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A discourse on true ma

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DR. SPRAGUE'S DISCOURSE

ON

TRUE MAGNANIMITY.

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DR. SPRAGUE'S DISCOURSE

ON

TRUE MAGNANIMITY.

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A
DISCOURSE
ON
TRUE MAGNANIMITY,

ADDRESSED PARTICULARLY TO

YOUNG MEN,

AND DELIVERED IN THE

SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN ALBANY,

FEBRUARY 25, 1844.

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By WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D.D.

MINISTER OF SAID CHURCH.  
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TO THE YOUNG MEN
OF THE AUTHOR'S PASTORAL CHARGE,
THIS DISCOURSE,
PRINTED BY THEIR REQUEST,
IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED,
WITH EARNEST WISHES FOR
THEIR HIGHEST HAPPINESS AND USEFULNESS,
BY THEIR SINCERE FRIEND,

W. B. S.

DISCOURSE.*

GENESIS, xlv. 5.

Now, therefore, be not grieved nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither; for God did send me before you to preserve life.

THE story of Joseph, of which these words are a part, may perhaps be considered, in some respects, as the master-piece even of inspiration. It is so simple as to be entirely appropriate to the nursery; and yet so beautiful that the man of taste can never ponder it enough; so tender that the stoic can scarcely read it with an unmoistened eye; and withal so illustrative of the great principles of human nature, as to be an edifying subject of contemplation to the philosopher and the sage. I shall presume upon your familiarity with the story, as a reason for not occupying the time allotted to this exercise in a recital of it. We meet Joseph at the point perhaps of the greatest interest

* This Discourse, with some slight variations, formed one of a course of Lectures to Young Men, delivered by various clergymen, in the Reformed Dutch Church in Market-street, New-York, during the present winter.

—in the act of discovering himself to his brethren. With one breath he let out the astounding secret that he was Joseph, whom they had sold into Egypt; and with the next endeavored to soothe their troubled spirits, by referring to the benevolent end which God had accomplished by their unnatural conduct. He saw the perplexity, the terror, the agitation, which had come over them, and his eye affected his heart; and though he knew that they deserved all, and more than all that they suffered, yet the heart of the injured brother rose as their apologist; and he said in the language of our text — “Now, therefore, be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither; for God did send me before you to preserve life.” Admirable triumph of the best feelings of the heart! Noble example of a forgiving and generous spirit in a young man!

From this sublime and affecting incident in the life of Joseph, I design to discourse to you this morning, on TRUE MAGNANIMITY; — and I will endeavor to exhibit the *nature* of this virtue; show that it is essentially a *Christian* virtue; illustrate its *paramount importance to young men*; and suggest some hints *to aid in the attainment of it*.

I. I am first to speak of the NATURE of true magnanimity.

The simplest meaning of the word *magnanimity*, is greatness of soul. It partakes more of the moral than the intellectual; though the greater the intellect, other things being equal, the greater is the capacity for the exercise of this virtue. But that we may understand more definitely what it is, we will contemplate the *elements* of which it is composed, and the *sphere* in which it operates.

The first element of a magnanimous spirit which I shall notice, is *a clear and quick moral perception*. No doubt there is, in this respect, *originally*, a great difference among men. You may mark it in the first buddings of the intellect—one *child* will exhibit a much more delicate perception of the difference between right and wrong, than another. But after all, no doubt the actual difference is to be attributed chiefly to education and habit. The moral perceptions are influenced, in a great degree, by the moral feelings: all experience proves that right feelings are favorable to correct judgments; while wrong feelings becloud the mind, and if long indulged, lead it to put evil for good and good for evil. As no man is excusable for the in-

dulgence of evil dispositions, neither is he excusable for the dim perceptions and erroneous judgments that may result from them.

But how does it appear that this quality of which I am speaking *is* an essential ingredient in true magnanimity? Magnanimity is always on the side of right—no man was ever magnanimous in doing wrong;—and this takes for granted a perception of the difference between right and wrong. Magnanimity is quick in its operations—it never waits the result of a long process of reasoning, but awakes in a moment, under the influence of a generous and lofty impulse;—of course there must be a proportional quickness in the perceptions in which it has its origin. Magnanimity is a strong and vigorous exercise of the moral man—the moral perceptions, therefore, must be clear as well as quick;—for strong virtuous emotions can never be the result of feeble and indistinct views of duty. Remember then, that whatever other qualities you may see combined in a character, if there is not a clear and quick moral perception, there is not even the foundation for true magnanimity.

Courage is another essential ingredient in this

virtue. I mean not mere *physical* courage—the courage which men possess in common with tigers, and which sometimes makes tigers out of men; but *moral* courage—that which results from a conscience void of offence, and from an unwavering confidence in God. This is necessary, because magnanimity carries men into scenes where cowardice could never live. Her element is in great and lofty enterprises; and who needs be told that in such a world as this, great and lofty enterprises awaken opposition, and are often attended with temporary danger?

Benevolence belongs also essentially to magnanimity. For magnanimity is ever busy in doing good;—good to the needy—good to the undeserving—good on a great and noble scale; and the spirit that prompts to this can be no other than the spirit of good will to men. So true is this, that if you would form an idea of the opposite of a magnanimous spirit, one of the first qualities you would be likely to think of, would be malevolence,—or at least an utter indifference to the wants of your fellow creatures.

And the last ingredient which I shall mention

is *self-denial* — a disposition not only to do good, but to do it at the expense of personal sacrifices. Magnanimity takes no counsel of the spirit of selfish indulgence; asks not whether the accomplishment of a noble project will require personal effort, or even suffering; but walks with zeal and patience over the most thorny paths. The man who does good only as his convenience dictates, — who has no ear for the claims of sorrow or want, when the practical recognition of those claims would subject him to the smallest sacrifice, may indeed have his reward; but it will not be the reward of a truly magnanimous spirit.

