

THE LORD REIGNETH

A

FEW WORDS

ON

SUNDAY MORNING, April 16th, 1865,

AFTER THE ASSASSINATION OF

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

BY

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1865
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MY CHRISTIAN FRIENDS,—I have no sermon, and there will be no preaching here to-day. For the first time I confess I wish I were not your minister, expected to say a word of consolation or help, which word I have not. Whenever I seek words, there come only tears; but I could wish to be one of you, meeting here to weep out our common grief, while in the sacred silence of this temple of God we re-assure ourselves that the Lord reigneth. Sometime when we are more calm I shall speak to you at length of our sorrow, our loss and our duty.

What means this overflow of tears wide as a continent? What mean these bells answering bells in solemn dirge all over our land? What mean these graspings of hand with hand when no word escapes the lips? What mean these anxious inquiries, these mute looks, this hope against hope for some denial of our sad news, these mutterings of vengeance, these streets lined with black, the air filled with murmurings, the very heavens joining in our tears? What voice have these strange drapings in our house of worship,—this emblem of our national glory, which at our last meeting told such a tale of joy, now too heavy with sorrow to speak at all—these flowers, which came to join in our thanksgiving for the immortal life brought to light to day, breathing their fragrance over an invisible bier, on which rests an invisible body? “He is not here, he is risen.”

Our President has been murdered! What made us love him, so that the humble citizen, taken by God from a western cabin, had well nigh won the homage of the world? What makes each one of us feel a personal grief, such as no ruler has ever called forth before? It was this simply: This man of God was true to the noblest principles which warm human breasts. Untaught in schools, but wise for any emergency; unskilled in diplomacy, but more than a match for any intrigue; temperate in the midst of every temptation; fearless in the presence of any danger; hopeful under every defeat; calm in every success; humble in every exaltation; powerful and yet prudent; firm and yet lenient; patriotic and yet humane; liberal and yet just; humorous and yet solemn-- Abraham Lincoln walked by faith and not by sight, and he was not, for God took him.

There is but one word of hope or trust. The Lord reigneth. Do not let us forget or doubt that, my friends, for one moment, or everything is gone. You will hear this question asked by some in utter despair. What are we all coming to? Let not us ask it, or harbor the despair. What are we coming to? Why my christian friends we are just following out the results of a cause which is sufficient for all these things, and a great deal more; for all that has happened, and a great deal still to happen. It is all coming about as naturally as the warm sun is calling all nature into life to-day. You may think it severe, you may think it strange, you may think it narrow, you may think

it partizan, you may think of it as you will—
but remember this ; the time will come when you
look at it in the light of Christian principle and
Christian retribution, and say with me, not a sin-
gle thing has happened for which we have not
had *in slavery* a sufficient and plain cause.

Our President has been murdered ! Who murder-
ed him ? That is something for you to consider
in your hearts, else we learn nothing from our ca-
mity. Who murdered him ? They tell us it was
Booth, an actor. No, it was not Booth. He was
only an instrument of others. They tell us it
was a maniac in a moment of frenzy. No, it was
not a maniac. *It was the calmest deliberation of the
most reflecting and honorable supporters of slavery for
the last two hundred years.* The maturity and cul-
mination, I trust, of this iniquity. Every man
who has ever said a word in defence, or extenua-
tion of this, helped murder our President. Every
man who has ever said a word in defence or sym-
pathy with the confederacy based on this iniquity,
helped murder our President. Every man who
has withheld his word of support or sympathy for
this nation struggling for a broader freedom,
helped murder our President. Every minister
who has stifled his prayer, or forborne the utter-
ance of his heart's conviction, or permitted his
sanctuary to be a refuge for the nation's destroy-
ers, has helped murder our President.

