about him bemoan him; and all ye that know his name say, how is the strong staff broken and the beautiful rod.”—JEREMIAH xlviii. 17.

“The Lord’s voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name; hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it.”—MICAH vi. 9.

THE solemn providence which has called our nation to mourning in the very midst of its joy and exultation over the hopes of returning peace, finds a most appropriate expression in these words of inspired wisdom. For the third time since our existence as an independent government, we have been called upon to mourn over the death of our Chief Magistrate. Yet never before has the nation passed through such an experience as this. At the close of four long and weary years of bloody war against the foulest and most causeless rebellion that had ever stained the annals of the world, our nation was exultant over the tidings of victories which it was evident to all were soon to end the struggle. Our President, but lately taking the oath of office for a second term of service, had returned home from a visit to the city which had been the seat and centre of rebellion, and from which the grand and only important army in the interest of traitors had been

driven, only to be followed by the stern hosts of freedom until it had broken up forever, while the leaders of the conspiracy were fugitives from the arm of avenging justice, seeking safety in an ignominious flight. The rancor of party feeling was fast dying out in the nation; men were fast honorably submitting to the voice of the people expressed through the ballot box; and they were gradually yielding to the conviction that Abraham Lincoln was an honest and a good man, and, under the guidance of heaven, was pursuing a wise and judicious policy, which would result in the restoration of peace upon the great and immutable principles of truth, liberty, and righteousness. On him the eyes of the whole people were turning as the man by whose wisdom, prudence, and conciliatory course treason was to be crushed out and the rebellious States brought back upon the great platform of the Constitution, with only the one condition of a destruction of the great system of slavery, which had been the weapon used by their leaders against the life of the nation. It was evident to all that this institution had received its death-blow at the hands of its friends. Already Missouri, Maryland, and Tennessee had accepted these terms and broken the last shackle that had held their fellow-men in bondage; and even in South Carolina—the very hot-bed of treason—such a man as Governor Aiken led the way in emancipation by striking off the chains of his one thousand slaves, and giving them farms to cultivate with free labor. A few more blows only were to be struck and the whole system would fall, and the South, restored to the Union and to the affections of their brethren, would resume its place, out of which it had only been jostled for a time by ambitious and unprincipled leaders, who had held over the seceded States a reign of terror. For the solution of all the intricate and delicate

questions which would arise in the final restoration of the Union ; for the proper punishment of the men who had instigated the rebellion ; for a wise and just discrimination between the leaders and the misguided victims ; for a course of kind conciliation towards the men who had been forced into the war against their better judgment and wishes, and for a discovery and due reward of those who had all the while been loyal to the Union—the nation were looking to Abraham Lincoln with increasing confidence and hope. No man had ever gained more rapidly in the respect and affections of his political enemies ; never was man more warmly loved by his friends since the days of Washington. He seemed to have been raised up by a kind Providence to meet the most solemn and momentous crisis in the history of this nation, and to deal with the most gigantic rebellion that had ever been witnessed in the world's history. Again and again was the anxious whisper heard, as it was known that he had gone to the front of the army, and then to Richmond : Is it safe for the President to put his life in jeopardy, on which so many interests are suspended ? And the whole nation breathed more freely when his safe return to Washington was announced. It has been said a man's life is immortal till his work is done. And so has it proved. Our honored and beloved President, who had safely reached the capital when traitorous fiends were determined to prevent his first inauguration ; who had for four years been unharmed, even while bitter and open enemies were plotting against him under the very shadow of the vast dome beneath which our national Congress gathers ; who had safely passed through Richmond, around which were still lingering traitorous bands who had for four years nursed against him their most bitter hatred—returned to his home only to die. In the midst of a scene of pleasure,

whither he had gone that he might not disappoint the crowds that had assembled to see him and the gallant and glorious general under whose giant blows rebellion had staggered and fallen—surrounded by his family and friends—he was struck down by the hand of an assassin, who, for many weeks, had been watching his opportunity, and whose act turned that scene of festivity to a house of death and woe, sending a thrill of horror and agony over the whole nation. Who can describe the gloom that settled over our land like a pall of death when the dreadful deed was announced, and the tidings spread from city to city, from ocean to ocean, with the speed of the lightning: *The President has been assassinated! The President is dying! The President is dead!*