Such, then, are the elements of true magnanimity — a clear and quick moral perception, courage, benevolence, and self-denial. Let us now consider, for a moment, *the sphere in which it operates.*

It operates *in a superiority to injuries.*

I do not mean that it dictates a spirit of *indifference* to injuries; that it requires me, if a man aims a deadly blow at my character or my life, to be insensible to the injurious act, and to treat him in all respects as if he were my friend: nor yet does it require, or even permit me, to compromise the claims of public justice, for the sake of rescuing

an offender from the punishment he deserves. An individual may do me an injury, and though I may forgive it as a personal offence, and even render good for evil,—yet it may be of such a nature, and committed under such circumstances, that it would be nothing less than criminal in me to attempt to stand between the offender and the laws of his country. I must be just to an injured community, though it be ever so much at the expense of the offender's comfort or my own convenience. But suppose the offence be one which does not fairly come within the cognizance of the law — one which chiefly or entirely affects my own interests, and which may be passed over without hazard to the general interests of society, — then justice does not stand in the way of the fullest exercise of a magnanimous spirit. I have, indeed, no right to let the individual pass unrebuked — on the contrary, I am sacredly bound to reprove him for his error, and exhort him to repentance; but I may — if I would be truly magnanimous, I *must* cherish towards him a forgiving spirit; and more than that — show myself ready, as occasion may offer, to stand forth his benefactor. Magnanimity does not require me to entrust my interests to him,

so long as I deem him unworthy of confidence; but it does require me to forgive him from the heart, and by manifesting towards him a generous spirit, to endeavor to make him a better man.

There is no department of human society, no condition of human life, that does not sometimes become the theatre of injustice and injury. Men often indeed fancy injuries where none are intended, or magnify things of trivial import into flagrant offences; and hence a reason why we should be guided, in our estimate of supposed injuries, by an unbiassed judgment, rather than a suspicious imagination. But such are the tendencies of human nature, that even in the best state of society, we can expect nothing else than that really injurious acts will often be perpetrated, and unprovoking innocence become the sufferer. The merchant finds that his competitor in trade, by some undue advantage, has checked his prosperity, and at least temporarily injured his prospects. The lawyer smarts under the misrepresentations of his brother lawyer, who has cast an evil eye upon his extensive and increasing practice. The physician who has every claim upon the public favor for skill and integrity, is often assailed without mercy by a

busy and stupid and malignant quackery. The minister of the Gospel, who is laboring with zeal and ability in his Master's work, has to encounter not only the opposition of the openly ungodly, which he has a right to expect, but the bitter hostility of many unworthy and fanatical intruders into the sacred office. And the young man in his intercourse with his fellow, is often, through some sudden impulse of passion, falsely accused, or otherwise disingenuously and cruelly treated. And what shall these various individuals do, in view of the injuries they have received? Shall each set himself to meditating a purpose of revenge, and look around him for the best means of its accomplishment? Not if he acts under the influence of true magnanimity. *That* will lead him to call into exercise a forgiving spirit; to inquire what good he can do to the man who has injured him. It is said to have been a rule of Archbishop Cranmer, that if any man did him an injury, he would ever afterward be that man's friend. Such a spirit may be denounced as tame and servile by the world, but it is really the noblest spirit that ever animates a human bosom.

What an offender against the spirit of magna-

nimity, while yet he professes to be acting under its influence, is the duellist! Some real or imagined injury has been done him — perhaps by his most intimate friend: and now mark the process which results in his becoming a murderer. Can he forgive the injury, and meet his friend at once in the spirit of a generous reconciliation? That he revolts from as a creeping miserable servility. Can he be satisfied to let the offender alone, giving him notice that he has no longer a place on the catalogue of his friends? Even *that* does not suffice as food for his revengeful spirit. Will he wait for the exercise of some friendly mediation, by which there may be a chance at least for the restoration of mutual good will? No — there is a spirit burning in his bosom that nothing but blood can quench; and forthwith the preparation is made for a bloody meeting. Two madmen have gone off into a solitary place, with the deliberate purpose that the one shall come back a murderer, and the other a corpse. And there they shoot at each other, as if each regarded the other a wild beast; and if one experiment fails, it is succeeded by another and another, till the writhing body, and the flowing blood, and the

final gasp, announce that the claims of honor are satisfied. I have said that the man who goes out upon this desperate errand, actually prides himself upon his nobleness of soul ; but the truth is, he is lacking in every attribute of genuine magnanimity, and is even one of the most fearful examples which the world ever beholds, of an opposite spirit. If one magnanimous feeling should rise in his bosom, even after the instrument of death were lifted to do its work, he would instantly throw that instrument of death away, and advance towards the man at whose heart it was pointed, in the outgoings of a conciliatory spirit. Or if such a feeling were to rise while the dead body of his antagonist lay before him, he would wish that his eyes were a fountain of tears, that he might weep forever for having shed his brother's blood.

I remark again, that true magnanimity has its operation *in a superiority to troubles*.

There is a greater or less amount of trouble involved in the providential allotments of every man ;—a fact in the divine economy which, however mysterious it may seem in some of its bearings, is yet easily reconciled with the divine wis-

dom and goodness, when taken in connection with the fact that man is a sinner, and that his troubles are designed to exert upon him a reclaiming and purifying influence. While no period of a man's life is exempt from sorrow, there are some periods in which calamities accumulate into an overwhelming burden; and while there is no individual who does not have his share in the woes of life, there are some who are greatly distinguished in this respect above the mass; though so large a part of human sorrow is from sources that are unobserved, and withal there is so great a difference in the constitutional ability of different persons to endure, that we are liable to be deceived in our estimate of the comparative degrees of suffering as they exist among men. And when woes cluster upon woes, and every cup that is taken seems surcharged with bitterness, and every prospect that is surveyed is clothed with gloom — nothing but true magnanimity will sustain the spirit of the sufferer in quietness and dignity. Ask you for an example? Around that stake there is a gathering to see a Christian die — a man who loves Jesus better than he loves life; and who chooses to die in the fire rather than dishonor his Saviour's name.

