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THE PRESIDENT'S FAST;

A

DISCOURSE

UPON

Our National Crimes and Follies,

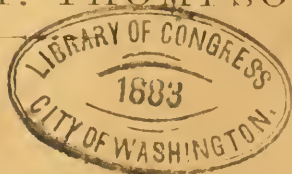
PREACHED IN THE

BROADWAY TABERNACLE CHURCH,

JANUARY 4, 1861.

BY

JOSEPH P. THOMPSON.



NEW YORK:

THOMAS HOLMAN, PRINTER, CORNER OF CENTRE & WHITE STS.

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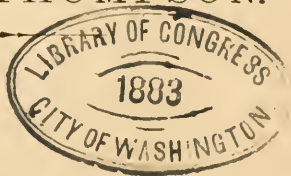
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GEORGE JAN. 12, 1861

NEW YORK, Jan. 5, 1861.

REV. J. P. THOMPSON, D.D. :

Dear Sir,—Having been appointed by the audience, who listened to your Sermon in the Broadway Tabernacle Church on the evening of the 4th instant (National Fast), to request a copy of said sermon for publication, the undersigned, in compliance with that appointment, respectfully solicit a copy for that purpose :

THOMAS RITTER,
GEORGE H. WHITE,
THOMAS S. BERRY,
ADON SMITH,
MYRON J. FRISBIE.

NEW YORK, Jan. 5, 1861.

Gentlemen,—The vote of the Congregation which you have kindly conveyed to me, requesting for publication the Discourse preached last evening, precludes my own judgment in the premises, and constrains me to an affirmative answer. I place the Discourse at your disposal, in the hope that it may contribute toward a better understanding of the causes of the "calamity and peril" that "threaten the Union of the States."

Very respectfully yours,

JOS. P. THOMPSON.

TO MESSRS. THOMAS RITTER,
GEORGE H. WHITE,
THOMAS S. BERRY,
ADON SMITH,
MYRON J. FRISBIE.

TO THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES.

A RECOMMENDATION.

Numerous appeals have been made to me by pious and patriotic associations and citizens, in view of the present distracted and dangerous condition of our country, to recommend that a day be set apart for HUMILIATION, FASTING, AND PRAYER throughout the Union.

In compliance with their request and my own sense of duty, I designate FRIDAY, THE 4TH DAY OF JANUARY, 1861, for this purpose, and recommend that the people assemble on that day, according to their several forms of worship, to keep it as a solemn fast.

The Union of the States is at the present moment threatened with alarming and immediate danger; panic and distress of a fearful character prevail throughout the land; our laboring population are without employment, and consequently deprived of the means of earning their bread. Indeed, hope seems to have deserted the minds of men. All classes are in a state of confusion and dismay, and the wisest counsels of our best and purest men are wholly disregarded.

In this the hour of our calamity and peril, to whom shall we resort for relief but to the God of our fathers? His omnipotent arm only can save us from the awful effects of our own crimes and follies—our own ingratitude and guilt toward our Heavenly Father.

Let us, then, with deep contrition and penitent sorrow, unite in humbling ourselves before the Most High, in confessing our individual and national sins, and in acknowledging the justice of our punishment. Let us implore Him to remove from our hearts that false pride of opinion which would impel us to persevere in wrong for the sake of consistency, rather than yield a just submission to the unforeseen exigencies by which we are surrounded. Let us with deep reverence beseech Him to restore the friendship and good-will which prevailed in former days among the people of the several States; and, above all, to save us from the horrors of civil war and "blood-guiltiness." Let our fervent prayers ascend to His Throne that he would not desert us in this hour of extreme peril, but remember us as He did our fathers in the darkest days of the Revolution, and preserve our Constitution and our Union, the work of their hands, for ages yet to come.

An Omnipotent Providence may overrule existing evils for permanent good. He can make the wrath of man to praise Him, and the remainder of wrath He can restrain. Let me invoke every individual, in whatever sphere of life he may be placed, to feel a personal responsibility to God and his country for keeping this day holy, and for contributing all in his power to remove our actual and impending calamities.

JAMES BUCHANAN.

Washington, December 14, 1860.

S E R M O N .

Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves : every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards ; they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them. Therefore saith the Lord, the Lord of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies. And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin. And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counselors as at the beginning : afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city.—ISAIAH, i., 23-27.

HISTORY becomes pertinent and almost personal to present times, because two of the principal factors of history, the depravity of man, and the righteous Providence of God, remain unchanged. It is as true to day as it was in Israel 2500 years ago, that the lust of wealth and power will lead a people of even the highest religious ideas and institutions to apostatize from God ; and that such apostacy will be followed by political and social corruption and degeneracy, and by the righteous judgments of Jehovah. The root of national corruption and decay is commonly found in some departure from public rectitude, through the lust of aggrandizement and the pride of power : or in some general defection from principle in the public mind, through covetousness, luxury, or political expediency. A breach of morality, a violation of some fundamental law or laws of ethics, as applied to society and nations, as surely leads to degeneracy and corruption in the State, as a breach of conscience tends to the defilement of the individual. And then, by the great law of retributive suffering that attends all human wickedness, and also by special Providential manifestations of God's moral government over the world, come evils to society and the State that no political sagacity can ward off, and no political constitution or combination can resist.

Such an epoch of abounding wickedness, and consequent

calamity and peril, this nation has reached, before completing the first century of its independent existence. The Proclamation of the President of the United States recommending this as a day of Humiliation and Prayer, "in view of the present distracted and dangerous condition of the country," sets forth—with some exaggeration of details and a melancholic strain of language, yet with a substantial basis of facts—that "the Union of the States is at the present moment threatened with alarming and immediate danger;"—that "our actual and impending calamities" are the result of "our own crimes and follies—our own ingratitude and guilt toward our Heavenly Father;" and that therefore it becomes us "to humble ourselves before the Most High, confessing our individual and national sins, and acknowledging the justice of our punishment."

