

Dr. Beecher's three Sermons on *Wm. Jenks.*
National Prosperity.

THE AMERICAN
NATIONAL PREACHER:

OR,
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FROM
LIVING MINISTERS OF THE UNITED STATES.

EDITED BY
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TO CHRISTIAN PATRIOTS.

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Go....Teach all Nations....Matt. xxviii. 19.

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VOL. III.

SERMONS LIV. LV. & LVI.

By **LYMAN BEECHER, D. D.**

BOSTON.

THE GOSPEL THE ONLY SECURITY FOR EMINENT AND ABIDING NATIONAL PROSPERITY.

JEREMIAH, ix. 23, 24.—*Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches : But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth : for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.*

At the time this inspired admonition was given, the Jewish nation had become uncommonly wicked. Instead of relying on the favor of Heaven, they confided in their knowledge, wealth, power, and political wisdom. Their prophets warned them of the divine displeasure and of approaching judgments, but these warnings passed unheeded as the idle wind. What, said they, has a nation, so wise and powerful, to fear? Let the prophets mind their trade, and take care of the world to come, and we will take care of this; for religion and politics have no sort of connection.

To rebuke such impiety the text was spoken. "Thus saith the **LORD.**" It is no philosopher that speaks; but God. No doubtful theory is announced; but eternal truth. No vain experiment is recommended; but the wisdom which is from above. "Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches : But let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth : for in these things I delight, saith the Lord." Cease from your vain confidence in learning, wealth, and power, and put your trust in that knowledge of my character and government, which shall purify the heart and secure my protection and blessing.

The same propensity to confide in man for national prosperity, and to forget God and the influence of his government, has manifested itself in every age. And no nation was ever, by its location, government, and great prosperity, more tempted to do this than ours. Our territory is vast, our soil bountiful, our institutions free, our intellect unshackled, our physical power vigorous, our enterprise untiring, our numbers multiplying beyond example, our fleets and armies are skilful and brave, while our colleges and schools are

If, then, wisdom, and power, and wealth, are not able, and the Gospel is able, to secure abiding national prosperity, why should we, with pertinacious obstinacy, rely upon causes whose impotency to preserve has been demonstrated by the experience of ages? And why that slowness of heart to rely on a cause, whose efficacy has been most happy every where, and uniformly, just in proportion as it has been fairly and faithfully tried? Whence that idolatry of patriotism, and talent, and forms of government, and that continual jealousy of the Gospel and its institutions and ministers, when it brings to the disordered state the only remedy which can prevent dissolution? And why should we tremble with forebodings of evil to our beloved country, when we possess the infallible means of rendering her prosperity durable as the luminaries of heaven, and abundant as the waves of the sea? And why should our time be spent, and our efforts comparatively wasted, in a partial and dilatory application of these means, instead of an immediate and universal effort? The Bible and the sacred Sabbath in every family of the land, would be the salt of the nation and the light of the world. The experiment is eminently practicable, and the result is certain; and why should the work of self-preserving mercy linger? Why should not the whole nation awake to its real danger, and make full proof of the power of the Gospel to save—not by governmental aid—but by the voluntary efforts of philosophers, and statesmen, and patriots, and Christians? Why trim the poisonous upas, when the axe may be laid at its root, and its circumference of desolation be filled with trees of righteousness? Why tamper with diseases of which so many nations have died, when the mercy of Heaven has provided One Tree, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations?

SERMON LVI.

PRE-EMINENT IMPORTANCE OF THE CHRISTIAN SABBATH.

JEREMIAH, ix. 23, 24.

From the efficacy of the Gospel to perpetuate national prosperity, as illustrated in the foregoing discourses, we learn,

THE PRE-EMINENT IMPORTANCE OF THE CHRISTIAN SABBATH.

The moral Government of God has no influence upon communities, except as its precepts and sanctions are clearly and habitually presented to the mind. But to this the Sabbath is indispensable. No efficacious mode of general religious instruction was ever devised, but that which by divine appointment is associated with the Sabbath. Throughout the world, where no Sabbath convenes the population to receive instruction, the character and government of God and the retributions of eternity fade from the mind, and cease to operate as principles of action. Blot out the Sabbath, and in half a century, the intelligent worship of God would be nearly obliterated, and the land covered with every form of superstition and crime.

The Sabbath is the great organ of the divine administration. It is the sun of the moral world. The mainspring of moral action. Where the Sabbath does not give presence and energy to the divine government, the moral law

is without effect ; parents are without natural affection ; children are disobedient and dissolute ; and the family a scene of turmoil and wretchedness.