How appropriate might the murderer have repeated, as he was preparing for his fearful deed of blood, the words—which must have been familiar to his mind—placed in the lips of Macbeth when contemplating the assassination of his king:

“He hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been  
So clear in his great office, that his virtues  
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against  
The deep damnation of his taking off.  
And Pity, like a naked new-born babe,  
Striding the blast, or heaven’s cherubim horsed  
Upon the sightless courier of the air,  
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,  
That tears shall drown the wind.”

Yet no such reflections entered his mind or heart to bid him pause in his horrid work. Abandoned of heaven, nerving his arm by the intoxicating draught, fully bent upon his fiendish purpose, resolved to accomplish what had evidently been in his heart, and in the hearts of his accomplices and abettors—he deliberately entered the scene of mirth and festivity, where sat his victim, and

with unerring aim struck at the life of the man who was pursuing but one noble impulse—the salvation of the Union—and whose kind and loving heart was waiting to extend mercy to even his enemies and the enemies of his country. How is the strong staff broken and the beautiful rod! Yet as we stand mute and sorrow-stricken in the midst of our national calamity, let us hearken to God's voice saying to us, "Hear ye the rod, and him that hath appointed it." How often has death stricken down men to whom the people were looking, and on whose wisdom and firmness they depended in the midst of great national crises.

1. Is not, therefore, the first lesson which we are taught, the folly of putting our trust in man? There is a constant proneness to look to means for our security and prosperity, rather than to the Divine energy and power that alone make those means successful, or that can or will accomplish its purpose by other instrumentalities and in other ways. In times of commercial embarrassment the nation turns to some favorite statesman, by whose political sagacity impending evils may be averted. When the dark cloud of war hangs gloomy and portentous over the land, how few turn to Him who hath said, "The battle is not with the strong," who alone gives success to our arms, while the land rings with the praises of him who is appointed to lead our armies, and whose skill and bravery is their only earnest of success. What crowds attend the career of a nation's idol; how few think of giving the first and highest praise to God! And may we not now hear in this new and terrible calamity the solemn and instructive warning: "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils?" What though he treasured up all the stores of human wisdom; what though he possess the respect and confidence of every section, and be able to pro-



pose terms of peace that shall forever heal the wounds through which the nation's life-blood is flowing, and make honorable and abiding reconciliation between a distracted people; what though at his call vast armies start up in the defence of the republic, and mighty navies sweep the sea to guard our nation's honor and protect its commerce;—in a moment, when all his well-matured plans are ripe for execution, when the strife of party is hushed, and the whole nation acknowledges his wisdom and goodness, death steps in to close up his career, and he passes away forever from among the living. Oh, what folly, then, for a nation to trust in an arm of flesh! Gather around that coffin, ye who look to man and not to God for help and safety; look upon those pale features; touch that cold forehead and those motionless hands, and hear ye the rod and who hath appointed it. Oh! that we might learn, in the solemn lesson of God's providence that God alone is our trust. Oh! that now, ere we begin to inquire into the qualifications of him who now has assumed the government of the nation, we might pause and remember that God alone is great, and that he alone is worthy of our trust and confidence.

2. Again: In this solemn dispensation of Divine Providence we are taught to recognize God's power and sovereignty. One of the great sins of our nation has been a virtual denial of the Divine authority. Infidelity makes open and unblushing assaults upon all that is sacred in his word and character. The institutions of religion have become subjects of conventional debates and angry discussion. The press teems with the most direct assaults upon the laws and authority of God, as made known in his word, and the minds of multitudes are tainted with the dreadful poison. Look at many who are high in office and political influence, and how little evidence they give



