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ON THE ASSASSINATION OF

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

PREACHED AT

Surrey Chapel, London,

SUNDAY, MAY 14, 1865.

BY

REV. NEWMAN HALL.

BOSTON:
BARTLETT AND HALLIDAY.
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SERMON.

IN the Inaugural Address delivered by the late lamented President on his re-appointment as supreme governor of the United States, he said of the two parties in the war, "Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God; each invokes his aid against the other. It may seem strange that any man should dare ask a just God's assistance in wringing bread from the sweat of other men's faces; but let us judge not, that we be not judged. The prayer of both could not be answered: that of neither has been answered fully; for the Almighty has his own purposes. 'Woe unto the world because of offences, for it must needs be that offences come; but woe unto that man by whom the offence cometh.' If we suppose American slavery to be one of those offences which he now wills to remove, and that he gives to both this terrible war, as was due to those by whom the offence came, shall we say there is any departure from the divine attributes? Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away: yet if it be God's will that it continue until the wealth piled by bondmen by two hundred and fifty years' unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword,—as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, that 'the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.'"

These words shall be our text. The motto for our meditations on his decease shall be furnished by the lamented President himself in the speech which he delivered within six weeks of that event.

Ps. xix. 9: "The judgments," &c.

The judgments of the Lord are his revealed will, contained in holy Scripture, of which we say with David, "The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes." But God speaks in providence as well as in Scripture. His judgments are his acts as well as his words: it is our interest and duty to study both. Some persons object to ministers of the gospel referring in their sermons to public events. They say we ought to preach Christ crucified, and not talk about statesmen, rulers, or philanthropists. Certainly; and a grievous dereliction of duty it would be, a sad prostitution of the Church and the Sabbath, if any secular theme were substituted for the glorious gospel of the blessed God. But may not passing events be made a vehicle for conveying truth to the mind? What is the value of abstract truths if never practically applied? The events of God's providence should be contemplated in relation to God's gospel. Instead of keeping religion distinct from the interests of life, and thus rendering those interests merely secular, and really godless, we should endeavor to hallow and elevate all those interests—domestic, commercial, political—by Christian faith and Christian feeling. Did the Jewish prophets never refer to political events? Their inspired ministry was directed, in the first instance, to their own age, and had a constant bearing on the great national events then transpiring. Did not our Lord himself illustrate his teaching by reference to things secular? Is not the Bible full of truth embodied? of lessons drawn from the lives of men and the dealings of Providence?

There has been no death in our own day more remarkable, none which will have a more prominent place in all future history, than the assassination of President Lincoln. If it was appropriate that every pulpit in our land should make allusion to the death of our lamented Prince Consort, if the omission would have argued a culpable disloyalty,—is it not right, that, in all the churches of America, sermons have been delivered with special reference to the death of the President? If *we* were bereaved as a nation, should we not feel grateful for the sympathy of Americans if they also, in public worship,

alluded to our loss? So also is it fitting, that throughout our country such sympathy in public worship has been and still is manifested, especially when we consider the unparalleled atrocity of the deed which has deprived them of their chief magistrate, and the peculiar crisis of affairs at which he has been taken from them.

Besides, we are one people. We have sprung from the same Anglo-Saxon stock. The same mother-country gave us birth. The Pilgrim Fathers who colonized New England planted there that freedom to worship God, which was then denied them here, but which their posterity, both here and there, equally prize as more sacred than life. We speak the same language, cherish the same traditions, read the same Bible, and sing the same hymns to the same tunes. We are animated by the same quenchless passion for liberty. Tens of thousands of our teeming population find a home there every year. Who has not yonder some near relative, friend, or acquaintance? How many look to America as the land where, however unlikely it may seem at present, they may possibly end their days! We are linked together by a thousand ties, so that their prosperity is our prosperity, and their honor is our honor. Their sorrows are our sorrows too. Let us then "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." Let us "rejoice with those who do rejoice, and weep with those who weep."

There is cause for lamentation. A good and a great man has fallen by the hand of an assassin, who thought that, in striking down the nation's head, he was striking down the nation itself. The universal grief in America shows how he was honored and beloved. Twice chosen by the free voice of millions of his fellow-citizens to rule over them in the most momentous crisis of their history; twice chosen to steer the vessel of the State amid waves that threatened to overwhelm it; exposed to their keen scrutiny in all his public and private acts,— he has won their universal homage and affection. Beneath an exterior unlike that which is generally found in courts, and which gave occasion to vulgar satirists to utter their rude jests, there beat a heart to which courts have been too much strangers. In President Lincoln there was a com-

