

A GREAT MAN FALLEN

A DISCOURSE

ON THE

DEATH OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

DELIVERED IN

St. Andrew's Church, Philadelphia,

SUNDAY MORNING, APRIL 23, 1865.

BY THE

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DISCOURSE.

2 SAMUEL 3 : 34, 38.

“THY HANDS WERE NOT BOUND, NOR THY FEET PUT INTO FETTERS: AS A MAN FALLETH BEFORE WICKED MEN, SO FELLEST THOU. AND ALL THE PEOPLE WEPT AGAIN OVER HIM. AND THE KING SAID UNTO HIS SERVANTS, KNOW YE NOT THAT THERE IS A PRINCE AND A GREAT MAN FALLEN ?”

A GREAT leader and a brave man had fallen in Israel. Not in battle, not by disease, not by the hands of the ministers of justice in satisfaction to violated law, but by the hand of an assassin,—a deed treacherously, cowardly, infamously and unsuspectedly committed. In the gate at Hebron, the place of judgment and the place of concourse, in defiance of the laws of God and man, Joab, openly before the people, imbrues his hands in the blood of Abner, whom he from jealousy feared, and towards whom he entertained the bitterest feelings of revenge. “And David said to Joab and to all the people that were with him, Rend your clothes, and gird you with sackcloth, and mourn before Abner. And King David himself followed the bier. And they buried Abner in Hebron; and the king lifted up his voice and wept at the grave

of Abner; and all the people wept. And the king lamented over Abner and said, Died Abner as the fool dieth? Thy hands were not bound, nor thy feet put into fetters. As a man falleth before wicked men, so fellest thou. And all the people wept again over him. And the king said unto his servants, Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel? And I am this day weak, though anointed king; and these men, the sons of Zeruah, be too hard for me. The Lord shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness."

How striking in many respects, the parallel between this deed of blood and that committed but little more than a week ago in our national capitol. A prince and a great man then fell by the hand of an assassin; unsuspectedly, cowardly, cruelly murdered in the place of concourse before the eyes of thousands, in defiance of the laws of God and man. The deed itself spoke in thunder tones to the hearts of the people. It needed not that Executive authority should call upon the nation to gird itself in sackcloth and mourn before its fallen friend, benefactor and ruler. Scarce had the terrible tidings flown upon the lightning's wing through the loyal States, when, from millions of stricken hearts there went up to Heaven a bitter cry of anguish,—the pitiful moan of a crushed and bereaved people. The whole land, just before revelling in excess of joy over unparalleled military success, glowing with bright

hopes and brilliant revelations of restored peace and prosperity, was suddenly plunged into the very depths of woe. The sombre hue of death everywhere visible, and the varied language of mourning, told how universal and how great was the grief of the people. The angels of sorrow stretched a pall of darkness and gloom over the whole land. In every house there was, as it were, one dead; and that one—a father.

Twice, my friends, since this awful crime was committed, have we assembled in this church. Upon Easter Day we sought to catch the spirit of the service and ascend gladly in our hearts to the risen and glorified Saviour. We sought to meditate upon the precious hopes given us and the triumph achieved for us in His resurrection. But how sad and fruitless all our efforts. A great woe pressed heavily upon our hearts. Easter joys were turned into mourning, songs of thankfulness into notes of sadness and bereavement. Our thoughts and feelings would not but flow mournfully through the dark valley of affliction into which we had been called as a nation to enter. We could not, from very weeping, sing the songs of Zion.

Wednesday's solemn service brought with it the same deep impressions of the great and terrible loss we had sustained. We gathered in spirit around the cold and lifeless form of our martyr President, and paid, with distressed and weeping hearts, like offices with those which were being at the same hour per-

formed over his remains in Washington. We then realized as never before that our truthful, loving, and noble-hearted friend and benefactor had gone. No words could add solemnity or effect to those funeral services under the powerful impression of this conviction.