In those countries where Christianity is but a name, and the Sabbath a holiday, assassination and murder are committed with terrific frequency. And in our own land, these crimes are most frequent where the sacredness of the Sabbath is most violated, and where intemperance and profaneness legislate, instead of a public sentiment, formed by the benevolence of the Gospel. Even that command of the decalogue which organizes the family, and watches over domestic purity, and perpetuates all the sweet charities which render life a blessing, maintains its powers only by the energy of the fourth command. And the security of property and the efficacy of oaths correspond entirely with the universal dominion, or partial efficacy, which the Sabbath gives to the moral government of God.

These are the considerations which have awakened the solicitude of the nation, and called forth petitions to the government from all parts of the Union for a *repeal of all legislative requirement or sanction of the violation of this Holy Day*. For, however seemingly great the convenience or profit of a Sabbath mail may be, it is purchased at the expense of moral principle—the life-blood of the nation.

The importunity is now the greater, because it is fully evident, that no successful effort can be made to resist the floods of worldliness and pleasure which are rolling over the Sabbath, while they are sustained and led on by the omnipresent example of government—under the high sanction and command of *national law*. The numbers whom the carrying and opening of the mail diverts directly from the influence of the Sanctuary, and the greater numbers of those who accompany them, or minister to their necessities, together with the innumerable multitudes, especially in large towns, whose worldly interests and cares and labors are continued by the news and letters poured in upon the Sabbath, must, when reckoned up, be seen to subtract, in an alarming degree, from those energies of the divine government which depend on the weekly ministrations of truth. But if to these we add all who are, perhaps, first tempted to travel in steam-boats and stages, by the *national example* ; and all who, when the flood-gates are thus open, pour out for business or pleasure, on foot, on horseback, in chaises, coaches, waggons and canal-boats ; who that reflects, can but tremble for the consequences ? Who does not see that the numbers employed in undermining our holiest institutions, are becoming greater than those employed for their defence ?

Were it not for this example of the government, a public sentiment might be formed, which would silently and powerfully correct the evil, and preserve to the nation the benign influence of the Sabbath. But with the strong tide of governmental influence setting down upon us, it will be certainly difficult, if not impossible, to prevent a general prostration of the Sacred Day :—at least as to any efficacious purposes of national instruction and morality. For its influence upon public morals can be salutary, only so far as it acts through the medium of evangelical instruction.

The question, therefore, whether the government will or will not continue to require its eight thousand Post-Masters, and several thousand other agents to violate the Lord's Day, is perhaps the most important that ever was, or ever will be submitted for national consideration. Prospectively, it is the question of the preservation or abolition of the Sabbath, and every petitioner,

and legislator, and remonstrant, should make up his mind on the simple question, SHALL WE ABOLISH, OR NOT ABOLISH, THE CHRISTIAN SABBATH ?

With but twelve millions of people, and no hindrance on the part of government, it might perhaps be practicable to form a public sentiment that would set bounds to the encroachments on the Sabbath, but every year and hour the breach becomes wider, and should the flood roll on, encouraged by government, till, within the present century, our numbers shall amount to EIGHTY MILLIONS—more and more tempted, and more and more by habit and the course of business necessitated, as they will feel, to violate the Sabbath—whose voice will then be able to electrify the nation ? whose hand can stop the rolling of such a flood ? or whose wisdom can counteract its awful desolations ?

A spectacle, then, we now witness, such as the sun never before shone upon. A Christian people petitioning their government to repeal a statute which enjoins upon many thousands of our citizens a direct violation of the Holy Sabbath, and which, by the high authority of its example, encourages many thousands more to similar violations ; and that government hesitating, whether to grant or reject these petitions !

It does not belong to the ministry, as such, to legislate. But it does belong to our profession, as a class of men appointed of Heaven for that very purpose, to lift up our voice, in respectful but earnest expostulation and argument, against every form of national transgression. And could I approach the representatives of the freest nation upon earth, and possessing ample means of becoming the greatest and the happiest, I would beseech them to consider, whether it was ever possible for a people to delegate to its representatives the power to appropriate the Sabbath to a secular use ? Has an individual a right to secularize the Sabbath for his own convenience or profit ? The laws of God and man forbid him. How then can the people delegate to Congress a right which no one possesses in his own person ?

The Sabbath was indeed made for man ; but not to add to the curse which doomed him, six days in seven, to eat bread in the sweat of his face ; but to alleviate its pressure, and to bring around him the means by which God in his mercy may allay the curse, and bring him out of bondage into glorious liberty.