bination of honesty, sagacity, magnanimity, and gentleness, such as few rulers have ever manifested. He was faithful to the trust imposed on him. He was firm to the purpose he had maturely formed. He was true to the nation whose integrity he was sworn to maintain. He was true to those principles of freedom he had always professed and loved. He would not allow his benevolent impulses to lead him away from what he considered his duty to the State which he had engaged to govern according to law. Neither would he allow his official position to deaden and keep in abeyance those impulses. The fear of misrepresentation, the charge of inconsistency, did not cause him to waver in the course he had marked out for himself. He faithfully administered those laws; but, as fast as circumstances gave him the opportunity constitutionally to modify those laws in the interest of emancipation, such opportunity was promptly embraced. Those who have not studied the peculiar Constitution of the United States cannot appreciate the difficulty of the position of a President urged on one side by a powerful party and his oath to observe the laws; and urged on the other side by another powerful party and his benevolent sentiments to abolish slavery. History will honor him for having accomplished both tasks.

In all his intercourse with this country, he manifested dignity combined with courtesy and kind feeling. He was prompt to satisfy every righteous demand without compromising the honor of his own nation. To his justice and moderation it is partly owing that peace was maintained between the two countries on more than one occasion of difficulty. In the conduct of the war he united firmness with clemency. He was often censured as being unfeeling because he persisted in prosecuting a contest which cost so many lives. This was said to be fighting for empire. But fighting for empire is fighting for new territory, not fighting for the maintenance of nationality. To guard one's own country from disintegration is surely not fighting for empire. No empire in the world would contend more earnestly than our own for self-preservation. It was not, therefore, indifference to suffering, but a high sense of duty to his country, which led him with such perseverance to maintain the strife. But no one ever conducted a war, or governed a

nation amidst such perils, with so much clemency combined with firmness.

One or two illustrations of his personal kindness have just come to my knowledge through a friend who has recently returned from the United States. This gentleman told me that he was one day conversing with the general in command of one of the armies on the subject of desertions, when the general said, "The first week of my command there were twenty-four deserters sentenced by court-martial to be shot; and the warrants for their execution were sent to the President to be signed: he refused. I went to Washington and had an interview. I said, 'Mr. President, unless these men are made an example of, the army itself is in danger. Mercy to the few is cruelty to the many.' He replied, 'Mr. General, there are already too many weeping widows in the United States. For God's sake, don't ask me to add to the number, for I won't do it.'" A young sentry was found asleep at his post: he was sentenced to be shot. But the President came into camp and granted the earnest petition of the lad. The dead body of that youth was afterwards found amongst the slain on the field of Fredericksburg, and under his waistcoat, next his heart, was a photograph of the President, beneath which the lad had written, "God bless President Lincoln!" Many similar incidents might be cited to show how tender-hearted he was, and how deeply he was beloved by multitudes who have received from him personal marks of kindness.

That he rose from a most humble station only illustrates the more the high qualities he possessed, enabling him to overcome the disadvantages of poverty. He was great enough not to be ashamed of his origin. When a parcel, carefully packed, was sent to the White House, which, being opened, was found to contain a woodman's axe, instead of being angry at this vulgar allusion to his former occupation, he ordered it to be placed in a prominent position, on a handsome mahogany stand, that all might see that he honored labor, and was not ashamed that he once ate his bread by the sweat of his brow.

There is every reason to believe that he was more than a mere professor of Christianity. When he left Illinois for Washington, his last request to his fellow-citizens was, that they would

pray for him. It is said that he habitually rose at five o'clock, and spent an hour in devotion. The inaugural address already quoted breathes a deeply religious spirit. So do many of his public documents and private letters. In a letter dated April 4, 1864, he says, "If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong. If God now wills the removal of the great wrong, and wills also that we of the North as well as you of the South shall pay fairly for our complicity in that wrong, impartial history will find therein new cause to attest and revere the justice and goodness of God."

This "wrong" of slavery, he, more than any other man of our day, has been instrumental in removing. It was his well-known hostility to it, which, on his election, was the proximate and avowed cause of the Rebellion. As far as his pledges to the law and the course of events permitted, he steadily pursued this great object. Under his auspices, slavery was speedily abolished in Columbia, and prohibited in the Territories. The slave-trade was declared penal, and the right of search fully granted. The loyal States were invited to emancipate their slaves, full compensation being offered. Then the proclamation was issued by which all slaves in rebel States were declared free; and though, for a season, this was inoperative over a large district, it is now not only law but fact. During the war, two millions of slaves actually gained their freedom, and were protected wherever the power of the President extended. And now, throughout those Southern States, long a house of cruel bondage, the jubilee trumpet is sounding deliverance to the captive and the opening of the prison to them that were bound. Four millions of freedmen bless God for Abraham Lincoln!