To-day, we are again assembled, and the same subject is occupying our minds and moving the deepest emotions of our hearts. There is no possibility of escaping it. Nor, dear friends, would we if we could, until it shall produce the result God designed it to accomplish in the gracious orderings of this most mysterious providence. A blow so heavy, so sudden, so momentous in its consequences, is not easily to be recovered from, or soon to be forgotten. To-day, the great and noble dead is in our midst; and every Church assemblage and every heart in this vast city feel the influence of that presence. Meet was it, that the noblest, the greatest, and the best of all the martyrs, who have been sacrificed upon the altar of liberty since the birth of this nation, should upon this, the last Sabbath before his sepulture, lie in state in the hall where liberty was cradled, and in which were first authoritatively uttered those great principles of human freedom, equality and constitutional law, in the defence of which he died.* His lifeless and mutilated

* The remains of President Lincoln were placed in Independence Hall, Saturday evening, April 22, and remained there exposed to view until

body calls upon us for a more extended notice of his character and services than in this church has heretofore been given; and in so doing, I shall not, I am assured, do violence to the proprieties of time and place, or go counter to your just expectations and the demands of the present occasion.

I purpose, this morning, to show, first of all, the true greatness of him whom the nation now mourns and seeks to honor; second, to discover, if possible, the culprit by whose hand he fell; and third, to indicate the manner in which his death may best be avenged, and our great and irreparable loss be made a blessing to ourselves and to our country. We must speak briefly upon each of these points, and cannot, therefore, do more than present a faint outline of the virtues and excellences of the illustrious dead, trusting that the

the following Monday morning. The head of the deceased was towards the pedestal upon which rests the old State House bell, which first pealed liberty throughout the land. The four walls of the hall were tapestried with serge. The pictures which the heavy serge festoons were allowed to reveal were six in number, and not inappropriate silent watchers of the dead. Upon the coffin was placed a beautiful cross, composed of perfectly white flowers of the choicest kinds. A card attached was inscribed as follows:

“A tribute to our great and good President, fallen a martyr in the cause of human freedom.

“In my hand no price I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling.”

Extract from Daily Paper.

perfectness and moral grandeur of his character, may at least, not suffer in your estimation by this necessarily imperfect presentation.

I. Consider then, how great Abraham Lincoln was, first, *in his devotion to truth*. It is said of him as of the immortal Washington, that he never told a lie. From the age of twenty-five to the time of his death, he was more or less in political life, and under its corrupting influences; and yet so sacredly did he hold to the inviolability of oaths, to the sanctity of plighted word, and to the great value and necessity of strict veracity in statement and conduct, that his bitterest enemies have not been able to convict him of a single falsehood, or prove upon him a single charge of fraud, of intrigue or of deceit. He had an instinctive love of truth,—truth in word, in principle, in belief, and in practice,—that caused him, no matter what the consequences might be to himself, to do and say, when duty demanded, what he thought and felt and believed. He was incapable of acting a part, and careful that he might not be deceived by others. No labor was too great, no pressure of business so severe, as to prevent him from learning, if possible, the truth of every case presented to him.

He was honest with himself, and honest in his dealings with others. It shone forth from earliest years. When a mere child, he labored for two days to pay for

a borrowed book, which he promptly confessed had been by his own carelessness destroyed. Veracity and strict integrity marked all his boyhood plays, bargains and engagements.

In after life, this fidelity to truth in word, in principle and in conduct, was marvellously manifested. History furnishes no parallel of devotion so constant and unswerving,—under a combination of circumstances so powerfully arrayed in opposition,—as distinguished him during his entire Presidential career. In the midst of plots and counterplots; amid the fluctuations of opinion and the surging waves of intense feeling over different lines of policy; at one time basely attacked by bitter enemies; at another, made the subject of satire, ridicule, or unjust criticism; at another, still, brought under the blandishments and seductive influences of greedy politicians, unwise friends, or base pretenders—now contending with factious elements at home, and now with intriguing or hostile cabinets abroad—firmly relying upon the invincibility of his principles, the correctness of his opinions, the rightfulness of his position, and the integrity of his purpose, like a rock he stood courageously and heroically beating back every wave, resisting every encroachment, withstanding every seductive influence; unmoved alike by blame or praise, bribes or threats, reproach, contempt, cajolery, or base

insinuations,—true to himself, true to his principles, true to his country, and true to his God. Oh, how noble such an exhibition of character! How rarely is it seen in the history of public men.