The morality of this recommendation, I am thankful to acknowledge, is of a higher grade than that of the *Ostend* Manifesto—which openly advocated the robbing of a weak and declining neighbor, in order the more securely to hold in bondage a poor and oppressed race among ourselves; which insisted that even by coercion we should acquire Cuba, in order to protect Slavery at the South against the contagious proximity of a Free Negro State. At the instance of President Pierce, the ministers of the United States to Great Britain, France, and Spain, convened at Ostend to consider the possibility of acquiring Cuba for the United States. As the result of that Conference, a document was forwarded to the Secretary of State, in which after arguing the commercial and political advantages to be derived from the possession of Cuba, the writers discuss the possibility of emancipation in Cuba, either by concessions from Spain, or by servile insurrection. Contemplating the influence of emancipation in Cuba upon the neighboring States of the South, the Conference proceed to ask, "Does Cuba, in the possession of Spain, seriously endanger our internal peace, and the existence of our cherished Union? If this be answered in the affirmative, then, by every law human and divine, we shall be justified in WRESTING IT FROM SPAIN, *if we possess the power*, and this upon the very same principle that would justify an individual in tearing down the burning house of his neighbor if there were no other means of preventing the flames from destroying his own house. We would be recreant to our duty, be unworthy of our gallant forefathers, and commit

base treason against our posterity, should we permit Cuba to be AFRICANIZED, and become a second St. Domingo.*

The first name appended to this document was JAMES BUCHANAN. This audacious proposal of national piracy for the protection of slavery was understood to be Mr. Buchanan's bid for the Presidency, and to indicate his principles and policy. It is grateful to notice that the recommendation for to-day, deprecates national "crimes and follies" as provoking the just punishment of heaven.

The morality of this Fast-Day recommendation is higher, also, than that of the Inaugural Address of the same "public functionary," which foreshadowed the false and inhuman dogma, so soon to be promulgated from the Bench of the Supreme Court, that the Constitution of the Federal Union recognizes slaves as property, and pledges the General Government to protect it.† The doctrine of the Inaugural was, that the existence or non-existence of Slavery in a territory of the United States is a matter of indifference; the moral aspects of the question are ignored, and it is reduced to a mere common-place topic of numerical accident, or political convenience or expediency. Yet, it is assumed that the Federal Constitution sanctions Slavery in the territories, and that the Supreme Court will so decide. No "crime or folly" was thought of then, in connection with the system that now agitates the land.

The morality of this Fast-Day recommendation is more elevated than that of the first Message of the same high functionary, in 1857, declaring that the right of property in slaves then in Kansas, was guaranteed under the Constitution of the United States; and defending the notorious attempt to force upon that territory a Pro-slavery Constitution, devised by fraud and maintained by armed invasion, with the whole force of the Federal Government

* The Conference met at Ostend, Belgium, October 9, 10, and 11, 1854, and continued its session at Aix-la-Chapelle until the 18th of that month. The document addressed to Mr. Secretary Marey was dated at Aix, October 18, 1854, and signed by James Buchanan, J. Y. Mason, and Pierre Soulé.

† This opinion in the case of *Dred Scott vs. San.* (19 How., 395) was uttered only three days after Mr. Buchanan's inauguration. In his last annual Message, the President refers to this fact as indicating the tone of his administration. He boasts that "the Supreme Court has solemnly decided that slaves are *property*, and, like *all other property*, their owners have a right to take them into the common territories, and hold them there *under the protection of the Constitution.*"

upon the side of perjury and violence. And, lastly, the tone of this recommendation is quite above the morality of the recent Message of the President, imputing the prevalent discontent, and the threatened destruction of the Union, "to the long-continued and intemperate interference of the northern people with the question of Slavery in the Southern States." The Presidential lesson for to-day is pitched on quite another key. Instead of a plea for stealing Cuba; for legitimating human chattelism in the territories; for imposing Slavery upon Kansas by armed ruffians and perjured voters; for the vigorous enforcement of negro-catching, as the only means of preserving the Union from revolutionary resistance—instead of such topics which have formed the staple of our Presidential literature for the past four years, we have now a document which distinctly traces the "present distracted and dangerous condition of the country" to the "crimes and follies" of the nation, not excluding its Executive head; and which seeks a remedy for this calamity and peril, not in the old specific of stealing negroes, whether in Cuba, Kansas, or New York, not by interpolating Fugitive Slave Laws and Dred Scott decisions into the Constitution, but by confessing individual and national sins, by abandoning any "false pride of opinion which would impel us to persevere in wrong," by acknowledging the evils we suffer to be "a just punishment" from our Heavenly Father; and of course, if we are not hypocrites—though the President forgets to say this—by openly renouncing and forsaking the crimes and follies that have brought us to this hour of danger.

It seems a long way from the pirate's creed issued at Ostend, and the buccaneering manifestoes against Kansas, to the Calvinistic humility and dependence of our Fast-Day lesson. Yet there is a logical connection between these extremes; the crime meditated against Cuba, the bloody raid upon Kansas, an almost unbroken course of public injustice and wrong pursued in the interest of Slavery, have necessitated the marked judgments of Jehovah; and these have startled the mummified consciences of public functionaries into an energy all the more terrific, because so long restrained. The handwriting is seen upon the wall, and the knees smite together. Under the lead of our rulers, we, as a nation, have followed Israel in boldly rebelling against God and mocking at his higher law, till we have become a people "laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers, children of corruption;" keep-

ing up the routine of religious observances, and invoking the name of God, while our hands were full of blood, and the wages of oppression and deceit ; till at length even our princes have become rebels and the companions of thieves !