The fearful arrangements do not terrify him. He even looks upon the kindling fagots and smiles. And he waits calmly and patiently for the fire to do its work; not doubting that there is a chariot of fire waiting to take him up to Heaven. Here is the triumph of magnanimity in one of its sublimest forms;—magnanimity producing calmness and peace amidst the bitterest suffering.

How opposite is this spirit to that which dreads suffering so much as even to sacrifice duty rather than encounter it; especially that which broods over imaginary evils, till the strength of the mind is gone, and with it the power of quiet endurance! If duelling is the extreme opposite of magnanimity in its superiority to injuries, not less is suicide its opposite in its superiority to troubles. I know there are cases in which suicide is to be regarded rather as a calamity than a crime, because it is the result of intellectual derangement rather than moral depravity; but the case which I now contemplate is that of a man who gives no other evidence of insanity than is found in the fact that he does the deed. And who needs be told that one of the most prolific causes of this evil is worldly calamity

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—a dissatisfaction with the condition in which Providence has placed us, or in which we, by our imprudence or wickedness, have placed ourselves? An individual finds himself in debt beyond what he has the ability to pay, while yet he has the reputation in the world of being a rich man; and because he is too proud to be willing to live till the eyes of the world shall be open upon his poverty, he goes out and destroys himself. Another does the same desperate deed, because he had rather die than submit to the mortification of an unreciprocated attachment; and yet another, because, having lived as a mere cumberer of the ground, he has become tired of life, and welcomes the pistol or the halter as a remedy for ennui. Know thou, who art meditating the purpose of thine own destruction, that thou art a disgrace to thy nature — a blot upon the handy-work of God. Thou hast not fortitude enough to look an insect in the face. Thou art afraid even of the shadow of earthly calamity. Thou art going to stop that vital current as it flows through the veins; to throw thy body prematurely into the grave, and thy soul into hell; to sport with the most tender and hallowed relations, and open foun-

tains of agony in many hearts; and all, all because the evils of life — it may be evils which exist only in thine imagination, are too great for thee to bear. Oh! if the spirit of a man were within thee, thou wouldst have no parleying with thyself on such a matter as this. Thou wouldst take what God is pleased to send thee, submissively, cheerfully, knowing that it is better than thy deserts. Thou wouldst abandon thy wretched purpose, and never think of it again, except as an occasion for humiliation and mourning at the altars of mercy.

Again: A magnanimous spirit has its operation *in a superiority to temptations.*

In such a world as this, and with such a nature as we possess, it cannot be but that temptations will meet us everywhere — temptations differing according to the peculiar constitution or the peculiar circumstances of different individuals. One man is naturally of a haughty and tyrannical spirit — he will be tempted, if he has authority, to abuse it — nay, he will be tempted to seek for authority, that he *may* abuse it, in acts of oppression and cruelty. Another is naturally of an avaricious spirit — *he* will be tempted to become a miser — to seek his supreme enjoyment in hoarding

up earthly treasure. Another is naturally ambitious of human distinction—*he* will be tempted to resort to unworthy arts to gain the applause of his fellow men. And yet another has a strong relish for sensual indulgences; and *he* will be tempted to a criminal and unrestrained obedience to the animal appetites. Now it belongs to magnanimity to secure a glorious triumph over temptation—no matter from what source it originates. Its possessor, having an accurate discernment of right and wrong; sees clearly the evil involved in yielding to temptation, and has the courage and self-denial to resist it. What though by a slight sacrifice of conscience, he might render himself the favorite of all around him, when, by adhering steadfastly to his duty, he must incur the disapprobation and odium of all; what though in the path which his conscience forbids, he finds every worldly good, and in the path to which his conscience directs, he finds every worldly evil; what though even a throne with its glittering attractions, looks forth upon him on the one side, and the martyr's stake frowns death upon him on the other—still he stands firm as a rock to his own convictions. He can afford to lose his earthly

comfort, and to bear a heavy burden of reproach, and even to have life itself brought prematurely to a close; but he cannot afford to go to war with his own conscience; he cannot afford to be charged from within or from above with having turned away from the path of duty, because it was a rugged path. He has the courage of principle—the courage of faith; and therefore will not he “fear, though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.”

Once more: The spirit of which I am speaking, operates *in a superiority to prejudices*.

We all know how easily prejudices are imbibed in every department of human action. There are religious prejudices, and political prejudices, and national prejudices, and prejudices pertaining to every profession and occupation among men. These have their origin in a great variety of circumstances, but chiefly in those of birth and education. The child receives his first impressions from his parents, at a period when he is incapable of examining for himself. These impressions are of course associated in his mind with parental tenderness and authority; and under this influence they grow with the growth and strengthen with

the strength. Now we have only to suppose such impressions to be wrong, to have the case of a child growing up in bondage to error; or even if they are right, and he is contented ultimately to repose in them without examination, they have still all the force of prejudices. Right or wrong, he is bound, as soon as he is capable, to exercise his own judgment upon the subjects to which they relate; and if he is satisfied that they are wrong, magnanimity will lead him openly to reject them; but if he is convinced that they are right, then they will become principles rather than prejudices, and he will hold them in a manner worthy of an intelligent being.