But again, the greatness of Abraham Lincoln was manifested *in his devotion to the rights of humanity, and his sympathy with his race.* We see him at the very beginning of his legal career, in the face of bitter prejudice and an intense feeling of revenge on the part of the community, defending the life of the son of a poor widow, charged with the crime of murder. Volunteering his services without a thought of reward, he rested not day nor night until the tangled and deceptive web of circumstance was completely unravelled, the malicious falsehoods of witnesses disproved, the innocence of the prisoner established, and light and life and joy could again visit the home of the widow and the fatherless. And then, not selfishly elated by his success, indeed scarcely conscious, so great was the simplicity and humility of his heart, of the proud distinction his talents had won for him in triumphing over prejudice, hostility and wrong, regardless of needed rest or of the praise that awaited his presence among his associates, in the greatness of his disinterested devotion to the suffering, the neglected and the defamed, he remembers only their needs, and lets the sun of that eventful day go down upon him administering to their wants. And this was the spirit he ever

manifested. No thought of self, no concern for his own fame, no feeling of personal pride, no expressions of triumph in the hour of success, ever disturbed his heart, or passed his lips so far as we are able to learn, throughout the whole period of his marvellous history. Whether receiving the plaudits of a country court for a successful defence, or the homage and praise of millions in this and other lands, for the liberation of a long-oppressed race and the preservation of the nation's life, he was the same modest, self-forgetting, unelated man.

This remarkable freedom from every form of pretension, from self-commendation, and from all feelings of exultation over the defeat of others or his own success, arose not only from the native simplicity and generosity and divinely implanted humility of his heart, and the singular mastery he exercised over the varied impulses and passions of his nature, but, also, was largely the result of his intense devotion to the right, and whole-souled sympathy for the distressed, the needy and the wronged; causing him entirely to lose sight of selfish considerations, and in all his legal and political successes to be absorbed in the contemplation of truth vindicated, the right maintained, justice honored, the bounds of liberty enlarged, and the oppressed and afflicted blessed. Oh how grandly his whole heart went forth in sympathy for all his race, and how earnestly, faithfully and untiringly, did he labor in

its behalf. It was not the white man, or the red man, or the black man, that he saw. It was humanity, suffering and needy, and down-trodden. It was not numbers, rank, wealth or position, that chiefly secured his attention, or obtained his most ready aid. The wife of the poor soldier starving in the infamous prisons of the South, or the widowed mother of a son who had fallen in battle, received from him equal attention with the noblest, the richest and the most exalted that passed the threshold of the Executive mansion. We see him at one time, with his own hands binding up the wounds of some suffering hero in the hospital; at another, riding ten miles to carry a reprieve to a poor soldier boy, who has been sentenced to death for sleeping upon his post; at another still, patiently listening to the story, and granting the request of a weeping servant girl, whose brother for desertion has been sent to the Dry Tortugas for punishment; and, we say, is *this* the Chief Magistrate of this great nation? Can he, who is engaged in such lowly offices, really be the one to whom is intrusted the fate of millions, who bears the weight of empire upon his shoulders, who daily decides great questions of state, and by his wise and far-seeing policy, and masterly direction of affairs, is largely shaping the future of other nations as well as our own?

Yes, even so. With Abraham Lincoln nothing was small or unimportant which his sense of justice and