I do not recall public documents so offensive to the moral sense of Christendom, with a view to criminate their individual author—for I would not forget that salutary precept of Christianity, “Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.” But such documents, emanating from such a source, represent that tone of the public mind and that course of national policy which have precipitated upon us our present confusion and distress ; they exhibit that reckless disregard of justice and of moral obligation which has marked our public policy, since the system of Slavery, which our fathers outlawed from the Federal Constitution and fenced in by the ordinance of '87, has been suffered to dictate its own terms to political organizations, and to issue its own orders from the Senate Chamber, the Executive Cabinet, and the Supreme Bench of Justice.

The prophet Isaiah assigns the corruption of the people and their rulers as the cause of the calamities that had overtaken Israel. And the specific instructions he gives as to the way of reformation, show the character of the sins of which they had been guilty as a nation. Seek *judgment* ; *i. e.*, make justice the standard of your national policy ; *seek* justice—as Dr. Addison Alexander paraphrases it—“be not content with abstinence from wrong, but seek opportunities of doing justice, especially to those who can not right themselves ;” *righten the oppressed* ; redress wrong, judge the fatherless—deal justly by him and protect him—“befriend the widow, take her part, espouse her cause ; orphans and widows being special objects of divine compassion, and representing the whole class of helpless innocents.”

The sins of the nation, therefore, were pre-eminently the sins of injustice, bribery, covetousness, and oppression of the poor ; and all their punctilious observance of the external duties of religion, was not only vain and worthless, but a mockery of God, while their hands were stained with oppression and wrong. If the President had transcribed this first chapter of Isaiah, would he not have made a faithful catalogue of our public crimes and follies, not omitting its special application to magistrates and rulers ? For, to quote again the Princeton commentator, “they who were

bound officially to suppress disorder and protect the helpless, were themselves greedy of gain, rebellious against God, and tyrannical toward men. Thy rulers are rebels and fellows of thieves (not merely like them, but accomplices, partakers of their sins), every one of them loving a bribe and pursuing rewards." Therefore, because the very fountains of justice have thus become corrupt, as a necessary vindication of his own sovereignty and justice, Jehovah declares, "I will take thee in hand, I will purge out thy dross like purity itself, and will take away all thine alloy." Our sins involve our calamities, as both a necessary consequence and a judicial infliction.

In considering our national crimes and follies as related to our calamities, we shall be aided by a glance at the present state of the country. If we compare the moral, social, and commercial conditions of two great sections of the country, it may help us to locate the seat of the present disorder, and to ascertain its cause. The President informs us that "panic and distress of a fearful character prevail throughout the land;" that "our laboring population are without employment, and deprived of the means of earning their bread;" that "hope seems to have deserted the minds of men;" that "all classes are in a state of confusion and dismay." Now, surely we in this community do not recognize this picture, as in accordance with facts. True, the money-market has been seriously disturbed, and all securities and values depressed; business has been subjected to another of those spasmodic convulsions which so often interrupt the course of our prosperity; there have been heavy losses, and many disappointments, and the general derangement of the finances has of course affected unfavorably the laboring population, and made itself felt among all classes. But much of this distress has been owing to precautionary measures against some possible evil, rather than to the actual pressure of present evils. It has been limited mainly to cities and large manufacturing towns; and has been exaggerated even there. The *panic* is fairly over. Confidence, under caution, is returning. The banks have not suspended their payments, passed their dividends, nor materially curtailed their discounts. The number of business failures has not been large, as compared with former revulsions. There is no general distress among the working-men of the North. There is plenty of food in the land, and plenty of money for those who know what to do with it. Above

all, we are at peace among ourselves. There are no signs here of a social revolution ; no threats of violence ; no bands of armed men in our streets ; no apprehensions of civil war. The people are peaceably and safely pursuing their business, and do not even stint themselves in their pleasures. The holiday shops have done a good trade ; the New Year's calls were cheerful. Fifth Avenue keeps carnival on every bright day, and the Central Park invites the equestrian and the skater. Should the Prince of Wales land at the Battery to-day, and ride up to the Central Park, he might find "all classes in that state of confusion" incident to a crowd, but would see nothing of "dismay" at the impending "horrors of civil war," nothing of that fearful panic and distress which the President assumes to prevail throughout the land. He would find all as quiet and serene as though South Carolina had never passed an ordinance of secession, and the right of Coney Island to an independent sovereignty, had never been mooted.

And yet, in another section of our common country, the picture drawn by the President is fearfully true. It touches one to sadness to think of the actual condition of the South, and should move us to prayerful sympathy. There alarm pervades every household—that terror by night, that fear of one's own servants and dependents, of which, happily, we have no conception ; there is distress for food, bordering upon starvation ; there hope has deserted the best and purest of the citizens, while madness runs riot on every side ; there "all classes are in a state of confusion and dismay ;" there are the impending horrors of civil war ; an armed mob coercing public opinion, coercing the press, coercing men of substance and standing to give their countenance and money to the support of measures they dare not oppose ; there is bankruptcy and financial ruin, and the hourly peril of anarchy. There, too, in the language of the President's Message, not contradicted, not even qualified in any quarter, "a sense of security no longer exists around the family altar. The feeling of peace at home has given place to apprehensions of servile insurrection. Many a matron throughout the South retires at night in dread of what may befall herself and her children before the morning." A sad and dreary picture, but, alas, too true !

But *why* is it so ? Why this distracted and dangerous condition of one section of the country, while another is in perfect security and peace ? Are there preparations here for an armed

invasion of the South? A year ago, one forlorn old man, a moral hero with a crazed brain, attempted that, but found no approval of his deed among the thousands who pitied his fate. Is there a political organization anywhere at the North to interfere with the State rights of the South? Could such a party be formed in any Northern State? or, if formed, could it find any support from the press or at the polls? The few at the North who urge the dissolution of the Union as the speediest way to the abolition of Slavery, are men who conscientiously abstain from recognizing the Union by voting. They organize no party in politics, they train no companies for war. Whence all this terror at the South? The state of the country is summed up in these words :

SLAVERY BEGETS ITS OWN TERROR, AND BY THAT TERROR SEEKS TO COERCE US TO ITS SUPPORT.

