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

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A

FAST DAY SERMON,

PREACHED IN POTTSVILLE, PENNA.,

APRIL 30th, 1863,

BY

Rev. CHARLES I. THOMPSON,

of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

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SERMON.

25. Who among you will give ear to this? who will hear and fear for the time to come? 26. Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robber? did not the Lord, against whom we have sinned? for they would not walk in his ways, neither were they obedient unto his law. 27. Therefore he hath 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 laid it not to heart.

—Isaiah, 48th chaps., 26th and 27th vers.

We have assembled together today, my friends, as a congregation of mourners. Now are we singular in this. The loyal portion of the nation is at this moment in humiliation before God. And wherefore do we mourn? Over both our national calamities and sins, and more particularly over the latter, for the former have arisen from the latter. God no more afflict 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 offer 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 50th 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 him 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 calamities; 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 disasters, for it is a weakening of the national resources, both men 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
2nd. Enquire why? We answer, because we are a sinful nation. Our great sin, which may be said to be the root of all the rest, is, we have forgotten God and given his glory to another. This is a sin which He never fails to punish.

God has wondrously favored us as a nation. From being no people He has made us one of the mighty ones of the earth. He brought this vine out into the wilderness and planted it, and protected it, and caused it to grow and expand, until it fills the land. He has given us the finest domain upon which mortal eyes ever gazed, and the best form of government that mortal man was ever trusted with; but we have said in our pride, that we can see what a great people we have made ourselves, and have lost sight of the overruling providence of God. We read of one of old who said, "is not this great Babylon that I have built by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty? when a voice came from heaven saying the kingdom has departed from thee? " and that mighty Babylon has passed away, its site not to be found; and so will God punish every nation which does not glorify Him.

We call this a Christian nation, but it is not filled with the fear of God; it is not the lowest to the highest places of society.

What is the principle upon which men are selected to fill the offices of the land, from the President down to the constable? Is it to promote the welfare and interests of our nation as a whole? If men of this character are selected, it is more the result of accident than design. Availability, not morality, is the test; who will give party success, and not who will best forward the welfare of the nation.

We venture to say, that nowheres upon the face of the earth, can an assemblage of more corrupt, irreligious men be found, than have been gathered together to represent this nation in its capital, in Washington. There profundity, drunkenness, licentiousness, and a disregard of God's holy Sabbath, have prevailed. Our legislative halls for years have been the scenes of political amphitheatre, where political gladiators are atavished for the championship. Nor is this to be wondered at, when we examine the condition of politics at home. Who are the ruling spirits in our principal cities? Not the most corrupt persons of a community. So shockingly bad have these assemblages become, that moral men, to say nothing of religious men, shrink from them, but shun them as places of too great contamination for them. In the electioneering campaigns, he most potent engines of success are run, lying, fraud, and bribery. The partisan press rarely rises superior to these partisan influences. The chief object of this engine is a distraction and abuse; its design seems rather to misrepresent the views of its opponents, than to give light upon its own particular tenets, and not only have politicians in exercise a censorship over the minds of the ministers of the gospel, and prevent them from declaring the whole counsel of God.—they, for party sake, array themselves against any moral measure, no matter it must be silent on that subject, though from time immemorial it may have been a legitimate or, be subjected to their anathema.

For instance, in the last Congress, there was a bill for the extension of the franchise so as to include the colored men of the United States. Many were opposed to this measure, others were in favor of it. The party which was in power was in favor of it, the party which was out of power was opposed.

Richards has always been a legitimate theme that a private person should keep the days of the old Testament, that declared that every fourth year should be broken, and that the oppressed orphans should go free, but politicians make it a political hobby, and forsooth the pulpit must be quiet.

Politicians, like Satan, can turn preachers, real moral lessons to God's ministers, lay all their own sins upon their shoulders, and consign them, at pleasure, to the tombs; they are damned; but ministers must never meddle with politics; however good they are, they must not be commanded; however bad, not rebuked.

While there is corruption in politics, there is equal corruption in trade. Mammon is the god who has taken trade under his especial protection. He has been pleased to give a code of laws for its regulation, and so the law, as it now stands, is no more than an instrument for the protection of the rich, and the taking away of the poor. If the laws are to be respected, the rich shall be protected, and the poor shall be plundered. If the laws are to be disregarded, the rich shall also be plundered.