As there are no prejudices more common, so there are none of more disastrous tendency, than those which are connected with religion. If there be any truth clearly revealed in the Bible, it is that all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, belong to his fold, and share his gracious regards, and are to recognise each other as brethren—fellow heirs to the heavenly inheritance. But look you into the Church, and see how fearfully the prejudices of her members conflict with this glorious truth. What multitudes evince

more reverence for the slight peculiarities that distinguish them from other denominations, than for those great and commanding truths in which the whole evangelical Church is agreed! How many magnify the interests of an inconsiderable party above the interests of the whole body of Christ; and even struggle intensely for the former, while they scarcely bestow a thought upon the latter! Brethren, the Church needs to have more of the spirit of Christian magnanimity poured out upon her, that she may not lose sight of the greater in her regard for the less: she needs to be purged from those unworthy prejudices which would lead any single denomination—I care not by what name it may be called—to say to every other, or any other, “Stand by, I am holier than thou;” and which prevent a cordial co-operation among the followers of Christ for the advancement of his cause. Not that I complain of the existence of different denominations, or that I believe any good would result at present from an effort to unite them—let them exist, and let each have the privilege to labor in its own way; but let no one think it a privilege to be insulated from all the rest, and to feel that there are

no ties to bind it to the universal Christian family. When the spirit which I am recommending shall have attained its legitimate dominion in the Church, the Church will be glorious not in her nominal but real unity; the body of Christ will stand forth in beauty and symmetry as well as strength; and the spirit that pervades it will be the admiration of the universe.

You have seen now the sphere in which true magnanimity operates—viz: in a superiority to injuries, to troubles, to temptations, and to prejudices. And this completes what I have to say of the nature of this virtue. I am now,

II. Secondly, to show you that it is essentially a *Christian* virtue—that is, it is the product of Christianity, (I mean Christianity in the large sense, as identified with the whole of divine revelation,) and nothing else. How does this appear?

It appears, in the first place, from the fact that the *precepts* of the Bible inculcate this virtue.

Look at the elements of which it is composed, and see whether each of them is not explicitly enjoined by inspiration, as part of the Christian character. Is a clear and quick moral perception one of the elements of magnanimity? Says the

Saviour, "The light of the body is the eye: therefore, when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness. Take heed, therefore, that the light which is in thee be not darkness." Is courage another of these elements? Again the Saviour directs his disciples to "fear not them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do." Is benevolence yet another? "Do good unto all men," is the language of the Apostle. And does this virtue include self-denial also? "If any man will be my disciple," says Christ, "let him deny himself, and take up the cross, and follow me."

Next, contemplate the sphere in which magnanimity operates, and see whether its exercises are not all in accordance with the precepts of God's word. Does it operate in a superiority to injuries? "Love your enemies; bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you." Does it operate in a superiority to troubles? "Ye that fear the Lord, trust in the Lord: he is their help and their shield." Does it

operate in a superiority to temptations? "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." Does it operate in a superiority to prejudices? "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? Come and see."

And beside these passages, each of which represents a large class, directly enjoining this virtue in its various elements and forms of operation, there is one in the epistle to the Philippians which deserves special attention, as well for its comprehensive import as the beautiful assemblage of qualities which it enjoins. "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

But if the precepts of the Bible enjoin this virtue, not less do its *examples* illustrate it. Witness the history of *Joseph* — the very history of which our text forms a part. His brethren had not only cherished towards him the rankest hatred, but had acted it out in deeds of blackest die. First they conspired against his life; and then threw him into a pit; and finally sold him, as they supposed, into perpetual bondage. But when the

moment came for Joseph's discovering himself to these very brethren, he did not even reflect upon them for their base and criminal conduct: the man in authority showed himself the brother still; and that he might relieve them, so far as possible, from their sufferings, he addressed them in the soothing language of our text — "Now, therefore, be not grieved nor angry with yourselves, that ye sent me hither; for God did send me before you to preserve life." And you remember another occasion on which Joseph evinced his magnanimity, in a signal triumph over temptation — he met the temptation fearlessly, victoriously, with this simple interrogatory to his conscience — "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" Witness the history of *Moses*. By the special providence of God, he was educated under the eye of royalty, and his prospects were those of an accomplished and opulent prince; but he hesitated not in obedience to his convictions of duty, to surrender all the prospects which his education had opened to him, for the sake of becoming the benefactor of his countrymen — of taking the lead in a most benevolent and yet most perilous enterprise; he chose "rather to suffer affliction with

the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." Mark the magnanimity of *Daniel* with the prospect of the lion's den before him. The royal decree has gone forth that he must leave off the duty of prayer or be cast into the den; but he keeps on praying to the God of his fathers, as earnestly and constantly as ever; fearless alike of the power of the king and the fury of the lions. Witness *Stephen*, under the influence of the same spirit, falling before the violence of a mob: with his eye entranced in a vision of future glory, he kneeled down, and, with his last breath, offered that memorable prayer, "Lord lay not this sin to their charge!" Read the history of *Paul*; and from the hour that he became a disciple till he yielded up his spirit, you will find that his whole course was marked by the highest moral heroism: no matter whether he was among friends or enemies, whether he was preaching the gospel or making tents, whether he was standing before Agrippa or Festus, or undergoing the perils of shipwreck, the spirit of magnanimity breathed in all his actions. There was no enterprise too arduous or perilous for him to undertake — nay, he counted not even his life dear to him,

that he might accomplish the end of his ministry by preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ. And last and greatest, there is the example of the great Author of Christianity himself, who, "for the joy that was set before him," (the joy of bringing glory to God by the redemption of a multitude of souls,) "endured the cross, despising the shame." Not to dwell here on the fact that the mission of Christ into the world was essentially a mission of magnanimity, let me point you to one or two memorable instances in his life, in which this virtue eminently discovered itself. As he approached, for the last time, the guilty city of Jerusalem, and called to mind the varied and fearful crimes with which she stood charged, and the tempest of fire and blood which was ready to burst upon her, instead of breaking forth in an acknowledgment of God's justice in the woes that were about to be inflicted, he exclaims with incomparable tenderness— "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not." And you remember what passed

while he was upon the cross. He had been hanging for hours in the most terrible conflict with death that any being ever experienced; and he was in the midst of those by whom these untold agonies were inflicted; and they were looking on and wagging their heads with hellish exultation; but he is pitiful and not angry: his last breath bears upon it the prayer—“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!” Here was the noblest triumph of magnanimity that ever was, or ever can be exhibited. It is the sun, shining with full orb'd glory, in the midst of a tempest.