Who have disturbed the finances of the country? *Who* have gone to the verge of treason in their acts, and sought to involve this nation in the horrors of anarchy and civil war? The men who wish to perpetuate Slavery, and those who, for the sake of pecuniary gain, of political power, or of a temporary quiet, are willing to combine with them for that end. The crimes and follies that have brought the nation to "this hour of calamity and peril" are all connected with the purpose to uphold, extend, and perpetuate the system of Slavery. If that system were done away, can you point to any thing in all the land, from Maine to Florida, from ocean to ocean, that could seriously distract and divide the nation, or ever threaten it with civil war?

The President speaks of the exigencies of the hour as "unforeseen." *Unforeseen!* Who that was not blinded by covetous or partisan interests could fail to see that the attempt to nationalize and extend a system of unmitigated injustice and wrong must demoralize those embarked in it, must corrupt the whole political administration of the country, must lower the tone of public justice and honor, must arouse the opposition of conscientious and God-fearing men, and provoke the righteous judgments of God? *Unforeseen!* Did not Jefferson, the father of Democracy, long ago write with reference to the possibility of a bloody conflict arising out of Slavery: "I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that his justice can not sleep forever... The Almighty has no attribute which can take side with us in such a

contest?"* Unforeseen! Did not Jefferson say again, touching the emancipation of the slaves: "When the measure of their tears shall be full, when their groans shall have involved Heaven itself in darkness, doubtless a God of justice will awaken to their distress." . . . "Nothing is more certainly written in the Book of Fate, than that this people are to be free."† "Unforeseen exigencies!" Did not Col. Mason, of Virginia, in the convention that framed the Federal Constitution, say that Slavery "brings the judgment of Heaven on a country. As nations can not be rewarded or punished in the next world, they must be in this. By an inevitable chain of causes and effects, Providence punishes national sins by national calamities." Foreseeing calamity as the consequence of Slavery, Mason opposed the Slave-trade.

Unforeseen! Did not leading citizens of Connecticut, in a memorial to Congress in 1791, say, "The whole system of American Slavery is unjust in its nature, impolitic in its principles, and in its consequences, *ruinous to the industry and enterprise of the citizens of these States.*" And the *Virginia Society for the Abolition of Slavery*, in addressing an early Congress, declare "that righteousness exalteth a nation, and that Slavery is not only an odious degradation, but an outrageous violation of one of the most essential rights of human nature, and utterly repugnant to the precepts of the Gospel?"‡

Unforeseen! Did not John Jay, first Chief Justice of the United States, say, "Till America comes into this measure [of the abolition of Slavery], her prayers to Heaven will be impious. I believe that God governs the world, and I believe it to be a maxim in his, as in our courts, that those who ask for equity ought to do it."

Unforeseen exigencies! Did not Mr. Webster say, at Niblo's in '37, the question of Slavery "has arrested the religious feeling of the country, it has taken strong hold on the consciences of men. He is a rash man, indeed, and little conversant with human nature, and especially has he an erroneous estimate of the character of the people of this country, who supposes that a feeling of this kind is to be trifled with or despised. It will assuredly

* *Notes on Virginia.* Query xviii. Works, vol. viii., p. 404.

† Works, vol. ix., 279; vol. i., 49.

‡ Quoted by Goodell. *Slavery and Anti-slavery*

cause itself to be respected. But to coerce it into silence, to endeavor to restrain its free expression, to seek to compress and confine it, warm as it is, and more heated as such endeavors would inevitably render it—should this be attempted, I know nothing, *even in the Constitution or in the Union itself, which would not be endangered by the explosion which might follow?**

The “exigencies” that are upon us, therefore, so far from being “unforeseen,” were predicted years ago by the framers and defenders of the Constitution, as an inevitable result of any national encouragement to Slavery, and even of the prolonged existence of the system in the country. Almost with one voice the fathers and sages of the past have warned us of the “crime and folly” of sanctioning that system of injustice and wrong, which must deteriorate society and provoke the judgments of Heaven. And yet, for the past fifteen years, we have scarce done any thing, as a nation, but consult for the preservation of Slavery, or humor its clamor and demands, as if this was the one great interest of the country. The annexation of Texas, the war with Mexico, the Fugitive Slave Law, the Nebraska Bill, repealing the Missouri Compromise, the raid in Kansas, the Dred Scott decision, the re-opening of the African Slave-trade with the connivance of Federal officers, the demand that Slavery shall be recognized in the territories as under the law of nature and the Constitution—all these and kindred measures, adopted into political platforms, or advocated by public men, show the subserviency of our national policy to Slavery. As these successive steps of iniquity have been taken, the pulpit has often warned the country of the very judgments that are upon it. I trust that without misconstruction, I may give one or two examples from the published utterances of the pulpit of the Broadway Tabernacle Church.

In 1848, alluding to the war with Mexico and the proposal to carry Slavery into the territories, your pastor said :

“For myself, I should be guilty of a crime against my own nature, against my moral sensibilities, against every feeling of the man which God has planted within my soul ; I should be guilty of a crime against mankind—against the great interests of humanity ; I should be guilty of a crime against the principles of our Declaration of Independence, and against the memory of the fathers

* Works, vol. i., p. 357.

of the Republic ; a crime against civilization and Christianity ; I should be guilty of a crime against God and the Savior of men, if I should fail to record my testimony in the most distinct and effective manner against the extension of Slavery. I could not answer for that crime at the bar of God, any more than I could bear in my own person the woes of the untold millions who will be doomed to bondage if this measure prevails. And I call upon you, Christian men, to look to your own consciences in this matter. Consider the consequences that may result from your vote, and make the casting of that vote a subject of prayerful deliberation. Let us seek to avert the judgments of Heaven. I tremble for my country when I consider that God is just. The language of Jehovah to Israel is singularly appropriate to us. ' You only have I known of all the nations of the earth, therefore you will I punish for all your iniquities.' I think of Assyria, of Greece, of Carthage, of Rome, of Jerusalem, and fear at times that we, like them, are filling up the measure of our iniquities, to follow in their ruin."*