Abraham Lincoln was a noble man. Noble his
life—forever sacred be his memory. He was all
American ; a true representative of what this peo-

ple may become. He was not my choice for President the first time, but he soon won my heart. I have read somewhat of the history of the past four thousand years, and I find here the record of no nobler, truer, simpler, grander man. *But he is dead.*

The Lord reigneth. God be thanked. He has not permitted very much of the world's progress to rest upon any one man. The very highest, the very greatest are quite insignificant when we think of this mighty march of the soul of humanity. We think otherwise. We think it all depended upon one man we call Leader, General, Emperor, King, President, Minister, Pope. It did not. We call his death untimely. Nothing is untimely, from the quiet and unseen opening of yonder leaf, and its fall some day next autumn when a gentle wind shakes the bough, all along up the series of events to where a demon robs a nation of its choicest treasure. Everything comes in the fulness of time, from the blessing of yesterday to the Resurrection of the world's Redeemer. It is all of God. God gave us our Chief Magistrate, God preserved his life until he did his work; and think what a work it was! Who shall say it was not done, and well done? But most certainly there was something for another to do. Perhaps in that great heart which knew no jealousy, no envy, no bitterness, and could harbor no unkind feeling, and no shadow of revenge towards one of the human kind, there was also wanting some of that quality which measures out

justice to the guilty. What that work was, the days will fast reveal ; and whatever it was, God kept it for others to do.

God gave him, God took him. Yes, my friends most sacredly remember both. We are too apt to think that it is only by a lingering death, by a long or severe sickness, or in a good old age, that God takes one away. The other deaths we sometimes thoughtlessly call untimely and unnatural. But God works by miracles sometimes, and then we do not stop to read the natural laws under which they come. I am very sure it was his Providence that called our President away from that Washington Theatre, as truly as if he had fallen quietly asleep in a good old age. One man dies; but in God's way ; and by God's hand another is raised up, and the principle lives on. Each man fills a place no other can. We ought not to want him to ; but from all these myriads, God will show us one or many to carry on His work ; and if this struggle be not His work, it matters little whether we have another President or not.

I spoke last Thursday of the Christian doctrine of retribution, and said a cry for it would come up from the friends of the prisoners, from the bereaved and sorrowing hearts, from the freedmen. That cry to-day is wide as the nation. I loved our President as I have never loved any public man, and yet, now that he has been murdered, I have not a single feeling of revenge. I call for no vengeance, but we must demand punishment. Not for the murderer merely. Why,

I would not have even him hanged. There are many thousands all through our land far more to blame than he. I do not ask for their blood. I pray to day that not a drop of blood may be shed, though life is not much ; but I call for punishment, for Christian punishment, for punishment, for past transgressions, for present rebelliousness, for the sake of future safety ; and let punishment fall wherever it belongs, North or South. Let a cry for justice go up which shall make this continent ring, and the guilty tremble. Justice which none but the guilty ever fear. Law which none but the law-breakers ever dread.

Our President is dead. He rests from his labors, and his works do follow him. Rest in peace, thou noble martyr, while every heart hastens to pay a son of America, while thy land learns the lesson tribute and drop a tear on thy grave. Rest in peace of thy life. Rest in peace, child of liberty, while her anthem swells to a purer strain over thy memory. Rest in peace, child of the Infinite, with all the immortal company.

Our President is NOT dead. He still speaks. *He is not dead*, for the memory of virtue is immortal. *He is not dead* and here is our only sufficient consolation.

To-day is kept very sacred in the Christian church, as commemorating the resurrection of Jesus, which brought life, and immortality to light. I was intending to speak to you this morning from that passage in Mark's gospel, XVI. chap. 4th verse,—when as the three women were going to the sepulchre to annoint the body of their Master with spices,—the tribute of affection

after the custom of the age, and as the early sun was just giving his rays to light their way, — it occurred to them that a great stone which had been put as a guard by the door, would defeat their pious purpose ; but when they came to it, and looked up, behold ! the stone was already rolled away.

A simple incident, indeed, but how deep its meaning, how grand its truth, how universal its experience. We too, go along with bowed heads and mourning hearts, raising doubts or questioning possibilities, or wondering whence our aid is to come, or what we shall do when we reach the end, — when there, we lift up our eyes and it has all vanished, the danger, the dread, like some phantom which has taken to itself fearful proportions, like some great body of human form, which turns out only a stone, and that, rolled away from where our path leads. Oh ! my Christian friends, a bold and trusting, and persevering soul finds no stone against the door, but always enters without hindrance among the guarding angels by the Saviour's side.

It was a short and easy step for our departed President from the theatre of earth to the theatre of heaven. The evening light was mortal, but the morning light was full of immortality. It was a short way through a green pasture, and beside a quiet stream, with the Lord Jesus leading. We have two words to strengthen and comfort us.

“ The Lord is risen ”

“ Be still and know that I am God.”