Again: This virtue, in its highest exercise, is *identified with the entire economy* of Christianity. Hear the whole in a single sentence—“God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Observe that the world in whose behalf this gift was bestowed, was a world in rebellion against its Maker—a world which, instead of having any claim on the divine goodness, deserved the severest expressions of the divine displeasure. And He who bestowed it was no less than the Almighty God, who, by a

volition, could blot out a race of sinners and supply their place with a race of angels; and withal the Being from whom man has revolted, and towards whom he is acting out a malignant hostility. And the gift itself was the most expensive, and the purpose for which it was bestowed, the most benevolent, which has ever entered the mind of man. The Son of God, the image of the Father, submits to have His majesty eclipsed by the ignominious horrors of crucifixion, that a self-ruined race might be restored to the divine favor on earth, and exalted to the divine presence in Heaven. You have heard of the magnanimity of Howard, whose benevolent spirit would never suffer him to rest, unless he were breathing the atmosphere of some lazaretto or dungeon, or otherwise mingling in scenes of human wo. You have heard of the magnanimity of Wilberforce, who consecrated the splendor of his genius, and the fervor of his piety, and the strength of his resolution, and whatever of physical energy belonged to him, to the breaking of the chains that bound both the soul and body of the slave. And you have heard of a multitude of others, both among the living and the dead, who have been distin-

guished for a self-sacrificing spirit, and now shine as stars in the firmament of illustrious minds; but compared with the divine magnanimity which breathes through the whole economy of the Gospel, even the noblest human examples appear tame and frigid. And as the Gospel is itself essentially a system of magnanimity, so it must impress this character upon those by whom it is cordially received; and though I do not say that it will at once expand every mind that imperfectly feels its influence, to such an enlarged philanthropy as shall attract the attention of the world; yet I do say that just in proportion as there is the lack of this spirit,—especially as there is the opposite of it, in any professing Christian, he has reason to fear that his profession is vain. It results from our intellectual and moral constitution, that the practical impressions that we receive are in accordance with the nature of the truths we contemplate,—or rather with the views which we take of those truths: of course the practical belief of Christianity—the habitual study of Christianity—great, and noble, and soul expanding as it is, must result in the production of a magnanimous character.

And this leads me to say — and I appeal to your own observation for the truth of the remark — that Christianity *actually does* effect this triumph. She takes human nature in its degraded state, and refines it of its grossness, and exalts it gradually and finally into a glorious resemblance to Him who had magnanimity enough to give his life for the world. Do you tell me that I am here occupying delicate and doubtful ground, as there are many professing Christians who are mean and selfish and cowardly — in short who are lacking in every essential attribute of genuine magnanimity? My answer is, that in the day of judgment, many who will have said “Lord, Lord,” while they were on earth, will be put down in the number of hypocrites and unbelievers. And besides, Christianity performs her work by a gradual process; and that may be expected from a babe in Christ, which may not be expected, and will never be found, in one who has reached the fulness of the stature of a perfect person in Christ. But even the scoffer cannot deny that among those who profess to be Christians, there are some — there are many, who do evince the spirit which we are

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contemplating. Who is he that is so intent upon rendering good for evil; that complies so rigidly with the divine precept — “If thine enemy hunger, feed him, or if he thirst, give him drink?” He is a Christian. Who is he that walks erect under a heavy burden of blasted hope, and has learned how to smile amidst tears, and to be thankful for mercies and active in doing God’s will in the day of tribulation? He is a Christian. Who is he that steadfastly resists the tempter, and keeps on in the path of duty, while a darkness that can be felt is gathering around him? He is a Christian. And who is he that rises above the dominion of prejudice, that recognises in every form and condition of humanity the tie of brotherhood, that supplicates an influence from above to enable him to look at every subject with a single eye? Again I answer, he is a Christian. Yes, whatever may be said of *some* who profess to be Christians, the most obstinate incredulity must acknowledge that there are others, who, in the whole course of their conduct, exhibit the grace and the loveliness and the sublimity of a truly magnanimous spirit.

I trust I have succeeded in showing you that

magnanimity is a Christian virtue, inasmuch as the precepts of Christianity enjoin it; its examples illustrate it; its economy involves it; and its influence produces it. But in order to establish my position, that this is *essentially* a Christian virtue, I must go farther and show that *nothing but* Christianity produces this character, or is *adequate* to the production of it.

Far be it from me to deny to any of the illustrious names of Paganism, any thing which can be fairly claimed for them. That Socrates and Cicero and other kindred spirits of their day, evinced, on various occasions, much of natural generosity and heroism—much zeal for the glory of their country, and in some respects for the benefit of their race, it were alike useless and unjust to question. But however their history may have been emblazoned by many acts of noble bearing, it is certain that they were lacking in some of the most essential properties of true magnanimity. Show me a passage in any of their writings, or an act in the history of their lives, that breathes the spirit of forgiveness of injuries—a spirit which, as we have seen, enters essentially into a magnanimous character. Their magnanimity too much resem-

bled that of our modern duellists — they not only justified revenge, but considered it as noble, and inculcated it in their schools as a necessary part of a truly great character. And what a poor example was the boasted Socrates — perhaps the very brightest name on the records of Paganism — what a poor example of magnanimity was he, in seeking from the fatal draught a deliverance from the trials incident to his earthly condition ! That these men were formed after a glorious model I do not deny ; and that they did many things to render them the admiration of all succeeding ages, I do not deny ; and that they needed nothing but the genial influence of Christianity to make them stars in the moral as well as the intellectual firmament, I do not deny ; but as this influence was withheld from them, they never did and never could reach the highest form of human character. Their religious system did not supply the materials for it ; and as the stream can never rise above the fountain, it was not to be expected that their character should be better than the system through whose influence it was formed. Christianity, as we have seen, does here what philosophy never could do — she not only breathes the spirit and enjoins the

practice of magnanimity, but operates directly and in various ways, to the production of it. I repeat, therefore, it is essentially a Christian virtue, and cannot, in its purest form, even take root in any other than a Christian soil.