Again : In 1851, this pulpit said :

" While Slavery stands, it is an evidence that the truth is there hampered or shut out, and to that extent *liberty is in danger*. It is impossible that Liberty and Slavery should forever exist together on the same soil. They can hardly do this for another half century. One or the other must come to an end. Neither can be passive ; the interests of each struggle for the ascendancy ; concessions and compromises will not long hold them together ; one or the other must encroach and enlarge ; one must go up, the other must go down. Either Slavery must go down voluntarily, peaceably, speedily, under the moral influence of the Gospel, OR SLAVERY OR LIBERTY WILL ONE DAY GO DOWN IN BLOOD. This must be so. Liberty lives only in the light of truth. Slavery lives only in darkness. The day will brighten or the night will deepen. The disastrous twilight of late shed over us may well excite our fear. The Gospel of Christ must prevail, and if we will not prepare the way for its triumph, God will make way for it by *blotting us out from among the nations*. It is true of nations as of individuals, that if they will not live by the Gospel, they must die by the law. For freedom's sake, for the sake of our posterity, for the sake of our brethren involved in this system, the slavholder and the slave, for humanity's sake, let us continually pray, and through all fit channels of moral influence, let us diligently labor that this curse may be removed."†

I am no prophet, nor the son of a prophet ; but surely the exigencies now upon us were not "unforeseen" when these words were uttered ten years ago.

* This sermon was published under the title of *Duties of the Christian Citizen*.

† Published under the title, *Christianity Essential to Liberty : a Plea for Hungary*.

Again : In 1854, remonstrating against the Nebraska Bill :

“ Would that I might stir up your consciences to recognize the retributive government of God, and to free yourselves from personal guilt in this matter. I speak in no narrow, sectional, or party spirit. I belong to no Anti-Slavery Society, and to no political party whatever. I plead for the honor of Christ's name ; for his suffering cause ; for the dignity of religion ; for the sake of humanity ; for the sake of liberty ; for the honor and safety of my country. I fear that this wickedness will be consummated. It will be no marvel if we see the oppression of the poor. And then it will be no marvel *if our children see a PROSTRATE COMMERCE, A SERVILE INSURRECTION, OR A CIVIL WAR.* * * * * * There is a God over the nations, and for no sin does he rebuke them so fearfully as for the sin of oppressing the poor. And now in face of a wrath written on the graves of all past empires, shall this nation dare to oppress the poor ? Let us hasten to acquit our souls of this stupendous crime. ‘ When God shall make inquisition for blood, he will remember the cry of the needy.’ ”*

We already see a commerce prostrated by the slave-power, and servile insurrection and civil war are both impending. “ *Unforeseen exigencies !* ” A child might have predicted them.

Again : In 1856, when Slavery in Kansas was a distinct issue at the polls, this pulpit said :

“ Christianity and Slavery can not live together. They have now met face to face upon a virgin soil. We know that in the end Christianity must triumph. We know that Slavery must go down ; *but this nation, like Rome, may first go down in the struggle.* The prayers and efforts of Christians alone can avert a catastrophe which *the madness of rulers is hastening on.* You can not make this a question of party measures or of political expediency. It is a question of vital, practical Christianity between your soul and God. If you thrust it aside, it will haunt you in night-dreams, and it will face you in ‘ that day.’ The day shall come when all party platforms, measures, and resolutions shall be burned with fire, and all human works and institutions shall be dissolved. Then shall you stand face to face with the slave before Him who is no respecter of persons.”†

In these extracts I have confined myself to sermons which have been published at the request of members of this congregation. Such have been the warnings of this pulpit for fifteen years. Such, too, have been the warnings of thousands of pulpits throughout the land. The very peril now upon us has long been foretold.

* Published under the title *The Voice of God against National Crime.*

† *Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery.*

Yet the warning of the fathers of the Revolution and the framers of the Constitution, the warnings of patriots and the pulpit have been unheeded ; political chicanery, partisan zeal, and the sensitiveness of commerce and all the pursuits of industry, have been the agents of that compact, resolute, imperious, untiring oligarchy which has usurped the reins of power, and domineered over every department of government for the sole interest of Slavery.

But God is now educating this nation to understand the unscrupulous wickedness of Slavery and its abettors. He is unmasking the system, and showing that the spirit which tramples upon the rights and the manhood of the black race, would trample also upon the rights and the manhood of all ; would disown the most sacred compacts of government ; violate the good faith of States ; put perjurers and traitors in the high places of power ; wreak desolation upon the peaceful industry and commerce of the country ; repudiate honest debts ; mob, imprison, torture, hang business collectors and inoffensive travelers ; suppress all inquiry and debate touching its own doings ; gag the press ; outlaw or murder all who dissent from its will ; wage war upon defenseless neighbors ; and either monopolize the territory, the treasury, the offices of the country, or tear down the fabric of our Constitution, and deluge the land with blood. The lesson is fearful, but we deserve it for disregarding the warnings of history, the warnings of the patriots of other days, the warnings of the Word of God. Let us accept the evils that are upon us as "the just punishment of our sins," and seek to profit by the lesson of the hour.

