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National Troubles the Result of National Sins: A Fast Day Sermon, preached in Pottsville, Penna., April 30th, 1863

Thompson, Charles I

Benjamin Bannan

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Boston University
National Troubles the result of National Sins.

A

FAST DAY SERMON,

PREACHED IN POTTsville, PENNA.,

APRIL 30th, 1863,

by

Rev. Charles I. Thompson,

of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

POTTsville:
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1863.
CORRESPONDENCE.

POTTSVILLE, May 24, 1863.

REV. C. I. THOMPSON:

Dear Sir:—The undersigned, having listened with much gratification to the excellent and patriotic sermon preached by you on the late National Fast Day, respectfully solicit from you a copy for publication.

Very truly yours, &c.,

B orn PATTERSON,
RICHARD GORHAM,
JOSEPH S. PATTERSON,
JAS. H. Grazier,
ISAAC BUCK,
B. T. TAYLOR,
JAMES FOOTE,
JOHN T. WERNER.

POTTSVILLE, May 8th, 1863.

TO MESSRS. BORN PATTERSON AND OTHERS:

Gentlemen:—Having been requested by the Ministerial Association of the M. E. Church of Schuylkill County, together with yourselves, to furnish a copy of the sermon delivered by me on the National Fast Day for publication, I cheerfully comply with your united request.

Your obedient servant,

C. I. THOMPSON.

SERMON.

28. Who among you will give ear to this? who will hear and hear for the time to come?
29. Who gaveth Jacob for a spoil, and Israel for the prey? did not the Lord, against whom we have sinned, so they would not walk in his ways, neither were they obedient unto his law.
30. Therefore hath he poured upon him the fury of his anger, and the strength of battle: and it hath set him on fire round about, yet he knew not; and it burned him, yet he held it not to heart.

—Isaiah, 44th chap., 20th, 24th and 25th verses.

We have assembled together to-day, my friends, as a congregation of mourners. Nor are we singular in this. The loyal portion of the nation is at this moment in humiliation before God, and before His people. The nation is at this moment in humiliation before God, and before His people. Over both our national calamities and sins, and more particularly over the latter, for the former have arisen from the latter. God no more afflicts a nation than an individual with out cause. Punishment, with Him, is first with a view to correction; but if this fail, destruction will follow, for He will be glorified. This is instanced in the case of His ancient people the Jews, to whom the text was originally addressed.

In the very act of observing a national fast day, we acknowledge this principle in the Divine economy, and I trust that we have assembled not only to acknowledge our sins, but to order war of the same duration. Not only put them away from us, for it is only by so doing that we can expect the Divine favor. This is plainly exhibited in the 58th chapter of Isaiah. If this chapter had been penned with an especial view to our case, it could not have been more appropriate thereto. Let us enquire—1st. Wherein God hath chastened us. 2d. Why? 3d. The design. 4th. Enforce the inquiry.

1st. Wherein &c. That God hath chastened this nation is too evident to need an argument to prove. Our country to a large extent, has been given for a spoil; it has been plundered by the robbers; the Lord has poured upon us the fury of his anger, and the strength of battle; the fire has been kindled round about us, and has seriously burned us.

The greatest calamity which can befall a nation is war. It brings in its train every other evil; the destruction of life; the bitterest animosities; national indebtedness; onerous taxes; increased prices for the necessaries of life, and a general corruption of public morals. But civil war is the most grievous of all others, for it is a weakening of the national resources, both in money and means, and continually endangers national destruction. In foreign wars only half the expenditure is borne by one nation, in civil, we acknowledge that they are; and
deteriorated, until no one thinks himself safe in purchasing the most common and necessary commodity, lest he should be mulcted to find that he has expended his money for trash utterly useless.

Nor do the learned professions rise superior to the trade. There is one profession which, next to the ministry, should rise superior to the general corruption, and lead and guide public opinion, and do anything for that end; it is one that calls for intelligence and education. The law of the land is based upon the moral law of God. Lawyers, professedly, are to protect the nation against its moral corruption, and the advocates of justice. They are to make men read the word of God, and write the laws of Christ on the hearts of the people.