kind heart told him ought to be done ; and nothing for the amelioration and elevation of his race was too great or too difficult for him to undertake to do that demanded of him the effort. In speaking to a friend of his Proclamation of Emancipation he said, "I did not think the people had been educated up to it, yet I thought it right to issue it, and I trusted in God and did it." How heroically grand this sentiment ! What expresses more perfectly the whole theory and practice of his life ! What sentence more worthy to be written in gold, and claimed by every true man as the history of every truly great act ? "*I thought it right ; I trusted in God ; I did it.*" Few, comparatively, approved of his course at that time ; but he hesitated not. Misrepresentations, censure and abuse were of little consequence to him, so long as he knew his motives were pure, the end he had in view right, and his course in accordance with the great principles of justice and humanity. He proclaimed liberty to the slave, and trusted in God that the victory which he sought to win over the prejudices of the people and the past policy of the nation might be crowned ultimately with success, both in the complete overthrow of the influence of slavery in the North, and in the practical liberation of an entire race from its thralldom in the South. The wisdom of his course has been clearly demonstrated by the progress of events. Thank God that he lived to see his views and his efforts sustained

by the great body of the people of this land; and to behold the dawn of a new era of privilege and blessing to the oppressed race, which, in the midst of peril and difficulty, he stretched forth his brave hand to save.

Never had humanity a more faithful, devoted and self-sacrificing friend. The principles of human liberty he enunciated, and the blows he dealt to tyranny, oppression and wrong, are felt the world over. The simple, unpretending man, whose body now lies in yonder State House, has made the monarchs of Europe tremble upon their thrones, and sent joy and the assurance of ultimate freedom to every bondman who has been able to spell out his name and heard of his glorious deeds; and they will weep, too, as we to-day weep, over the cruel act that stilled the throbbings of his noble heart, and closed in violence and blood his earthly career.

Abraham Lincoln was great yet again, *in his devotion to his country*. No testimony of mine, I am sure, is needed to strengthen your convictions of the truth of this statement. His whole history, before as well as after his elevation to the chief office of authority in this nation, is in every part of it proof conclusive of his entire single-hearted devotion to the land of his birth. An intense, all-comprehensive patriotism, as has been said, was the constant stimulus of all his public exertions. It grew into the very constitution

of his soul, and operated like a natural function, continuously, spontaneously, and almost as it were, unconsciously. It pervaded and vivified all that he said and formed the prime incentive of all that he did. If he had ambition, it was to serve his country, and in that sphere where he might do it most effectually. In no way did he ever fail his country in the time of need. A public trust was to him a sacred thing. Sublimer moral courage, more resolute devotion to duty, cannot be found in the history of man than he has displayed for the salvation of the American Union. It was the sublime performance of sublime duties that made him so trusted, and which has given him a fame as solid as justice, and as genuine as truth.

And yet, once more. Chief above all things else, Abraham Lincoln was to the Christian heart manifestly great *in his devotion to his God*. Whatever other elements may enter into the composition of a great character, this undoubtedly is the noblest and the best. And this especially distinguished him whom the nation now mourns. Religion shed its pure and hallowed influence over his life. It preserved him from those vices which too often disgrace men in place and power. It made him a pattern of goodness even to those who made greater professions. It opened fountains of comfort, encouragement and support to his soul, and gave him that grand and

abiding trust in the final overthrow of the rebellion, which, amid all the vicissitudes and varied fortune which attended our arms never wavered, and enabled him to guide, with a firm and steady hand, the destinies of this great people. When he left his home in Springfield to assume, for the first time, his great and responsible duties, he declared that he humbly leaned upon Divine guidance and mercy. This was the keynote of all his after declarations. Faith in God was his pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night. It supplied him with comfort and peace in the midst of family bereavement. It guided him safely through the wilderness of perplexing doubts and discouragements that he was called upon to enter, in leading this people up to a higher standard of duty, and to the possession of greater privileges and blessings. It inspired him with calm and cheering hope in the darkest days of this rebellion, when other hearts were inclined to despondency and gloom. "Gentlemen," said he to a company of clergymen who were paying their respects to him, "my hope of success in this great and terrible struggle rests on that immutable foundation, the justice and goodness of God. And when events are very threatening, and prospects very dark, I still hope that in some way which man cannot see, all will be well in the end; because our cause is just, and God is on our side." And so again, when the rebel army invaded this State, and all confidence seemed for a time gone in our

ability to beat back the foe, we learn the manner in which he met the trial, and how his fears were overcome. "I rolled on God," he said, "the burden of my country, and I rose from my knees lightened of my load, feeling a peace that passeth understanding—feeling that I could leave myself, my country and my all, in the hands of God." Oh, what a noble character was his. How we love to study it. How we long more and more and more, to imitate it. Great as we have seen in his devotion to his God, to his country, to humanity and to truth, Abraham Lincoln was a prince in a line of royalty that contains the best blood that God ever permitted to flow through the veins of fallen man. The words of Cardinal Wolsey to one whom England has likened in some respects unto himself, seem ever to have sounded in his ears, as though uttered by a voice from heaven, to indicate and prepare him for his fate.