We have been taught that the traffic in ardent spirits is the great means of corrupting the morals of the people; yet, not only are hosts ready to engage in such a business, but they are contented by good citizens and legalized by the government. Business men acknowledge that some of the largest firms cannot be purchased without it, and yet they unhappily pursue such business. Even in legitimate business the study generally is to be sharp rather than honest. The facts of articles of merchandize are carelessly considered, and their excellencies over extolled, until as general has become the habit of treachery and deceit, so that almost every man deals with his neighbors with distrust. In no branch of trade is fraud more extensively practiced than in the manufacturing, for here the fraud can be most carefully concealed from an expert eye. Not only is base material substituted for good, but everything that will bear it is deteriorated, until no one thinks himself safe in purchasing the most common and necessary commoditie, least he should be mortified to find that he has expended his money for a trumpery useless.

Next let us consider the professions in general, are the professions superior? In trade there is one profession which, next to the ministry, should rise superior to the general corruption, and lead and guide public measure, and all the moral law. It is one that calls for intelligence and education and labor. The law of the land is based upon the moral law of God. Lawyers, professedly, are trained in theosophy and righteousness, and the advocates of justice. They should, therefore, form a proper pair of balances in their hands, and to be clad with a spotless coronet. But O, Lucifer, son of the morning, how art thou fallen! There is no case so unjust but lawyers will defend it, if it will pay. They are not so anxious to become adepts in justice as in shrewdness. They are not so anxious to give their clients the benefit of the law, as to save them from its bitterness. Other men may become just, but not rarely they; other men may reverence the sanctuary, and revere the holy Sabbath, but they scarcely ever.

It is easy for the ministry from their part of the blame for the general corruption. Instead of crying aloud, "sparing not, lifting up their voice like a trumpet, and showing the people their transgressions, and the house of Jacob their sin" (Isaiah 53:1), they are like dogs, "sounding the council of God, or fearing to stay the tide of immorality, lest they should give offence to prominent transgressors."

No command in the decalogue stands more prominent than, "remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." Yet no law is broken with more general impunity. True, the laws have not been formally closed, but taverns and rum shops on that day do business more than on any other, and so do the most thrifty masters. Farmers must not plow, nor sow, nor reap upon that day, but corporations may run their cars, and government ships have been built, and the quiet of the valleys be profaned by the shrill shriek of the locomotive.

While this is the character of the public mouth, the state, of course, is no better, for it is of the same nature as the offices of the Sabbath. Of course, and the parts are of the same nature as the whole. Because of swearing, the law means; because of drunkenness, the law is neglected; because of licentiousness it rots; because of the desecration of the Sabbath, it weeps. Indeed there is a general unfeeling of unrighteousness, as well as public morals.

But the great sin of the nation is SLAVERY. Mr. Wesley pronounced it the "sum of all vanities;" and indeed it is a low institution that has thus come to pass! It is said that slavery is a scriptural institution. If this is so, then we have no right to assail it. If slavery is a scriptural institution, then the scriptures give license to one institution to violate every moral law. The scripture of which was the weapon of the one general that slavery certainly violates the principles of justice, mercy, truth, honesty, chastity, brotherly kindness, humility, etc., and the golden rule that we should do unto others, that would they do unto us. That it is not, is evidently the voice of the church throughout the world, for wherever the light of Christianity has been, outside of our own country, there slavery has been abolished.

That system of slavery did exist in the early church, both the Patriarchial and Matric, it is true, but it was, such a system as tended rather to the elevation than the depression of its subjects, and it looked to its release at certain periods, when they were placed on an equality with other citizens. This system became vanished and disappeared, until the coming of Christ, when it had entirely disappeared. All that we ask of the advocates of Bible slavery is to place American slaves on a footing with either Jewish or Patriarchal, and it will be shown entire.

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 of which society supplanted for its immediate destruction. As we have found to be the case with slavery in the church, if we refer to the directions given, both to slave and master. Christianity in its early councils was not free from any of the evils of the former. This is evident from the fact that the latter are more frequently addressed than the former. Where the slave masters are so much closed, but in would be hard to be made a heathen, it had no power to dictate roles for the government of that relationship, further than exhort the slave to obedience, for not for the masters' sake.

