

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

THE AMERICAN

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OR,

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FROM

LIVING MINISTERS OF THE UNITED STATES.

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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

both Schools, only seven who had been in them over fourteen days had ever been brought before him for crime; and that too among a class of citizens peculiarly degraded.

These fruits of the Bible are in perfect accordance with its predictions. I need not repeat them at large. They are many and express. It is predicted that God will destroy the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil spread over all nations—that his knowledge shall cover the earth as the waters the sea—that all shall know him from the greatest to the least—and the people be all righteous—that wars shall cease—that benevolence shall supplant selfishness and ferocity—and that the earth, exuberant in its supplies, shall nevertheless be filled with purity and joy.

I have only to add, that all other systems of moral influence depend simply upon their own unaided strength; while the Gospel is attended by the special presence of God and the power of his Holy Spirit—giving to it an efficacy infinitely beyond that of simple argument or eloquence. Thus attended, the Gospel wrought its wonders on the day of Pentecost, and during the first ages of Christianity. Thus attended, it has, in these latter days and these ends of the earth, often, in the course of a few weeks or months, changed the entire aspect of a neighborhood or town—introducing a moral elevation that gladdens angels. And thus attended, this same Gospel is capable of breaking every chain of oppression, and renovating a ruined world. Who then, that loves his country—that loves mankind—would, by example or otherwise, hinder the progress of this Gospel? and not rejoice rather in every effort made for extending its blessed influence?

SERMON LV.

PROPRIETY AND IMPORTANCE OF EFFORTS TO EVANGELIZE THE NATION.

JEREMIAH, ix. 23, 24.

If, as has been shown in the preceding discourse, the Gospel only is able to conduct nations to abiding prosperity,—then,

NOTHING IS TO BE FEARED, BUT MUCH IS TO BE HOPED FOR, FROM THE EFFORTS OF PATRIOTS AND CHRISTIANS TO EVANGELIZE THE NATION.

Infidels and profligate men affect great trepidation, lest the efforts made to spread the Gospel should lead to combinations dangerous to our liberties, and rear up another hierarchy, and bring back priestcraft and the dark ages. But do they *really believe* any such thing? Do they fear *any such thing*? Do they not *know*, that wherever the Gospel and its institutions have been most revered, men have been most intelligent, most free from superstition, and most incapable of ecclesiastical domination? Do they not *know*, that superstition and priestcraft have in all climes and ages increased, just in proportion as the moral energy of the Gospel has declined? It is the testimony of history, that principles of civil and religious liberty have always accompanied evangelical religion, and made their most desperate resistance to arbitrary power and achieved their most glorious victories under its auspices. And it is equally true, that there never was a religion

but that of the Gospel, which did not darken and debase the mind, and lend its influence to despotism and to a corrupt and abominable priesthood.

The ascendancy of that terrible form of *nominal* Christianity, which arose in the dark ages, and whose persecutions have kept the heavens gleaming with their fires, and the earth flowing with blood, was the result of, a long declension of evangelical light, and has held, and still holds, indissoluble alliance with ignorance of the pure Gospel, and passive obedience to despotic power.

But are those among us, who affect so much apprehension of danger from clerical influence, aware of the invidious imputation which they thus cast upon their countrymen? Are they as ignorant as the people of the dark ages? Do they need conservators to prevent their giving up their money, and their civil and religious rights, into the hands of the clergy? Are our citizens so far gone, that they have no guardians between them and destruction, but the volunteer aid of those keen-sighted, kind-hearted gentlemen, who have discovered that the Bible is a cunningly devised fable, and that after death it shall be as well with the wicked as with the righteous? What possible danger to liberty can arise from clerical influence, exerted by enlightened men upon a virtuous community? There is an influence inseparable from talent, piety, and fidelity in the pastoral office, which none but wicked men fear, and which can never be prevented, but by such general ignorance and profligacy as will render good men odious, and ruin the nation. A new kind of conspiracy, indeed, against civil liberty must that be, which proposes, by the dissemination of Bibles, and the preaching of the Gospel, to enslave the country!—The very means by which the Reformers emancipated half Europe, and by which to this day all the civil liberty which exists in the world has been preserved! An unparalleled deliverance, too, from priestcraft and popery must that be, which shall be achieved by undermining the public confidence in evangelical ministers, stopping the circulation of Bibles and tracts, and abolishing missionary societies and sabbath schools!—thus leaving the land in darkness, and open to the invasion of Papal missionaries, and the influence of those ample revenues which “his Holiness” so unsparingly consecrates to the establishment of his dominion in North America.*

Are those enemies of revelation who clamour so loudly against the means which achieved the reformation, and which alone can prevent the spread of popery in our country, in the pay of his Holiness? Has the secret service-money reached its destination, and does the mystery of iniquity already begin to work? We make no pretensions to prophecy, and we do not need that gift to foresee, that if Popery shall ever gain in this land an ascendancy dangerous to our liberties, it will be accomplished only through the aid of infidels, and the virulent haters of evangelical religion, and those multitudes to whom evangelical instruction is not extended.

Already has the loud tone of execration against popery been turned from “his Holiness” and his American emissaries, to that class of Protestants who in Europe broke down his dominion, and in this country are raising the only effectual barriers against his usurpation.

Is it darkness, then, or is it light, which they so much fear, who cry out against charities which are destined to evangelize the nation and the world?

* It is understood that “his Holiness” has sent over at least *twenty-seven* Missionaries, and *one hundred thousand* dollars to aid in this good work the past year.