III. Let me now, in the third place, illustrate *the paramount importance of magnanimity to young men*. Joseph was comparatively a young man when the occasion for the display of this virtue, to which our text refers, occurred. And the same spirit was signally exhibited by him on various other occasions. Indeed it was this which contributed chiefly to his dignity and influence, and constituted the brightest attraction of his character.

The first consideration which I shall notice, illustrative of the importance of this virtue to young men, is, that *it is an effectual security against the vices to which they are peculiarly exposed*.

Young men are in great danger of yielding to *violent resentments*, and under such an influence, of perpetrating *rash acts*, one of which may be enough to cloud their prospects for life. Their liability to this, results partly from the natural quickness

incident to youthful feeling, partly from a mistaken notion of honor, partly from the unrestrained freedom of their intercourse, and especially from the vigorous operations of an unsubdued depravity. It is painful to see young men who have been used to the most friendly intercourse, standing aloof from each other in silent hostility, and passing each other without even a look of recognition; but it is doubly painful to witness, or even to hear of, those desperate acts by which they attempt, perhaps successfully, to shed each others' blood. It was but a few months ago that our ears were made to tingle by hearing of a young man in a neighboring college, literally stabbing another in the dark; and the question is yet to be judicially settled, whether or not he shall be regarded as a murderer. But we need not go back *months* to find these frightful examples—it was but the other morning that your blood was curdled by reading the story of two striplings, stealing off into a solitude to brighten up their tarnished honor; and the end of the story was, that while the one was left in his blood, the other ran off in his ignominy—that while the one writhed through the dark valley into a

murderer's grave, the other flew from before the face of men, self crowned with bloody laurels. Had these young men possessed the spirit of true magnanimity, their names, instead of being associated with deeds of blood, might have been associated with deeds of honor and of mercy ; and the community, instead of being outraged by the history of their crimes, might be rejoicing in the light of their beneficence. Remember, ye especially who are subject to sudden impulses of passion, that you may perform an act in a moment, that shall not only burn into your character an abiding mark of infamy, but shall return upon you forever in the most remorseful and terrific reflections. Cultivate the spirit of magnanimity, and you will be delivered from this danger ; for then provocation and insult will awaken not a revengeful, but a forgiving spirit.

Young men are peculiarly in danger — yes, even at this day, — of a habit of *intemperance*. This danger may arise from different causes. Sometimes it is the result of disappointment in regard to worldly plans and prospects: a young man has projected some enterprise by which he confidently expects to make his fortune ; but owing to some

untoward event which he did not anticipate, his plans are defeated and his hopes cut off. And now, for the first time, he flies to the inebriating cup, to drown his sorrows, not improbably at the expense of utter self-destruction. Or it may be that the formation of this destructive habit is to be referred chiefly to the power of example—removed perhaps from parental vigilance and restraint, he becomes a companion of evil doers, and yields first because he dares not to be singular; and he is led on in this path of wo and death, till his course terminates in the drunkard's grave. In the former case—I mean where this habit is the result of disappointed worldly hopes, a spirit of magnanimity would have prevented the effect by preventing the immediate cause: it would have enabled him to sustain himself under disappointments, and maintain a firm and manly attitude amidst the beatings of any storm. In the latter case—indeed in every case in which the temptation to this vice presents itself, magnanimity would dictate a prompt and efficient resistance. It would induce some such soliloquy in the bosom of the tempted youth as this—“How can I submit thus to degrade these noble faculties—to sink towards

the brute instead of rising towards the angel? How can I bring myself to sport with the fond hopes of my friends—to torture the hearts of beloved parents, who would rather die, than live to behold my ruin? How can I look society in the face, if I thus voluntarily put it out of my power to meet the claims which it has upon me? And how can I lift my eye towards Heaven, if I have done my utmost to efface Heaven's image from my soul?" These questions, under the prompting of true magnanimity, would take from temptation its power, and be a pledge for security in circumstances of the greatest danger.

Moreover, young men are peculiarly exposed to contract a habit of *dishonesty* and *fraud*. The temptation to this arises not so frequently from avarice as from prodigality. A youth who has acquired a relish for forbidden pleasure, very soon finds that the gratification of his evil propensities is an expensive matter; that in the winding up of a midnight revel there is a bill to pay; and that they who have shared the pleasure of the scene, must also share the burden of the expense. But his parents, from whom perhaps he is temporarily

separated, have calculated only for his *necessary* expenses: they have looked upon him only as a virtuous youth, and have taken no thought for the cost of his vices. And now whither shall he look for means to defray those expenses, which he would not dare acknowledge to his parents that he had incurred? Whither but to the drawer where his employer keeps his money — the key of which is within his reach — possibly has been confided to his keeping? And now, for the first time, he ventures to withdraw a small part of the deposite, though he does it tremblingly, and perhaps pacifies his conscience by the reflection that sooner or later he shall be able to return it. But the step once taken with apparent impunity, is taken again with the greater ease; and the repetition continues to increase the facility; and thus while he seems to be acquiring a mercantile education, he is really training himself for the penitentiary. And sooner or later, not improbably, as you walk through the wards of the prison, he may be pointed out to you among other felons, as distinguished at once by the height of respectability from which he has fallen, and the depth of depravity into which he has sunk. Poor young man! If he had had

a spark of magnanimity in his soul, the thought of that first dishonest act would never have entered his mind; the first step had never been taken in that career of crime, which has made him an outlaw from all society better than that of thieves and robbers.