I once heard Messrs. Cobden and Bright address a mass meeting at Manchester, assembled to congratulate them upon the repeal of the odious and oppressive Corn Laws of England. Why is it, said they, that this measure which we so long advocated with a feeble and despised minority, has now found favor in the eyes of all the people—farmers, landlords, manufacturers, merchants, parliament, and the ministry of the crown ? We have brought forward no new argument or appeal ; the facts, figures, and reasonings we use to-day are the same that we used twenty years ago, when we began to agitate this question. But the nation would not hear us then ; it needed the terrible appeal of the famine in Ireland ; when men died by hundreds on the roadside, till, in some places the living were not enough to bury the

dead ; when our streets were crowded with wretched beings in the last stages of hunger, and the cry of 'bread or blood' came up into our palaces ; then the Corn Laws went down amid the mingled execrations and rejoicings of the nation. The horrors of famine were needed to teach the people of England one of the simplest lessons of political economy. Just so preachers, patriots, and moralists have warned this nation that Slavery in one part of the country meant tyranny over the whole ; that such injustice and wrong must breed corruption, violence, anarchy ; and that the judgment of God must come upon us for the oppression of the poor. It is nearly thirty years since Mr. Bancroft wrote, as a historian, that "Despotism, in the order of Divine Providence, is the punishment of a nation for the institution of Slavery."* But the nation would not hear. Those who gave such warnings were denounced as fanatics and traitors ; they were hooted at and mobbed. We needed the peril of financial ruin, and the impending horrors of civil war, to arouse the nation to its guilt, and teach it the first lessons of public justice and morality. Let us try to profit by the lesson, somewhat in detail.

1. *God is rebuking our idolatry of the Union.* I value the Union of these States as a means of peace and prosperity to them all. I value the Union and the Constitution, as ordained for freedom and justice, and capable of bringing out the highest development of self-government under recognized law. I deprecate any attempt, from any quarter, whether in Massachusetts or in South Carolina, to overthrow the original compact under which the States were united. The sternest opponents of Slavery stand before the world to-day as the friends of law and order, of the Constitution and the Union. They will even stand by a President for whom none of them voted, if he will stand by his oath, "to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States."

But some, instead of valuing the Union as a means to the great ends of order, freedom, and peace, have glorified it as in itself an END, and have vaunted the Constitution above the "higher law" of God. When the advocates of Slavery have demanded some palpable wrong under threat of breaking up the Union, these worshipers of the Union, as such, have conceded the wrong to save the Union. That was an idolatry, like the idolatry of

* *Miscellanies*, p. 307.

Pharaoh, when he boasted of the Nile as his creation; like that of Nebuchadnezzar, who boasted of great Babylon that he had built. God is rebuking that idolatry. We have assumed that this Union was the perfection of human government, and necessary to the advancement of religion in the world. God is rebuking our pride and idolatry. He is teaching us that no human agency is indispensable to his plans, and that he can overthrow our Constitution with a breath. Our Dagon falls in its temple before the ark of his strength.

2. *God is rebuking, also, our pride of material resources, and our luxury of living.* We have relied upon our wealth and material prosperity, and have nursed these as our pride and power. Commerce has divided with the Union the homage of the nation. I put a high value upon commerce, as the handmaid of civilization, and often the servant of Christianity. I believe a mercantile community to be, upon the whole, as upright, honorable, and magnanimous as any other. It is right, it is in accordance with Christianity, to seek prosperity by all honorable means. I can not join in the denunciation of mercantile men as habitually selfish, covetous, timid, and time-serving. Rather would I sympathize with them in their temptations and trials, and rejoice with them in all honorable successes.

But there are those who put trade above every thing; who count it as a sufficient argument for or against any measure of public policy, that it will help or injure trade; and when the advocates of Slavery have brought forward scheme after scheme of iniquity, such persons have virtually said, "This is all wrong, to be sure, we are sorry it was ever proposed; but let it pass, rather than have business broken up by agitation." Now, God is teaching us that business gains no security and no blessing when it enters into partnership with wrong. As John Owen admonished the British Parliament, so God is teaching us, "Say not, in the first place, this or that suits the interest of England; but look what suits the interest of Christ, *and assure yourselves, that the true interest of any nation is wrapped up therein.*"

It was domestic Slavery, not barbarian invasion that destroyed the life of ancient Rome. "It is a calumny," says Bancroft, "to charge the devastation of Italy upon the Barbarians. The large Roman plantations, tilled by slave labor, were its ruin. The careless system impoverished the soil, and wore out even the rich fields

of Campania. The Barbarians did not ruin Italy. The Romans themselves ruined it. Slavery had effected the decline of the Roman people, and had wasted the land, before a Scythian or a Scandinavian had crossed the Alps. None of the Barbarians were tempted to make Italy the seat of empire, or Rome a metropolis. Slavery had destroyed the democracy, had destroyed the aristocracy, had destroyed the empire ; and at last it left the traces of its ruinous power deeply furrowed on the face of nature herself.* Slavery must eventually prove the destruction of agriculture, of manufactures, of commerce, and all industrial arts, wherever it gains ascendancy.

3. *God is rebuking all political expedients devised to harbor and perpetuate iniquity.* That which God requires of us, as individuals and as communities, touching any iniquity, is not concealment, evasion, palliation, but "*putting away,*" renunciation. He may bear with us long, while we are honestly laboring to remove an evil and to reform our ways. He is long-suffering and kind. He will give us all needful time 'to remedy any social disaster or wrong. But if we make compromises with injustice and wrong, he will break these up. The fatal error of our legislation for forty years has been that of treating Slavery as a mere political institution to be conciliated, instead of a moral wrong to be repudiated from our public policy. "Wherefore hear the word of the Lord, ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem. Because ye have said, we have made a covenant with death and with hell are we at agreement ; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come to us : for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves : . . . Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet : and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place. And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand ; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it." Isaiah, xxviii., 14-19.

We have seen compromise after compromise with Slavery, framed for the pacification of the country, broken up by a more violent agitation, till at length the advocates of Slavery themselves trample all compromises and concessions under foot, and demand

* *Bancroft's Literary and Historical Miscellanies*, p. 317

that we shall abnegate our moral sentiment against Slavery or accept the challenge of civil war. Vainly have we sought to daub this system of iniquity with the untempered mortar of political compromises. Whatever is cemented together with such "anti-christian lime," must needs be shaken "so as to have every cranny searched and brushed," till the iniquity is thoroughly purged away.