At the very culmination of his labors,—just as he saw the failure of the attempt to disintegrate the nation, and to found a rival empire on slavery as its corner-stone,—just as he saw the triumph of emancipative victory crowning his skill and perseverance, he was snatched from the scene of his toils and his triumphs. The whole world execrates the deed. All future history will stigmatize it as the blackest of crimes. But for the victim himself shall we lament? Being, as we trust he was, a sincere Christian, sudden death to him was sudden glory. He found himself in heaven before he expected. Freed from

the anxious cares of government, in a season of peculiar difficulty, he was suddenly "where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest." Having done well what he was spared to do, he is now beyond the possibility of tarnishing his fair fame by the mistakes to which all men are liable. Having died a victim to the hatred which the slavery spirit ever bears to the stanch friends of freedom, he will be known to all coming generations, not only as the honest, the magnanimous, the merciful President, but as the pure and illustrious martyr of American emancipation; so that, whether we consider his condition in the other world or his reputation in this, we cannot pity *him*. The bullet of the murderer was a quick summons to the joys of heaven, and an effectual guaranty of fame on earth.

We need not lament for Lincoln; but we may and do lament for his family and for his nation. Let our tender sympathy go forth towards her, who, sitting at his side, all unconscious of the coming blow, was suddenly bereft of the endeared companion of so many years, during which they had shared together both hardship and honor. Our beloved Queen, with that prompt, spontaneous kindness of heart which she manifests to all sufferers, — one royal widow to another, — with her own hand wrote to express her sympathy. There is not one of her subjects, who, if possible, does not love her the more for, and in spirit join her in, that act.

We lament for the nation. They have lost their chosen ruler, whose fitness for his exalted post had been severely tested and fully confirmed; under whose administration the empire had been preserved from disruption, and freed from what had been its weakness and dishonor; and whose wisdom and clemency marked him out as specially competent to complete the work of pacification and reconstruction. Our brethren yonder feel as if each of them had lost his own father. Never was such wide-spread, spontaneous, and universal grief. Whole cities hung with black are a feeble expression of the sorrow that is felt. Commerce suspends her trafficking, Mammon forgets his hoards, Pleasure arrays herself in sackcloth, to join the general lamentation. From twenty thousand churches, from twenty times twenty thousand family altars, go up earnest

prayers for consolation and for succor in this their hour of public and of private woe. Let us join them in such prayers! It will be our best expression of good will. It will be the most solemn and most effectual sympathy. We have already often implored for America under this bereavement the special help of Heaven. We have done it in public, we have done it in private. Let us do it expressly and emphatically now! Yes: let us, one and all, once more, with affectionate fervor, implore for our bereaved sister nation the guidance, protection, and comfort of the compassionate God and Father of all! Let us pray.

King of kings, Lord of lords, the universal Ruler, who doest according to thy pleasure in the armies of heaven and amongst the inhabitants of the earth! we adore thy power and majesty, thy wisdom and goodness, thy righteousness and love. Clouds and darkness are round about thee; but mercy and truth are the habitation of thy throne. Thy judgments are a great deep; but thy faithfulness endureth to all generations. We bow with humble reverence before thy throne. We submit; we obey, we confide, we rejoice in thee, our refuge and our strength. We mourn before thee in sympathy with our brethren in America in this their hour of bitter bereavement. We mourn with the bereaved family. God sustain and comfort them! O thou Judge of the widow! bind up the wounds of that broken heart. We mourn with the bereaved nation. The Lord be their lawgiver, the Lord be their king and help, and save them. We bless thee for the maintenance of order at a crisis of so much peril. We bless thee for the spirit of clemency which has restrained the natural risings of revenge. Oh! grant a continuance of the same. We pray for thy servant, who, in circumstances of so much difficulty, has succeeded to the office of supreme ruler of that great nation. Give him all needful wisdom and ability; firmness tempered with kindness, justice allied with mercy. Let him rule in the fear of God. May law and order speedily be re-established! May the wounds of war be healed! May there be an immediate and final end to slavery! May the long-oppressed negro race rejoice in knowledge and industry, in the rights of freemen, and the privileges of Christ's church! May America flourish! may she be exalted in righteousness, and employ her vast influence only for the welfare of the world! Unite our nation with theirs. Draw us together with the cords of sympathy. Let there be no envy, no ill-will. Oh! save us, save the world, from the miseries of war between Great Britain and America. Scatter thou the people that delight in war. Give peace in our time, O Lord! give peace in all time, we beseech thee. And may these two nations, so blessed of God, be ever found united in the toils and the triumphs of civilization, freedom, and religion! God save the Queen! God bless the President! God guard our native land!