Thus, whether we consider young men as liable to revenge, to intemperance, or to fraud, their best security is to be found in the cultivation of a magnanimous spirit.

Another consideration equally illustrative of the importance of this quality to youth, is, that it is *the best pledge of a useful, honored, and happy life*. I have spoken of it as a preservative from vice and crime — but it is much more: it exerts a positive influence to render its possessor *useful* in any condition in which he may be placed.

Contemplate him in the *every-day walks of life* — in the discharge of his ordinary social duties; and you will find that wherever he moves, blessings follow in his train as the fruit of his magnanimity. He is interested in every plan that is adapted to aid the improvement of society; he has an ear for the cry of sorrow and a hand for its relief; he frowns upon those unworthy prejudices, which



contract the social feelings, and erect barriers to social enjoyment; and by a spirit of generous forgiveness and conciliation, he triumphs over injuries, and in some instances at least, keeps down wrath and strife. And he does not less to benefit his fellow men by his general example than by his particular acts. There is a grace and charm about every thing that he does, which carries with it a benign and grateful influence. In whatever he engages, he is contributing either directly or indirectly to the well being of society. He is "like a tree plantéd by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season."

But from ordinary social life, pass to the scenes of *civil and political life*, and notice the influence of this spirit there. And how little do we actually find there, but ebullitions of party spirit — plans for personal aggrandizement at the expense of the best interests of the country! I appeal to those who mingle in private cabals, as well as appear openly on the arena of political conflict, whether no small part of what is said and done, is not dictated by a miserable contracted policy — a policy that looks out for a part rather than the whole — that cannot claim even an

alliance to genuine patriotism. If a spirit of true magnanimity were to gain possession of all the American youth of this generation, how soon would our national character acquire a glorious elevation! Our national councils would cease to be the theatre of puerile and disgraceful conflicts; our national representatives would not call down Jehovah's wrath upon us by shedding each others' blood; and our national interests, instead of being at the mercy of demagogues and conspirators, would be under the guardianship of a pure and lofty patriotism. If our government is to be preserved in its integrity, or even saved from utter ruin, I doubt not that it is to be chiefly through the magnanimity of our young men.

And I may speak of the *Church* as well as of the *State*—of the importance of this spirit in connection with our *religious* as well as our civil interests. What are the evils from which the American Church at this moment has most to fear? What but the want of Christian charity—the unscriptural pretensions of particular sects—the interfering influence of different parts of the true body of Christ? What but an extensive

neglect of the spiritual wants of the world,—especially of the remoter regions of our own country; and the consequent prevalence of ignorance and error and crime—of every thing that belongs to the deepest intellectual and moral degradation? Let our young men be baptized with this noble spirit of which I am speaking, and how quickly would many a wound with which the body of Christ now bleeds, be healed; how the spirit of united effort would diffuse itself over the whole community of the faithful; how the missionary cause, and every thing connected with the economy of spiritual improvement, would gather fresh strength, and move forward with a renewed impetus;—in short, how the Church would grow in union and power, in beauty and majesty, thus rapidly approximating to the character of the Church triumphant above! Time has been when the influence of young men upon the Church was comparatively little known, because there were few young men connected with it; but not so in the times on which we are fallen—now their influence is felt in every department of benevolent and religious action; and accordingly as that influence is exerted, may we look in a great

measure, for the prosperity or the decline of evangelical truth and piety.

But if this noble quality is important to the usefulness of young men, it is not less important to their *character*—to the estimation in which they are held by their fellow men. There may indeed be a few so base as to laugh at the scruples of a magnanimous spirit in its conflict with temptation; but there is no man upon whom the seal of God's reprobation has not been impressed, who does not *in his heart* approve the exhibition of true magnanimity. There is an inward testimony in its favor, which nothing but the extreme of vice can ever suppress; and while the great mass of the world will profess their admiration of many of its operations, with the upright and virtuous it is always a passport to esteem and veneration. He who is the subject of this quality is honored not only while he lives, but after he is dead. The wise and the virtuous will go out of their way to visit his grave; his name will be fragrant beyond the community in which he has lived; and when those who were like him, in respect to every thing else but magnanimity, are utterly forgotten, *his*

mory will be cherished and embalmed amidst the most grateful associations.

And need I say a word to show that the life of such a man must be a *happy* life? He is happy in the consciousness of his noble purposes and aims; in the exercise of the best feelings of the heart; in being employed in a manner worthy of a rational and immortal being. He is happy in witnessing the blessed effects of his efforts in promoting the interests of his fellow men;—happy in seeing his neighborhood gladdened, his country elevated, the Church quickened and improved, through his instrumentality. He is happy in the reflection that the approving smiles of the good fall upon his path, and that he will live in the grateful remembrance of those who come after him. And the recollection of what he has done through grace, under the influence of this spirit, will make him strong to walk through the dark valley; and will light up his way, till he meets the brighter light of heavenly glory. Is it not true, then, that magnanimity is the parent of happiness?

And this leads me to another and the last consideration, illustrative of the great importance of

magnanimity in young men—viz, *its bearings upon their eternal prospects*: as this is the highest style of virtue, so it will receive hereafter the most glorious reward.