of any respect for the word of God as laying any claim to public and national obedience. Look at our broken and dishonored Sabbaths. How many turn their feet away from the sanctuary ; how crowded are all our great avenues with old and young, intent only on pleasure, even amid the very sound of the Sabbath bells. And what evidence do we here find of a growing disregard for Divine law and authority. Such evidence is found, too, in the increasing sin of profanity, in the prevalence of intemperance, and the open and gross violation of all healthful laws for its suppression. Such is the horrible increase of infidel and licentious literature, showing a most depraved state of public morals that could either demand or sanction such infamous and demoralizing sources of vice and profligacy. Such is the open and growing disregard for sound and wholesome laws, and a want of submission to constituted authority, culminating at last in treason and rebellion, and aided and encouraged by men who have thus sought to gratify their party prejudices or personal ambition. These and a thousand similar evils have been terrible indications that our nation has been drifting away from its allegiance to God and casting aside his authority and law. Thanks be to his name, the evil has been checked in a measure, and among our leaders and rulers there has been evidence of a desire to acknowledge his sovereignty and look to him for help. Yet by what a terrible process have we been brought to a sense of duty and of obligation to him ! And oh ! that now, standing in the very presence of death, we might feel that God is our sovereign, and that, as a nation, we owe him supreme allegiance !

3. And in immediate connection with this thought, is not God, in this solemn and terrible providence, recalling to our minds and consciences the sanctions and guards and

penalties by which he has ever designed his law should be honored and human life preserved. Amid the earliest statutes ever given to man was that which guarded human life from violence, by requiring the life of the murderer. To Noah it was said :—" Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." And that law was again and again repeated in such language as this :—" He that smiteth a man so that he die shall surely he put to death." " Moreover, ye shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer which is guilty of death ; for blood defileth the land, and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein but by the blood of him that shed it." No one can read the word of God and not see how carefully he has thrown around human life the sanctions and penalties of his law. Nor can we fail to see how fearful would be the consequences were society to be exposed to brutality and crime, unchecked by these dreadful consequences of transgression. Yet who has not observed the growing disposition on the part of many modern radical reformers to do away with capital punishment, and to treat murderers as ordinary criminals are treated ? Who has not noticed that, while our papers contain almost daily notices of acts of violence and assassination, but few of the criminals are ever brought to justice and punished with death ? And this spirit of leniency towards convicted murderers was showing itself even in relation to the men who have plotted and executed the foul act of treason that has resulted in untold suffering and misery, and the death of thousands and hundreds of thousands of our noblest and bravest men. I confess that I have read with shame and indignation the speeches and editorials of men who, having done all in their power to awaken angry and excited passions in past years between the two sections of our country now at war, who have sneered at and denounced

conservative men for their efforts to retain peaceable relations between the North and the South by upholding the provisions of the Constitution, now ask that the arch traitors and plotters of rebellion, who have for forty years been laying their plans for secession, and have used slavery and abolition simply as the best means for accomplishing their foul and infernal purposes, should be kindly treated ; and that—in the language of one of these orators—we should say to them as we would to a wasp whom we first had thought to crush, “There is room enough in the world for thee and me.” We punish with death the man who takes a single life. Shall we do less to him on whose soul is the blood of thousands who have perished on the battle-field, and of thousands more cruelly and brutally starved to death in their dark and horrible prisons, while those of their number who have fallen into our hands have been fed and clothed, and cared for in the very spirit and letter of the command, “If thine enemy hunger, feed him ; if he thirst, give him drink.” No, no. God’s law lays upon us its demands that these murderers should die, not to gratify a thirst for revenge, but that all coming ages may read a lesson of justice and righteousness in the punishment of treason and rebellion, and learn to keep the law, which declares, “Thou shalt do no murder.” And may it not be that God has permitted this great crime, which has struck at the head and the heart of the nation, to awaken us to a sense of justice and to a full exaction of the penalty of God’s law upon those who have planned and accomplished the horrible scenes of the past four years ? God punished treason and rebellion when it broke out in heaven by the immediate and condign punishment of the angels that kept not his law. We cannot be wiser and kinder than God. We cannot find fault with his administration, or question the justice of that law that