"Be just and fear not;

Let all the ends thou aim'st at be thy country's,

Thy God's, and truth's! Then if thou fallest, O Cromwell!

Thou fallest a *blessed martyr!*"

Thou *hast* fallen, just and fearless one! greater in thy devotion to truth, to country and to God, than Wolsey ever could have believed of man, or Cromwell ever was capable of being! And thou art a martyr blessed! Blessed with the honors of Heaven, the smile of God, the gratitude of the rescued and the

saved, and the love of the good and true, the loyal and the brave, in whatever clime thy name and thy history is known. We thank our God to-day for what thou hast been to us.

II. But who was his murderer? Whose the hand that dared to still the beatings of that noble heart, destroy the great champion of human freedom and the preserver of our national life, make desolate the home of pure affection and filial devotion, and plunge a whole nation into mourning? Not that poor wretch who, now horror-stricken at the deed he has done, and the terrible penalty attached to it, seeks to escape the ministers of justice. He, indeed, was the tool, the agent in the execution of this diabolical act, and ought when found to be punished according to the atrocity of his crime. But he was not the inspirer, he was not the soul of this murder. There were others as much more guilty than he, as he was more guilty than the pistol which he held in his hand. Both were merely tools. Who set them to accomplish this awful deed? Who used them? Perhaps you may say, the chief of the Southern traitors, and those who with him devised this infernal plot. But can *they* truly be said to be the murderers of our noble-hearted President? Have we found the real culprit yet? No, my friends, though all we have mentioned may be guilty, and I believe they are of *this* crime, as well as the hundred

others with which they are charged, yet the originator and the executer of this fearful murder is to be found, not in one traitor or in a band of them, but, in that great Evil against which Abraham Lincoln battled all his life, and was sacrificed in attempting to destroy. It is the accursed Spirit of Slavery; the sum of all villanies; the mother of treason, arson, perjury, and crimes of every color and name; the fruitful source of most of our woes as a nation and the destroyer of thousands of immortal souls. This it is that struck down our lamented President. This it is that has added another to the long line of martyrs that have fallen to appease the insatiable thirst for blood which it has incited and inspired. It were not possible for the soil of America to produce a wretch so cowardly, so detestable, so devilish, as the reputed assassin of our late Chief Magistrate, unless possessed by this demon of wrong. It has given birth to the rebellion which has made our land wet with blood and strewn with the bodies of the slain. It has starved sixty thousand of our noble soldiers in the prisons of the South. It has carried sorrow into every heart, and darkened every home in our land. It has crushed out the very manhood of those whom God made in His own image, and Christ died to redeem. It has debauched the conscience of the South, so that the broad distinctions between right and wrong, virtue and crime, loyalty and treason, are not clearly seen but

by few, the large proportion of the people upholding and defending upon the authority of Holy Writ, that which the plain letter of the law of God and man clearly declares to be a sin and a crime. It has corrupted public morals, tastes, sentiments and opinions in the North, greatly blinding it to the guilt of treason and the crime of rebellion: degrading many of its merchants into mere sycophants and slaves in their greediness to appropriate its gains and share in its favors: setting up as models of excellence and as the true aristocracy of the nation, those who now do not refrain from every crime to effect their unholy ends: pouring contempt upon the humbler virtues when not redeemed by graces of manner, or the stamp of noble birth: perverting the purposes and aims of life, and dishonoring labor. This is what slavery has done and is doing to destroy this land. Thank God that its power is not now as great as in days gone by. Thank God that he whom the nation now mourns, was permitted before his death, to grapple with this great evil as man never did before, and to crush out its life in many portions of our land. Thank God that the loyal and true men in our National and State halls of legislation, have decreed its total destruction, and soon, if we mistake not, so far as its outward presence is concerned, it will be seen no more on this continent. But it has a Spirit which will not so easily die. And it is this Spirit, as we have said, which drank the life-blood of our Presi-

dent. Here we find the real author and perpetrator of this horrid crime. This is the criminal which we arraign in the sight of high Heaven, and charge with this foul murder, and with the agony of heart that now is felt throughout our beloved land.