All the rewards of Heaven are indeed to be referred ultimately to God's boundless grace: nevertheless such is the divine constitution that men are rewarded at last *according* to the measure of holiness they have acquired, and the amount of acceptable service they have performed. Now, whether you look at the bright assemblage of Christian virtues of which this is composed, or at those deeds of moral heroism in which it often has its operation, can you doubt for a moment that the most magnanimous spirits on earth will wear the brightest crowns in Heaven? Paul, and Stephen, and the noble army of martyrs—wherefore is it that ye shine with such superlative glory even among those who "have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb?" It is because your magnanimity braved every danger, submitted to every sacrifice, marched boldly to the block or to the rack, in the service of your great Master and Lord. Young men, let

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this spirit begin now to animate your actions, and let it henceforth control the purposes and conduct of your life; and though you may never wear a martyr's crown, as God may save you from a martyr's death — you *may* look for an “exceeding and eternal weight of glory,” compared even with that which the multitude of the saved shall inherit — you *may* anticipate an open and abundant entrance “into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

IV. I am now, in the last place, to suggest two or three brief *hints* to the young men before me, *designed to aid to the attainment of this exalted virtue.*

And the first is, that you should *carefully distinguish true magnanimity from its counterfeits.* There is much that passes for this virtue, especially among young men, which is not more nearly allied to it than chaff is to wheat. Many a young man thinks that it indicates a noble spirit, to show himself regardless of the wishes and counsels of his parents, to utter the profane oath, especially when he is in the company of the profane, — as if he thereby showed himself superior to vulgar prejudices; and to avenge even the semblance of

an injury, as if he were of so much consequence that a spot upon his honor would startle the whole world. Now remember that, if you call this magnanimity, you deceive yourselves; and if you perseveringly practise it, you destroy yourselves. I repeat, any thing that the Bible forbids has no right to this venerable name. There you may find the genuine quality, required, described, exemplified: study the Scriptural exhibition of it, that you may know, with full assurance, at what you ought to aim.

Secondly: *Yield yourselves, if you have not already done it, to the renewing influences of the Holy Spirit.* I do not say that magnanimity in a lower sense may not result from the more general influences of Christianity, even where it has not performed its effectual work in the renovation of the heart — we often witness cases in which men who do not even claim to be disciples of Christ, yet perform many acts of lofty and heroic bearing, and thus acquire a bright name to be transmitted to posterity: but magnanimity in its noblest form, (and that is the only form in which it will be crowned with an ultimate reward,) is a divine quality, and is the effect of a divine operation.

The truths of God's word are fitted to produce it; though it is the Spirit that gives these truths their effect. Let the new man in Christ Jesus be created in the soul, and you have all the elements of true magnanimity. Begin then at this point; seek the influences of divine grace to mould your hearts into the divine image, and to adorn you with all the virtues and graces of the Gospel.

Thirdly: *Attend carefully to the culture of each of the several virtues of which this is composed; for you cannot possess the whole without possessing all the parts.* Endeavor to attain the most accurate moral discernment; measuring every action and every quality by the infallible standard of God's word. Cultivate that moral courage that will be always ready to face danger in the path of duty; — that benevolence that delights in diffusing happiness over the world; that self-denial that enters upon great and worthy enterprises, without even asking or caring what amount of sacrifice they may involve. Let these virtues be in you and abound, and they will ensure to you the character which I am recommending.

Fourthly: *Study the characters of those who have been most distinguished for magnanimity.* Such cha-

racters, blessed be God, you may find both among the living and the dead: you may contemplate them through the medium of observation or the medium of history. But not to speak of those in whom this noble virtue shines less brightly,—let me say, study the character of Paul, till you get your soul thoroughly imbued with its spirit. Study the character of Jesus—that divine model of magnanimity. Study it in all its parts; and behold this virtue exemplified alike in his actions and sufferings—in his life and death. And while you learn from these illustrious examples, what magnanimity in its noblest form is, open your heart to the hallowed influence, and let the same spirit breathe through *your* life. Hold communion with this spirit wherever you find it. It is next to breathing the atmosphere of Heaven.

Finally: Let me exhort you *to labor and suffer, and live, in conformity with the true genius of Christianity*. Christianity is a revelation of the love of God; and this “love Divine, all other love excelling,” breathes in every doctrine, and every precept, and every promise; but if you will behold it in its brightest effulgence, you must see it beaming from the cross. Forgiveness of sin,

the spirit of adoption, triumph in death, and everlasting glory in Heaven—all through the channel of my Redeemer's blood! The more you study this wonderful economy, in the exercise of a right spirit,—the more you meditate upon the boundless compassions of God in the salvation of a lost world, the more will you feel the attractions of true magnanimity. Let the spirit of the Gospel animate you as well as its precepts guide you; and as you go on from strength to strength in the divine life, you will be constantly increasing in all that constitutes the real greatness of the soul.

And now, my young friends, I leave this subject in the keeping of your understandings and consciences. In bringing it before you, I have endeavored to take counsel of your own best interests, and of the well-being of your country and your race. I profess no great wisdom in respect to the signs of the times; but I am by no means sure that, before the generation to which *you* belong shall have tasted death, there may not be fearful overturnings and convulsions both in the Church and in the world. I am not sure, from passing indications, but that this very land may yet become the theatre of startling and bloody con-

flicts, which shall cause other nations to look towards us with amazement and even with horror. Should this be so, how are you to act your part without magnanimity? How will you stand firm amidst the rockings of the tempest, without moral courage? How will you resist the overwhelming tide of evil without benevolence? How will you plead the cause and labor in the cause of truth and right, under such appalling circumstances, without self-denial? But suppose you have no reference to the future—what claims does the *existing* state of things make upon you? What says your country, bleeding under the influence of distracted counsels and party strife? And the Church, blessed indeed—wonderfully blessed, in some respects, of her Head—but yet the theatre of divisions and jealousies, and unreasonable claims—what does *she* ask at your hands? And this great world too—a large portion of which is sunk in ignorance, and idolatry, and crime,—still to be reclaimed as part of the dominion of the Son of God—what has *it* to say to the young men of this generation—to the young men in this house? All require that you should keep the spirit of magnanimity burning brightly in your bosoms;

that you should nerve yourselves for great and heroic deeds; that your ruling purpose should be to serve God and your generation. Yield to this claim, my young friends, and as sure as the ordinance of generation will bless you; and God the with everlasting ben-

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