Have *they* any objection to the dark ages who oppose the propagation of that Gospel—the extinction of which produced them, and the restoration of which has kindled the only light and restored the only civil and religious liberty which now cheers the world? Do not the infidel and profligate *know*, that the general prevalence of the Gospel would create an atmosphere of light and purity that would pour shame on the *wicked*? And is not *this* the *real* ground of their alarm?

But our countrymen are too intelligent to be the dupes of a feigned alarm. They understand the motives of those who make the outcry—in many instances men who for a mess of pottage would sell their country—men who, should a tyrant ever rule the nation, will, by their bad example, prepare the way, and be the first to hail the usurper, and to become the ministers of his despotism. For, those who blush not to practise treason against the government of God—who acknowledge the obligation of Divine institutions only to insult Heaven and a Christian community by violating them, have no conscience and no patriotism, and can give no security that they would not, in times of temptation, sell their country.

But will the future Cæsar of our country, should one arise, be able, think you, to call to his standard the patriotic band, who, amid obloquy and self-denial, are laboring to transmit to future millions our colleges and schools, and sabbaths and sanctuaries? Were such means and such men ever employed to subvert the liberties of a nation? Preposterous! The Gospel, instead of degrading, is the only power which elevates the people above the influence of demagogues, and diffuses intelligence, independence, and a vigorous morality among the middle classes in society. It is the only power which detects imposture, supplants idolatry, and pours a hated day-light on superstition and the works of darkness. It is the only power which can keep down the plethora of a luxuriant prosperity, and restrain the paroxysms of mad ambition.

As to the outcry, then, if sincere, of a national religion, to be reared by clerical intrigue and pecuniary influence, it is the most chimerical and laughable imagination that ever danced in the brain of a lunatic. The permanent funds held by charitable institutions are but a drop of the bucket, compared with those which are allowed to be held by companies associated for secular purposes, and their annual accounts, rendered to the public, of receipts and expenditures, are more minute, and such as more entirely preclude the possibility of perversion, than those rendered by any secular institutions in the land. No man who pays taxes for the support of government, has any thing like the same evidence that the public income is not perverted. And it is this open, honest course, which satisfies a virtuous community, whose charities will no longer be continued than this confidence in their wise appropriation is sustained.

The Christian population of the United States is divided chiefly between four or five large denominations; each sustained and protected by its own religious Magazines, Newspapers, Theological Seminaries, Education and Missionary Societies, and Sabbath Schools—neither of which could supplant the others, or be supplanted, without a moral miracle. Nor could they be amalgamated into one denomination for ambitious purposes, without a still greater miracle. And though, in regard to objects in which all Christians and all patriots are agreed, it may be amiable, and very proper, that these denominations should cheerfully unite and co-operate, yet their amalgamation into one denomination, even for religious purposes,

would not indeed be desirable. In their emulation they banish sloth and covetousness, and provoke one another to love and good works; and thus with increased zeal they put forth those efforts which are needed to evangelize the land. The funds raised by them for charitable and religious purposes are under the management of boards of trust, composed of ministers of approved character, and laymen possessing the highest confidence of the denominations to which they belong, and of the candid and virtuous of every name.

Instead of threatening the liberties of our country, then, if our liberties are to be preserved, it is eminently by the instrumentality of such associations that the work must be done. Government cannot superintend the religious and moral interests of the country. And the churches, though adequate to the purposes of a stated ministry, are not, as such, sufficiently imbued with zeal and harmony of character to act, as churches, with the activity and vigor demanded for the general diffusion of the Gospel. But these volunteer associations concentrate the best hearts, the most willing hands, and the most vigorous and untiring enterprise. And being united by affinities of character, they move with less impediment and more vigor than any other bodies can move, and constitute, no doubt, that form of the sacramental host by which Jesus Christ intends to give freedom to the world.

So far from being dangerous to our liberties, these benevolent associations constitute just that kind of attraction which our circumstances demand. Our national compact is a compromise of local interests, exposing us to sectional jealousies and competitions, as well as to the feverish agitations of passion and ambition. Religion is the only principle of universal benevolence, whose eye pervades, and whose heart feels for the entire nation. And Christians are those members of the nation whose views and hearts are most in unison, and who act for ends, and under the influence of principles, which constitute the cement by which the nation may be held together.

It is by means of these associations, to spread the Bible and distribute Tracts, and educate ministers, and establish schools universally, that Christian friendships are formed, and a national influence exerted, and that charity extended which is the bond of perfectness, and which, if any thing can do it, will save the nation from civil war and commotion. And should we be ever driven by mad ambition to the perilous edge of destruction, it will be found, that the love of Christians for one another, and for the cause of God and their country, will afford a powerful tranquilizing influence, and will probably be the cause without which the nation had not been saved.

A peculiar motive to effort now, is found in the consideration that we are fast becoming a *manufacturing*, as well as an agricultural people, and, with the increase of temptation, need that augmented preserving influence of the Gospel, which experience has shown to be able to avert the evils which have attended the manufacturing establishments of Europe, and to render this class of citizens as intelligent, industrious, respectable, and pious, as any whose labors bless the land.

Indeed our Republic is becoming too prosperous, too powerful, too extended, too numerous, to be governed by any power without the blessed influence of the Gospel. The bayonet, in despotic governments, may for a time be a substitute; but ours must be self-government, or anarchy first, and then despotism. The prevalence of Christian philosophy may save us, as certainly as that of infidel philosophy would be our ruin.

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