But were it possible for a people to delegate to their government the right to secularize the Sabbath, I would still ask, whether the generation who fought the battles of our Independence and framed our Constitution, did in fact delegate the power to appropriate the Sabbath to purposes of national gain ? They who recognised the over-ruling providence of God, and national accountability, and, beyond any other people on earth, venerated the holy Sabbath—they who, in their distress, so often cried unto the God of armies, and for victory sent up such heart-felt thanksgivings—they, surely, while the tears of distress and of joy were yet wet upon their cheeks, could not, *did not*, in their national compact, authorize the violation of the Sabbath. A clause authorising what is now done, could not have passed the Convention : and if it had, would, at that day, have been rejected unanimously by the States. Besides, rights not expressly delegated to Congress are reserved to the States. But the Constitution not only gives to Congress no power to divert the Sabbath to secular uses, but the laws of nearly every State in the Union expressly prohibit to its citizens any such appropriation of the Sabbath. How then can Congress authorise by law encroachments on the Sabbath, without invading directly the reserved rights of the States ? Cases of national, as of in-

dividual necessity, may occur, but they are plain and exempt cases when they exist, and can never justify laws requiring a habitual violation of the Sabbath.

But were it a question not of morality, or of national right, but of expediency—the *impolicy* of encroaching upon the religious veneration and careful observance of the Sabbath, would be a decisive reason for regarding the cry of patriots and Christians, resounding in the ear of government. I am aware that the convenience and gain are by some supposed to be so great as to make the transportation and opening of the mail on the Sabbath a work of *necessity*. But how can that be a work of necessity, which in London, the commercial emporium of the world, is not done? In that great city, the post-office is not opened on the Sabbath, and no mail leaves it.—Are our citizens in such straitened circumstances as to make it *necessary* to attend to business here one day in seven more than in London?

There are multitudes in our cities, God grant their number may increase, who do not call for their letters on the Sabbath. Do they fail in business? or do they fall behind their commercial competitors who include the Sabbath in their day of secular care? The plea of necessity is utterly unfounded;—the result of that impatient worldliness which needs to be checked;—which it was the merciful design of the Sabbath to suspend; and which, if it be not suspended, will drown the nation in perdition.

The plea of necessity can never hold, till the nation is threatened with poverty;—certainly not while it is in a condition of unparalleled affluence. It is over-abundance which constitutes the temptation to violate the Sabbath;—an argument which, if valid, would license every thriving mechanic and farmer to do the same, as a matter of personal convenience, and necessity. But already over-prosperity is our greatest danger, unless we can balance its corrupting tendencies by moral power. To subtract, therefore, from the moral influence of the Sabbath, for the purpose of adding to our abundance, is like subtracting the life-blood from one who is dying of debility, to be forced into the veins of another who is dying of inflammation. All our Sabbath-day earnings, then, were they real, would but increase our malady, and at the same time diminish the force of our only remedy.

But long since has the point been settled that nothing is gained by adding the seventh to the six days of labor. Mind and body have their limits of care and toil; and God, who made them, well knows what degree of relaxation is consistent with their most productive exercise, and has given his decision in the appropriation of six days to labor and one for rest; and none have been able with impunity to disregard this appointment. The appointment, in France, of nine, instead of six days for labor, was found to be injurious to health and vigorous enterprise. And those best acquainted with the animal powers, admit, that whatever immediate gain may be attained by unintermitted toil, is cut off, and more than balanced by the waning powers and shortened date of animal activity. And the same laws of nature, with irresistible power, will bring the man prematurely to the dust, who disregards Heaven's merciful appointment of a seventh day rest. So far then as national prosperity depends on mental and muscular vigor in man, and the unwasted powers of animal life, six days produce a greater amount of income than seven,—and this accompanied with cheering rest, higher health, social enjoyment, religious privileges, peace of conscience, and hopes of heaven.

But even were Sabbath day labor as productive as some suppose, it is still far more than balanced by the extra taxation which vice and irreligion never

fail to impose. Before we exult, therefore, in our gain, let us estimate the additional expense of sickness and premature mortality, of quarrels and lawsuits produced by irreligion, of the idleness, improvidence, and wasteful prodigality which attend national dissoluteness, and how then will the balance stand? All these sacrilegious earnings will be consumed, besides double their amount of honest gain. In no way can the nation be impoverished so certainly, as by that extended annihilation of moral principle, which cannot fail to keep pace with the profanation of the Sabbath.

I have heard, in this land of freedom, the movements of the nation to rescue the Sabbath ascribed to priestcraft! But is it such a crime to be a minister of Christ, as creates presumptive evidence of guile, when he performs a professional duty? Who is bound to watch and sound the alarm, if not the watchmen of Zion? Or is the Sabbath such a remnant of papal superstition, that he must needs be an ambitious hypocrite, who excites his countrymen to care for and preserve it? Is religion high-treason? Are ministers disfranchised? Are we not citizens, and blessed with equal rights? And have we not families upon whose neck must come the yoke of that despotism, which vice and irreligion never fail to create? But it is not ministers alone that have awakened the solicitude which pervades the nation, and which extends and deepens, every month, and day, and hour. This is an intelligent nation, and to some extent a religious nation; and thousands of Christian patriots appreciate the civil blessings of the Sabbath, and perceive the certain destruction of our republican institutions which must follow its extended and general profanation. It is the sober, reflecting, judicious, pious part of the nation, that sees and thinks, and feels and petitions.