This review of the state of the nation in the light of history and of Scripture shows us what "crimes and follies" have brought us to this hour of peril. They all run back into Slavery as their tap-root. Now, no man here doubts that Slavery, as it exists in this country, is a CRIME. I would not insult your moral sense by assuming that that question needs to be argued. If it does, the argument is brief enough. Let me go to your house to-night, and by force tear away your wife or child, to be held and used as my property, subject to my will and passions, without redress, to be sold by me at pleasure, and forever placed beyond your reach, and beyond every legal right of personality. You would cry out for the law to avenge the outrage; you would cry out for the humanity, the justice, the conscience, of the whole community to come to your rescue; you would appeal to God in heaven—knowing Him to abhor such an iniquity. But just that act is the root and the essence of our American Slavery. I do not charge that each individual slaveholder, born to the inheritance of the system, is guilty of that act in its specific form. But the LAW of Slavery in this country, is that very act incorporated into a statutory permanence. The LAW of American Slavery is simply the law of robbery and violence. It makes the slave an article of merchandise, and by all its interpretation and administration treats him, not as a person, but as a chattel. And, therefore, whatever the treatment of individual slaves by masters who are better than the laws, every slave at the South is liable to all the fearful possibilities of this system of legalized robbery. Mr. Webster did not exaggerate when he said that, in this odious but characteristic feature of chattelism, American Slavery is without a parallel on the face of the globe. "This particular description of Slavery does not, I believe, now exist in Europe, nor in any other civilized portion of the habitable globe. It is not a predial Slavery. It is not analogous to the case of the *predial* slaves, or slaves *glebe adscripti* of Russia, or Hungary, or other States. It is a peculiar system of

personal Slavery, by which the person who is called a slave is transferable as a chattel from hand to hand. Although Slavery, as a system of servitude attached to the earth, exists in various countries of Europe, *I am not at the present moment aware of any place on the globe in which this property of man in a human being as a slave, transferable as a chattel, exists, except America.*"* Well might Mr. Webster say, "I regard domestic Slavery as one of the greatest evils, both moral and political."†

What folly, what wickedness, for men calling themselves ministers of Christ, to attempt to foist such a system into the Bible by such pettifoggery as was used in a Brooklyn pulpit the other day! You *know* that this stupendous injustice can find no sanction in the Word of God. You know that no curse of Slavery was ever pronounced upon "the seed of Ham," and that Noah's malediction upon *Canaan* was fulfilled when Joshua took possession of Palestine. You know that the household retainers whom Abraham held after the manner of an Arab sheikh, whom he sent upon distant journeys, laden with treasures, or led forth to war against foreign tribes, were not his chattel slaves. No southern Abraham would think of sending a slave to New York with costly presents, for his Isaac's bride, or of marching his slaves under arms to prevent Mr. Lincoln's inauguration! You know that the idea of property in man is no more to be found in the Mosaic law than it is in the Constitution of the United States, from which it was excluded at every point; and after all the paltering of un-scholarly preachers about *doulos* and Onesimus, any tyro knows that the term *doulos* does not determine a condition of chattel-slavery, and you all know that the very first article in the Constitution of a Christian church—the equality of the brotherhood, and the golden rule of Christ's kingdom, equal justice toward all men—forbade any believer in the apostolic age to hold his servant as a chattel, under the existing Roman law of Slavery ‡ You

* Works, vol. 5, p. 305.

† Vol. 3, p. 279.

‡ I have somewhat expanded this part of the discourse in preparing it for the press. But having already discussed the Biblical view of the subject, in "The Fugitive Slave Law of the Old Testament," and "The Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery," I have still foreborne to enter at length into the Bible argument against the system. Dr. Tayler Lewis, in his reply to Rev. H. J. Van Dyke, says with truth and force :

know that every principle and precept of Christianity touching the mutual relations of men is diametrically opposed to American Slavery as defined by its own laws.

I make every allowance for those born and educated under that system. Zealous anti-slavery men sometimes denounce me for an excess of charity in that direction ; but, knowing human weakness and depravity, I will have charity for those who do a wrong that I too might do, in their circumstances. But *you* and *I* know that the whole system of slave law is unjust—that it is against right, against humanity, against God.

You and I can not sanction it without crime. This nation, with all its light and experience, can not sanction it without crime.

“It is not the mere presence, but the predominance of the one or the other of these ideas, the property or the government idea, which gives its chief moral character to servitude. In the patriarchal, we venture to affirm, the former was altogether subordinate, or rather almost wholly unknown, according to the modern mercantile conception of it. There is mention of persons ‘bought with money.’ It was, as we have said, an evidence of the social change. With the heathen sellers it might have had all the nature of mercenary traffic. That so it was regarded by the patriarchs themselves, there is not a particle of proof. There is the strongest inferential evidence to the contrary. We boldly challenge any man to produce one line or word of Scripture to show, directly or indirectly that any patriarch ever sold a slave to the heathen, or to any other patriarch ; that ever a Jew, in later times, sold a bondsman to a heathen or to any other Jew. There may have been transfers of neighborhood, or convenience, but nothing like *traffic*, in our modern sense of the word. They were bought with money, and, doubtless, in this way many a poor stranger escaped death, or exchanged a hard vassalage for a blessed patriarchal home ; but there was no *domestic* slave-trade. Neither are slaves ever mentioned as articles of ‘property.’ They are never reckoned in the Jewish statistics along with ‘the corn, the wine, and the oil, the barley, the flocks, and the herds.’ They are enumerated in the census of the household ; and in this way are named in connection sometimes with lower things, but never as articles of traffic or merchandise. They are mentioned, sometimes, as evidence of their Lord’s power and greatness, but rather as followers and vassals than as slaves. It is said ‘Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s man-servant,’ and the text is often quoted to prove the scriptural lawfulness of the modern human bondage ; but so is it also said, ‘Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife.’ He who would pervert the guileless scriptural language in the one case, may do so with equal justice in the other. Wives were sometimes bought with money ; wives are mentioned among the items of household property ; the argument is as good in the one case as in the other. In neither does it present any thing more than the painted outside resemblance to our modern trafficking, while in spirit it is as remote from it as the ages are from each other.”