dooms the murderer to punishment. I yield to no man in my love of mercy and clemency to the erring. I yield to no man in the respect and affection I have had for many noble-hearted and honorable men whom I have known in other days at the South, and who have been forced into an apparent if not real acquiescence of the doctrine of secession. I will be among the first to extend to such my hand when they shall again stand with me under the same broad folds of our national banner, and pledge themselves to be henceforth true to the Union. I will be among the first to give, to the utmost of my ability, aid and support to the thousands of misguided men who have staked and lost their all in this dreadful rebellion. But every sense of justice, every prompting of love for truth and law and peace and human safety and national life and honor, demand for the men who have instigated and fomented this foul, unnatural, and monstrous rebellion, that God's law be fully vindicated. "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." "He that taketh life by the sword shall perish by the sword. Their chief associates must be sent forth and banished with the mark of Cain upon their foreheads." Anything less than this will only be a premium offered to treason and lawlessness and murder—will only throw into our future political contests elements of strife and discord, and national dishonor and ruin.

4. Again: This dispensation of God's providence reminds the Church of the duties she owes to the nation and her rulers. I exhort, saith the apostle, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all in authority. God has placed his Church in this nation not to seek unholy alliance with the State, but to throw into it elements of virtue and piety and justice and truth. Ten

righteous men would have saved the cities of the Plain. The Church alone, under God, can save this nation. She can throw over it the shield of her faith and love and prayer. She can by her efforts arrest the torrent of infidelity and lawlessness and crime, and secure such a state of public morals as shall constitute that righteousness that exalteth a nation. And is not the present the time for special prayer and earnest effort in this behalf?—now that the spirit of party is hushed; now that men of the most opposite political principles are nobly laying aside all previous prejudices, and uniting to support the government and uphold the Union; now that all classes are standing hushed and subdued and thoughtful around the remains of departed worth and greatness; now when our rulers are made to feel that they are mortal, and to know that they must give an account of their stewardship? Is not this the hour when we may hope and ought earnestly to pray that around the grave of our late honored Executive every selfish and unholy feeling may be buried, and the hearts of men become the seat of a generous love of country, and the passions be brought under a sense of responsibility to God? Oh, what a patriot was Moses when he stood between an incensed and avenging God and a guilty nation and plead that he would spare his people! And may not Christians in this country be equally in earnest in their prayers for their rulers and for the nation? Here is the last grand experiment of freedom. If we fail, the hope of oppressed millions expires in the darkness. Where else shall Liberty find her home? Where else shall be fostered those influences that are now felt in every nation, and are inspiring millions with confidence of eventually rejoicing in the removal of every yoke of spiritual or political bondage. He who has been so suddenly taken from us has left us a rich legacy in his



noble and unfaltering purpose to preserve the Union. Let us gather around his grave as the children of one great family, and catching his spirit—or rather breathing it in with our common Christianity—offer up our prayers to Him who heareth prayer, for our rulers and the perpetuity and prosperity of our nation. \*

5. Again: We behold in the death of our President a lesson of the vanity of earthly honor and power. What does our whole nation present but an incessant struggle for wealth and office? How many neglect in this pursuit the deathless soul and all its interests! How many would willingly barter away every manly and noble principle to attain the exalted position—or even one far inferior to it—which Abraham Lincoln but lately occupied! Yet what does all avail him now? Never, perhaps, since the days of Washington was a man more reluctantly and unambitiously drawn to the possession of such distinguished honors. Seldom has a path to glory been so modestly and unobtrusively pursued. Seldom has one risen from an humble position to a higher eminence. He became what he was not by inheritance from a long line of kingly ancestors. He sat not upon a throne reared up by blood and oppression; but, making his way from an humble and obscure cottage in the Western wilderness—self-supported and self-educated—he passed on by untiring industry, and sustained by a cheerful and hopeful heart, through the profession of his choice, until the voice of a great people called him to occupy a position which monarchs might envy. And then, too, by his purity and honesty of purpose, by his noble and generous qualities of mind and heart, he drew towards him even the respect and reverence of his political opponents; and men who once denounced him have approved and sustained his administration. Yet what does all this avail him now?