But it is said, that Congress have no right to legislate for religion. It is true, and let God be praised that there is at length one nation under heaven, one mighty nation, where church and state are not united, and where reason and conscience are free. But the petitions are, not that Congress will do any thing *for* religion, but, simply, that by legislation they will do nothing *against* religion—*simply that they will not, with the people's money, hire their twenty-six thousand Mail-carriers, Post-masters and assistants, to unite with the wicked in prostrating the holy Sabbath!* We ask for no union of church and state: but, simply, that the moral influence of the Sabbath may not be thus bartered away for secular gain.

But again, it is said, that no man is obliged to imitate the example of those who violate the Sabbath, and why should not those who choose to keep it mind their own concerns, and let their neighbors alone? We might, if it were benevolent to see our neighbors perish without an effort to save them, and if the conduct of our neighbors affected in no respect our civil and religious rights, by impairing the restraining influence of the government of God. But every Sabbath-breaker, in addition to the ruin he brings on himself, is impairing the moral principle of the community in which I live, and the obligation of an oath; and of course impairs the security of my life, and property, and character, and multiplies temptation around my family—*increasing the difficulties of a virtuous education, and the chances of destruction to my children; and by augmenting the power of licentiousness, and impairing that of moral principle, he is preparing to rob my children of the birth-right of liberty, and to bring upon them the yoke of a grievous bondage;—and is all this nothing to me?*

Besides, the act of the government is to a certain extent my own act : my suffrage, and the taxes I pay, all go in support of a national act of Sabbath-day violation. And why shall my rights of conscience be thus sported with, for purposes of secular convenience or gain, to that small portion of the nation, who think that they are benefited by a Sabbath mail ?

It is, however, more than intimated that the petitioners for the preservation of the Sabbath, are influenced by superstitious scruples of conscience, unworthy the consideration of the enlightened and liberal-minded legislators of a great nation. Has religion, then, become foolishness, and conscience a thing to be despised, and exiled from the Republic ? Are the Sabbath and the fear of the Lord remnants of papal superstition ! Are the men who have too much conscience to encroach on sacred time, to be of necessity excluded from an important trust, as they must be if Sabbath mails are continued ? Must the commercial interests of the nation be intrusted to those who can eulogize, and still, with pliant conscience, systematically profane the Sabbath, from motives of personal gain ? Once it was, that a want of the fear of God, in courts, occasioned the predominance of temptation, and the multiplication of crimes ; but this it seems is an era of peculiar light, in which conscientious scruples are to be regarded as despicable !

But even could we for a season prosper without the Sabbath, is it possible to shake off our allegiance to God, or to evade the retributions of his righteous providence ? Who wields the orb of day ? Who guides the season ! Who sends adversity, and measures out prosperity ? Have we so soon forgotten the weakness of our infancy, and our cries to God, when men rose up against us ? Have we reached an eminence from which God cannot thrust us down ? Can we dispense with his protection, and set at naught his institutions, and run successfully the race of an irreligious prosperity ? Be not deceived. What fleets and armies could not do, the hand of suicide may accomplish, emancipated from divine restraint. Proud and fearless of Heaven as we may be, in one hour our destruction may come. The decree is universal—“*The nation and kingdom that will not serve Thee, shall perish.*” And God has not departed from the helm of universal government, but put beyond his power the instruments of punishment. In our country’s bosom lie the materials of ruin, which wait only the divine permission to burst forth in terrific eruption, scattering far and wide the fragments of our greatness.

Give up the Sabbath—blot out that orb of day—suspend its blessed attractions—and the reign of chaos and old night would return. The waves of our unquiet sea, high as our mountains, would roll and dash, from west to east, and east to west, from south to north, and north to south, shipwrecking the hopes of patriots and the world.

Who, then, is the patriot that would thrust out our ship from her peaceful moorings, in a starless night, upon such an ocean of storms, without rudder, or anchor, or compass, or chart ? The elements around us may remain, and our giant rivers and mountains. Our miserable descendants, also, may multiply, and vegetate, and rot in moral darkness and putrefaction. But the American character, and our glorious institutions, will go down into the same grave that entombs the Sabbath ; and our epitaph will stand forth a warning to the world—**THUS ENDETH THE NATION THAT DESPISED THE LORD, AND GLORIED IN WISDOM, WEALTH, AND POWER.**