God guard and prosper and bless America, for the sake of Jesus, the Prince of peace, our Lord and theirs! Amen and Amen.

If there is cause for lamentation, there is also cause for thankfulness. The mercy of God is revealed together with his judgments. If we weep with those who weep, we will also rejoice with those who rejoice. Let us, then, give thanks that no civil commotion has followed this murder! There has been no interval of anarchy. The machinery of government has revolved without a moment's pause. Power has quietly been transferred to the next in station, without contention, panic, or delay. While lamenting that the blow at the individual has taken effect, let us thank God that the blow at the nation has been averted.

Let us rejoice that there has been no outburst of popular revenge! There might have been riotous assaults against the persons and property of all people supposed to be favorable to the Southern Confederacy. There might have been wholesale conflagration and massacre. There might have been a wild demand for severest measures on the part of the Government against all implicated in the Rebellion. There has been nothing of the sort. We have not heard of one act of violence. Justice is indeed threatened against those implicated in the murder; but the same policy of clemency and conciliation towards the conquered which was inaugurated by Lincoln has been adopted and proclaimed by his successor. When we consider the provocations which have been given by the Vermont raiders, by the New-York incendiaries, by the starving to death of thousands of federal prisoners, we regard it a mark of the special controlling grace of God, that, under this additional and most monstrous outrage, the passions of the nation have been thus restrained; and that, after all their victories in battle and all their successful sieges, they have illustrated the proverb, "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."

We should be thankful for that overruling Providence, "from seeming evil still educing good," which, from an event so sad, from a crime so horrible, nevertheless causes some good to follow, and makes the wrath of men to praise him.

In America this crime has fused together all parties in one common sentiment of indignation, not only against the individual plotters and perpetrators of it, but against that slave-spirit, of which the crime was the undoubted and legitimate development. There have been misguided men, who, though fighting for an institution that violated all the rights of man and all the laws of God, were, nevertheless, incapable of being implicated in such an act as the assassination of the late President. It would be most unwarrantable to charge that crime, without proof, on individuals who proclaim their abhorrence of it. But it is just and natural to charge it against that slavery-spirit which the institutions of the South have nurtured through long years of cruelty and wrong perpetrated against the negro. That slavery-spirit which bought and sold human beings like cattle; which separated husbands and wives, parents and children; which flogged naked women; which hunted fugitives with bloodhounds, and burnt alive and killed with unmentionable tortures those slaves who resisted their wicked will,—that slavery-spirit which organized ruffianism, incendiarism, and murder in Kansas; which struck down Senator Sumner in the senate-house, and hailed with plaudits in every city the would-be assassin; which plotted the burning of New York, and commissioned plunder and murder on Vermont bankers,—that slavery-spirit which would have shot or hung or burnt to death any of us if caught in the act of helping one single slave to escape,—that slavery-spirit it was which struck down the man who had given freedom to four millions. This, then, will unite all parties in execration of slavery. If there have been two parties hitherto, one desiring to abolish slavery, the other only seeking to debar it from spreading further, there will be only one party now. All are resolved to extirpate, root and branch, that atrocious system, that embodiment of all villainies, which has so long prevailed in the Southern States; which caused this cruel war, and which now, in addition to all the lives lost in camp, in battle, in hospital, and in prison, is answerable for that of President Lincoln, whose murderer it incited and commissioned in his deed of perfidy and revenge. We will therefore be thankful that at least this good has resulted from the crime,

— that if there was previously any possibility of compromise, any disposition, for the sake of union and peace, to deal gently with the slavery question, and not immediately and completely to let the captive go free, there will be none now. No fear now that the loyal servant shall be made to submit to the yoke of the rebel master, and the friend be worse treated than the foe. No! the death of Lincoln is the final knell of slavery.

There is also cause of thankfulness as regards the relations between this country and America. There was ill-feeling in many minds. America had eagerly looked to the mother-country for sympathy in her great struggle for existence, — in her great battle with the most gigantic of wrongs. She thought she looked in vain. The great mass of the people sympathized; but many of those whose opinions America most esteemed, looked on coldly or critically, or with undisguised sympathy for the foe. America misunderstood this country in some matters: in others she had cause for disappointment and irritation. Nor was there altogether the absence of words and deeds in America calculated to cause alienation here. But all this is obliterated in the universal sympathy elicited by this event. Whatever differences of opinion have existed among us, arising partly from incorrect information as to facts, partly from erroneous judgments as to the objects of both parties, all are one in lamentation for the murdered President, in abhorrence of the crime, in sympathy with the bereaved. That which has emphatically been expressed by the Queen, by Parliament, by municipal assemblies, is felt by every inhabitant of the land, from the peer to the peasant. This sympathy over the grave of the President will facilitate the union of all parties in accepting accomplished facts, and wishing well to America, united and free. And this universal sympathy expressed here will do more than could have been done by years of explanation to cause Americans to forget what they had thought indicated injustice and unkindness on our part. They, as we, are a generous people. They will be melted by the spontaneous and unequivocal outburst of a universal sympathy. They will know that the heart of old England beats true, though for a season its tongue did not utter what they considered generous and just. Buds of misconception, which might