The express desire for exhortations to servants was, that they might, under their undoubtedly trying circumstances, be examples of a Christian spirit, and then command religion to the public mind, as, for instance, the Cor, 7th c, 21 22 v.; Eph, 5th c, 5 8 v.; Col, 3 c, 22 25 v.; 1 Tim, 6th c, 1 2 v.; Titus, 3 c, 9 10 v.; I Peter, 3rd c, 18 v.;— all these are to judge of slavery by religious exhortations, or rather, religious exhortations to the master. 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 believer or both were believers. It could then either impose a rule for the government which embraces all crimes in its ample folds. The master toward his slave, or in respect
to their mutual relationship, and this it has not failed to do. And be it observed here that there are only two addresses to believing masters: Who are the masters that believing masters are exceedingly few in comparison with believing servants. These addresses will be found so completely to nullify the relation of the spirit, if not its letter. In Eph. 6th c., 6th v., masters are warned that they have a master in Heaven, whom there is no respect of persons. In Col. 4th c., 1st v., masters are commanded to be subject to their masters, that which is just and equal, and are warned that they have a master in Heaven. Now let masters be governed by the spirit of these two exhortations, and it must be qequerly could he? No-thing 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, which in express terms declares he is no respector 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 therewith. Thus, for instance, Gal. 3rd v., 28th and 29th verses. In the words of St. James, it is: “First, pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.” And in some cases, in order to force people to do the very things they are not able to do, and even enough to be ruled and governed by three hundred thousand, it would be a crying sin before God against their manhood; but when twenty-seven millions, seven hundred and eighty thousand, are the number, it becomes the right of labor, or the pro-duet labor. Who he stops to argue for constitutional rights for rebels, as to take their lives? Why not treated as a traitor in his heart; and he who refuses to fight under the constitution for this, is a poltroon, a coward. The only right which a rebel has under the constitution is a right to enough rope to hang him as high as Haman. Where shareholders are loyal, they should be assisted by all lovers of human rights, by compensation, in getting rid of the evil.

But another danger is the danger of another condition. The sentiment has existed from the first formation of the government until recently, for not only churches but legislatures entered into the spirit of the sectional division and the spirit of inhumanity is still shown in the slave, in spite of all efforts to check it, and it must go on, first, by force; but if that does not accomplish the purpose, by some more summary process. Besides this, its tendency is to corrupt the morals of the whites, for while female slaves are lacking in the principles of chastity, the

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

Three, my brethren, are the reasons why I am so anxious for the slave, because of what the slave, making them captive, keeping not only not to look upon labor, but laborers, with contempt. And this is not only the case with the educated and refined, but also with ignorant boors, who are as ignorant as the slaves, making them captive, keeping not only not to look upon labor, but laborers, with contempt. Thus is the very spirit which has generated this wicked Rebellion.

I might go on to enumerate, but have said enough to prove my point: that American Slavery is not consonant with the spirit of the gospel, and that it is the MAMMOOTH SIN of the nation.

But it may be asked whether I am not making a Southern sin a national one? I answer no. It is not only 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 year, as far as the abolitionists, 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 controverted the government 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 eighty thousand, the Pro-duct labor is 675,000. And this is the right of labor, or the pro-

4th. Lastly: let us examine the language of the text, “Who among you will take away this? Who will take away this.” Will hear and hear for the time to come?

But to use the words, many will close their ears to these declarations, however true they may be. Many will permit prejudices to cause them to turn away from legitimate conclusions, and from God’s truth. It is always so, as we naturally seek to do so now. They will turn a deaf ear to that which involves their best interests, in time and eternity, their certain destruction follow. But will all who hear and hear for the time to come, forget that nations are made of individuals, and that each must act his part in the reforming of national abuses.

It is “righteousness which exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.” That is, the sins of the nation have caused the nation to be brought to its knees, and the people whom He has chosen for His inheritance.

Without provoking any longer this topic, I will refer you to the conclusion of the 28th Chapter of Deuteronomy where the blessings for obedience, and the curses for disobedience, are fully elaborated.