That a system of slavery did exist in the early church, both the Patriarchal and Moabite, is true; but it was such a system as tended rather to the elevation than the depression of its subjects, and looked to their release at certain periods, when they were placed on an equality with other citizens. This system became diluted and mingled, until the coming of Christ, when it had entirely disappeared. All that we ask of the advocates of Bible slavery is to place American slavery on a footing with either Jewish or Patriarchal slavery. But did not slavery exist in the Christian Church in the days of the Apostles? Undoubtedly it did, if that might be said to exist in which this system of slavery was already in existence, and was found to be the case with slavery in the church, if we refer to the direc tors given, both to slave and master. Christianity in its early condition was not free from the vice of slavery, and, besides, more than that, but unbosomed of the state of the former. This is evident from the fact that the latter are more frequently addressed than the former. Where the slave was freed, his name was written down, and the person who was the slave had a heathen power to dictate rules for the government of that relationship, further than exhort the slave to obedience, not for the master, but, for the master's sake.

The express design of all exhortations to servants was, that they might, under their undoubtedly trying circumstances, be examples of a Christian spirit, and thus commend religion to the whole world. Cor. 7, c. 21, 22 v.; Eph. 6, c. 5, 6 v.

The expression, 'in the church,' has been construed to mean that the slave was free, and that the person who was the slave was a Christian. This is not the case, but that the slave was a Christian. It is a common error to suppose that the slave was a Christian, because he was a slave. The slave was a Christian, and the master was a Christian, the same as the master was a Christian. Though Christianity had no right to interfere with the legal relationship existing between believing slaves and unbelieving masters, it was different when the master was a unbeliever or both were believers. It could be then either impose a rule for the government which embraces all crimes in its ample folds, of the master toward his slave, or in respect
to their mutual relationship, and this it has not failed to do. And it be observed here that there are only two addresses to believing mystics. Who are there two addresses to believing mystics? The revelation of the spirit, if not its letter. In Eph. 6, c. 5, 8, masters and servants are warned that “they have a master in Heav- en with whom there is no respect of persons.” In Col. 4, c. 1, 6, masters are command- ed to do this: “that which is just and equal, and are warned that they have a master in Heaven. Now let masters be gov- erned by the spirit of these two exhortations, and it must be feared they will be told that nothing but the shadow. For be it remembered that the principle of justice and equality by which masters are to be governed, is not that which emanates from human codes, which have one principle of justice and equality for white men, and another for black men; but it is that which emanates from the law of God, in which express terms declares he is no respecter of persons.

But we are not to judge slavery alone by the letter of the gospel, but also by its spirit, and who will dare assert that there is one feature in it in consonance with the gospel. And the same observation must be made in the case of the words of St. James. It is: “First, pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.” And no word is to be the more solemnly correct than these, as it is the same as the masters, in order to be kept subversive; consequently, not only do the masters refuse to educate them, but they do not permit them to obtain education from such sources as may be within their reach. It is, therefore, necessary to teach the white man to be instructed in the principles of the gospel. Not only keeps the body in bondage, but the soul, and therefore, necessarily, the morals. Slaves must be kept in ignorance, in order to be kept subversive; consequently, not only do the masters refuse to educate them, but they do not permit them to obtain education from such sources as may be within their reach.

Heaven, for which we are barriers and expect to feel more keenly His retributive justice.

These, then, my brethren, are the reasons why we have the peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

4th. We enquire: Wherefore does He afflict us? First, to lead us to repentance, and re- formation, in order to bless us. Second, if, in the language of the prophet, “The wicked must forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy, and to our God, He will abundantly pardon.” This is as binding upon a nation as upon an individual. And it may be said that there are barriers and expect to feel more keenly His retributive justice.

But may it be asked whether I am not making a Southern sin a national one? I answer no. It is not Southern but national, for there are more pro-slavery men in the North than in the South, and the anti-slavery sentiment in the North prior to this current war has been very weak and conservative. There are less than three hundred thousand actual slaveholders in all the United States, and yet it is apparent that slavery has ruled and con- trolled the eleven Southern States from the beginning of its history. Now, if there was no other sin to be laid at the door of twenty-seven millions, seven hundred and forty million slaves, it would be a cry- ing sin before God against their mankind; but when twenty-seven millions, seven hundred and forty million slaves were all, and the idea of the most abhorrent and most revolting character of chains upon four millions of helpless captives, it is such a cryning sin before God, that it is wonder- ful that he is not restrained when the land first and evermore, as did he upon Sodom and Gomorrah of old. But judgment is God’s work, and only comes when moral means have failed. So long as there was a sentiment of the government unit until recently, not only churches but legislatures entered into the spirit of the forbidding and strong, and necessarily overbearing and tyrannical, for the spirit of the forbidding and strong will show itself in the slave, in spite of all effort to check it, and it must be the first, by the lash; but if that does not accomplish the purpose, by some more summary process.

Besides, this tendency is to correct the morals of the whites, for while female slaves are lacking in the principles of chastity,