III. How, then, may this cruel murder best be avenged, and our great and irreparable loss be made a blessing to ourselves and our country?

Dear friends, not by indiscriminate denunciation of all now in rebellion against this Government. Not by giving vent to feelings of hatred and revenge against even its leaders, red as are their hands with this the best blood of our land. No. There is a better way of avenging it. It is by destroying entirely and forever the Spirit of Slavery and all its most infamous progeny. Let the *law* deal with the mere tools and agents of this awful crime according to the severity which justice demands,—no less and no more. But let *us*, as citizens and Christians, deal with that which has inspired them. This Spirit of Slavery as we see it in the North, let it be crushed out, root and branch. Let us hate treason and rebellion with a perfect hatred, because they are sins against God and crimes against the State. Let us make such distinctions between the guilty and the innocent as truth and justice demand. Let us require that the guilty and unrepentant be punished;

but let us pardon and forgive those who have been misled and are penitent. Let us frown down the mean and sordid spirit that would barter away the true dignity of manhood for gold, whether it be exhibited in trafficking with Southern products, Northern manufacture, or the nation's life and credit. Let the model of excellence we adopt and imitate, be, not what slavery, but freedom produces,—freedom of body and mind and spirit—freedom, human and divine—such a magnificent exhibition of character as God gave us in Abraham Lincoln. Let us see for what end we live, and what God has placed us here to do.

Oh, what a momentous time is the present to the young men of our country! What opportunity for noble effort, for a high development of character, for exerting great influence, and fighting glorious battles for truth, for humanity, for country and for God. Are they doing it? Are they meeting the great questions of the day with the seriousness and consideration which their importance demands? Are they placing themselves positively and clearly upon the side of human liberty and equality, truth and justice, law and loyalty, virtue and religion? Are they rising to the height of the demands of the years that are coming to a nation which God has preserved for a great work, and in which they are to act a most important part? Are they preparing themselves for it by a full dedication to their Lord and Saviour as well as their country?

Would God I could answer these questions in the affirmative, even as regards the young men of my own beloved flock. There are some who realize these times as they ought. Some who knowing their duty solemnly meet and perform it. Others are only partially awake to their responsibilities and unfitted to do the work assigned them. They love their country, but they do not love their God. And yet it is only Christian men that God would have direct the glorious future of this people. They only are equal to the work, because it is a work that they only can do. We have not been baptized in blood for nothing, or to be what we once were. God, I believe, has saved us, that we may extend far and wide His Gospel, while advocating at the same time, by theory and practice, the cause of universal liberty and equality. Our mission as a people is the moral, social, political and religious elevation of mankind.

Let us, then, appreciate our work and its responsibilities. Let us begin with our own personal infirmities and sins, and seek to have them removed,—with individual aims, purposes, and positions, and seek to have them right. Let us take hold of every foolish prejudice and every false notion, and by the power of God, destroy their influence upon ourselves, and as far as we can, upon others. If we cowardly shrink from our duty, and say as did David, “These sons of Zeruah be too hard for me,” like him we may be

called hereafter to lament our weakness, and suffer punishment again for our sins.

This day, when the body of our noble and sainted President is in our midst, and our hearts are touched by feelings of grateful love, let us over his lifeless and disfigured corse, pledge ourselves to truth, to humanity, to our country and to our God. And that we may do it aright, let us confess and forsake our sins, and trust and love and worship the Saviour, who hath bought us with His blood, and would present us to His Father without spot, clothed with His own most precious robe, and sealed with the signet of His covenanted and unchangeable love.