have blossomed, and produced a harvest of contention, have been nipped and destroyed. A more cordial union than has been felt for many years has been consecrated by this martyrdom. Fears cherished by many that the civil war might be followed by an international war have been allayed; and peace between the two nations has been rendered secure.

And who can estimate adequately the importance of maintaining peace between two such empires? The recent war has proved that the resources, the energy, the bravery of America, are not inferior to our own. What, then, must be the result of war between nations thus prepared and thus resolute! Each would provoke the other to renewed effort. There would be no yielding till there was utter exhaustion. What millions of precious lives might be sacrificed! how wide-spread would be the desolation and woe! How would universal tyranny exult at the sight of the two great champions of freedom turning away from the common foe to destroy each other, instead of being allies in the great conflict of truth against error, of liberty against despotism, of right against wrong! If, then, the death of Abraham Lincoln, by evoking British sympathy, has tended to allay American irritation, and to unite the two countries in the bonds of peace and good-will; and if it has ratified the late President's Emancipation Proclamation, so that slavery in America is buried in the same grave with him whom it slew, shall we not adore the goodness which blends with the judgments of the Lord?

We may, from this example, learn to trust in God when all things seem to be against us. To many the murder of Lincoln seemed at first to be ruin to America and to freedom. And every Christian can look back to periods when God was working for him special blessings by methods which seemed most destructive to his welfare. The brightest morning has sometimes dawned out of the darkest night. The loveliest paradise has sometimes been reached by the roughest path. "All things work together for good to those that love God."

"Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for his grace;
Behind a frowning Providence
He hides a smiling face."

There are other lessons of an ordinary and obvious kind. We are, of course, reminded of the uncertainty of life. The chief danger was over; the hour of triumph had come. Mr. Lincoln, on an occasion of national rejoicing, unconscious of danger, was hurried into eternity. We may be in no danger from the hand of our fellow-men; but Death is an assassin, who has marked out every one of us as his victim. He dogs our steps. We can never elude his pursuit. He is close behind us, watching his opportunity. The blow, though delayed, is sure some day to be delivered, sure some day to prove fatal. When that shall be none can know. Is there, then, no possibility of avoiding the danger? There is. Let us commit ourselves into the keeping of the Prince of life. He is stronger than death. He is a body-guard under whose care all are safe who put their trust in him. "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them." "No weapon formed against them shall prosper." For though death will seem to strike, it will not be as an assassin, but as a friend to those whose life is hid with Christ in God. To them he is a friendly messenger to call them home from the conflict to the triumph, from the pilgrimage to the palace, from earth to heaven. Jesus says, "He that believeth in me shall never die;" for, when the body is summoned to the grave, the soul is summoned to glory.

Finally we are reminded of our divine Emancipator. Abraham Lincoln, on Good Friday, was slain, an unconscious martyr in emancipating four millions of men from the slavery of the body. Jesus Christ, on Good Friday, was crucified, a voluntary sacrifice in redeeming the human race from the slavery of the soul, from the condemnation of hell. He, the Eternal Word, the Son of God, beheld mankind toiling, groaning, dying. Moved with compassion, he undertook the work of our emancipation. He took our nature, fulfilled our duties, suffered for our sins, died for our salvation. Of his life he said, "No man taketh it from me; I lay it down of myself." "We are redeemed not with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ." But it was not only necessary that the price of redemption should be paid; the spirit of freedom needs to be imparted into the abject slave of

the Devil. And this, also, our Emancipator does. We are new creatures in Christ Jesus: old things pass away; behold, all things become new in the case of those who believe. And all are invited thus to believe and be saved; for "He is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world."

Are we still servants of sin, slaves to Satan? What! when God himself has published a proclamation of emancipation? Let us all accept the priceless boon! Let us cast away our old fetters! Let us exult in the freedom of faith and love. Let us yield ourselves in grateful homage to Christ, obeying his laws, rejoicing in his love, and aiding to proclaim throughout the world, "Liberty to the captive, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound!"