And God is now testing us upon the very point, whether, at whatever cost of money, pride, or power, we will refuse to sanction an enormous crime, or will succumb to terror, strike hands with iniquity, and some new political evasion of a plain moral duty. Have we the moral force to go through this present trial without flinching, and to refuse to be implicated, as a nation, in this iniquity? Whatever is done by Congress to uphold or sanction Slavery, commits the nation to a crime. God's commandment to us this day is, "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes." Have we faith enough to obey his voice, and to abide the issue?

Good men have been accustomed to pray that God would overturn all iniquity, and many have prayed specifically for the overthrow of Slavery. Yet, when they see convulsions premonitory to that overthrow, some seem to be afraid of the answer to their own prayers. A plain shrewd man, on the Connecticut River, was asked why the minister of his parish did not pray for rain in a time of drought. "Oh, he don't dare to," was the answer. "Does not dare to pray for rain! Why so?" "Well, two years ago, it was very dry hereabouts, and the minister prayed for rain; and the Lord sent such a tremendous flood, that it swept half of his farm into the Connecticut River; and ever since he has been afraid to pray for rain!" Just so we have prayed that Slavery might be done away; yet, because the flood of divine judgments against the iniquity has washed off a portion of our national farm into the Atlantic Ocean, some begin to tremble, and propose to dike in the waters. But "the voice of the Lord is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth. The Lord sitteth upon the flood; yea, the Lord sitteth King forever." If the desolating flood of human passions now raging at the South, be God's judicial dispensation for the overthrow of Slavery, who am I that I should seek to stay his hand? Rather let me, shunning alike all carnal strife and all carnal fear, "stand still" in the meekness and the firmness of faith, "and see the salvation of the Lord."

Some business men are just now ready to make peace with the slave-power, upon any terms. I appreciate the desirableness of quiet and stability to the mercantile community. But, my friends, you can not have peace in this matter, upon *any* terms. Only God's terms of justice and righteousness will bring you

peace. Suppose you compromise in moral right. Will that give peace? It will only increase the agitation.

Bad men will soon agitate the country with greater demands of wickedness. If you do wrong under their intimidation, it is like beginning to pay black mail to buy off a conspiracy against your character. When the villains get all your money, you will find your character gone too. If you yield now to threats, you will put your business, your peace, your rights, into the power of evil and designing men, to be recovered only by bloody revolution. "*Be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.*"

If you compromise away the right, *good* men will agitate. You can not silence conscience, and conscience will speak while wrong endures. Can you muzzle the press? Can you silence those who, through years of conflict and obloquy, have gained the ear of the people for liberty? Will you drive out the minister from the pulpit? You make the nation his audience. He will agitate the more. Remember Dudley Tyng. They who break windows, by-and-by have to pay for the glass. They who provoke mob law, may have to submit to martial law. A good conscience before God is ready for any trial from man. It will not cease to agitate, because wicked men oppose it. Men of good conscience are thereby committed to oppose Slavery, "at all times, in all places, under all circumstances," where that iniquity shows its head.

Above all, if you compromise away the right, God will agitate. Come what may to business, to governments, to social and political compacts, the God of truth and justice will overturn and overturn, till slavery is cast down forever. This nation is now in the favored day of opportunity—such as was given to Jerusalem of old, but given, alas! in vain. This is THE GOLDEN HOUR for putting away evil from before the Lord, and receiving at his hands an infinity of good. Let us, then, leave our sins in the valley of humiliation, at the foot of the cross, and go up the mount of prophecy for this golden vision of hope and peace. If, by a firm and unalterable commitment against legalizing and nationalizing Slavery, this nation shall free itself from the incubus of crime and terror so long seated upon its heart, then shall this day prove the turning point of its destiny. Henceforth it shall be strong only for freedom and for righteousness, and the grandeur

of its physical domain and the might of its material resources, shall be lost in the glory of its moral progress rolling onward through the ages. As our fathers kept the recognition of Slavery out of the Constitution, and the fact of Slavery out of the great national domain, let us with equal firmness and patriotism, refuse any legislative recognition or support of Slavery by Congress, any sanction of it by the General Government ; and having thus washed our hands of all complicity with crime, we shall be ready peaceably, cordially, wisely, safely, at whatever pecuniary cost, to aid our brethren of the South in ridding themselves of an institution which is no less a burden than a sin. The financial struggle of northern emancipation from the slave-power is more than half over ; the political struggle is more than half achieved. If we have the nerve to go through, this is the golden hour of opportunity.

A hope indicated by the text, lies just before us. The promise to Israel was, after her fiery discipline, "I will restore thy judges *as at the first, i. e.,* in the earliest and best days of the commonwealth, and thy counselors, or ministers of state, *as in the beginning.*" Lest any should accuse me of a partisan interpretation of these words, I will give the exact paraphrase published ten years ago, by the Princeton Commentator, now in his grave. Here is promised a "restoration to a former state of purity, to be effected not by the conversion of the wicked rulers, but BY FILLING THEIR PLACES WITH BETTER MEN."* Yet would I remember the admonition, "Put not your trust in princes ;" "it is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man." If we commit ourselves to God in doing right, he will be our strength and salvation. Once rid of our national iniquity, we shall behold a country more glorious than the brightest dreams of patriot or poet—from the lakes to the gulf, and from ocean to ocean, United, Prosperous, Free.

God bless our native land!
 Firm may she ever stand,
 Through storm and night ;
 When the wild tempests rave,
 Ruler of winds and wave,
 Do thou our country save
 By thy great might.

For her our prayer shall rise
 To God above the skies ;
 On him we wait :
 Thou who art ever nigh, *
 Guarding with watchful eye,
 To Thee aloud we cry,
 GOD SAVE THE STATE.

* Dr. J. Addison Alexander.



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