What to him is the splendor of his palace, the wealth and the honors of earth? Oh, how infinitely are they all surpassed by one word from that Saviour whom we believe he loved! "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Life's fitful fever is over, and he sleeps as lowly as the poor soldier that sunk to his grave amid the tumult of battle. Go to that sepulchre, and read there the vanity of earthly possessions and honors. The illustrious dead sleeps on undisturbed, while they who sought his favor drop a tear to his memory and then turn to gaze upon the new star now in the ascendant, and who must in his time pass away to be numbered with the dead.

"Why all this toil for triumph of an hour;  
What though we wade in wealth or soar in fame;  
Earth's highest station ends in 'Here he lies,'  
And 'Dust to dust' concludes our noblest song."

Such is the vanity of life; and oh, that this whole nation might hear the voice of God calling us away to the pursuit of what is alone fully worthy the soul—the service of God, and preparation to meet him in judgment. How solemn and awful is the monition that comes to us from the hushed repose of the grave which has now closed upon the mighty dead. His high official position, his brilliant career, his exalted character, could not avert the winged messenger as it came from the hand of an assassin, yet directed by a sovereign God. No more shall he hear the shouts of the victors, or the plaudits of a grateful and exultant people. No more shall his wisdom direct the councils of the Cabinet, and his mind project schemes for the union and perpetuity of the nation. His eye is closed that shone with unaffected gentleness and wept in pity over the dying, or brightened with thoughts of his country's greatness and glory. In the midst of all

his pleasures and his honor, he has sunk to his grave. Alas! even in the garden there is a sepulchre. We walk beneath its shades, we gaze upon its beauties, and, while plucking its flowers, we feel the damp mould of the grave. Behold the house appointed for all the living, and read the unvarying lessons of nature: "All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof as the flowers of the grass." Oh ye who are toiling for earthly wealth or fame, enter that princely mansion where beauty and honor and power have often met, and see in his narrow coffin the man at whose command thousands rushed together to stand up in defence of the republic; at whose word the shackles of millions were broken; around whom were gathered the wisdom and strength of the nation! Yet all now is hushed and still. His work is done. Tread lightly around the honored dead, and listen to the voice that speaks from the repose of death, and that bids you seek those joys which are unfading and eternal. Oh turn your eyes to the grave whither you are hastening, that home of man—

"Where dwells the multitude. We gaze around,  
We read their monuments, we sigh, and while  
We sigh, we sink and are what we deplored—  
Lamenting or lamented, all our lot."

6. Lastly, this solemn providence reminds us all of the necessity of immediate preparation for death. Oh how terrible is the lesson which we are here reading of the uncertainty of life. How solemn is the monition which comes to each of us. What thine hand findeth to do, do it with thy might. Be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh. How rapid was the transition of our beloved President from time to eternity! Think of it, my hearers, and be warned in time to secure an interest in the great salvation. We believe that he

over whom a nation now mourns had, in life and health, accepted of Christ as his Saviour; that he had calmly looked at the great subject of his soul's salvation, and, convinced of his need of mercy through a Divine Redeemer, had, with the simplicity of a child, trusted his eternal interests into the hands of him who was mighty to save, and whose blood cleanseth from all sin. Oh, then, let his death—so sudden, so dreadful as to its circumstances—remind you of the need of immediate preparation for that eternity to which we are all hastening. Christ, and Christ alone, is the hope of the soul. In him we are safe. He who relies upon his death and merits is alone fitted to die. When death comes to him it finds him ready. He can hear unmoved, and fearless, the summons which calls him away to grapple with the last enemy. He alone can see in death a friend that beckons him to come up higher, and can look upon the scenes of earth, as they fade away from his vision, without regret, and go to his dying bed,

“Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch  
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams.”

Oh, my hearers!—ye men of business and care! ye children and youth!—will you not to-day listen to the providence of God which calls upon you to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness? Christ alone can fit you to live. He alone can prepare you to die; and in that solemn hour, when heart and flesh fail, he will be the strength of your heart and your portion forever.