

Duffield, George

THE GOD OF OUR FATHERS.

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AN HISTORICAL SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

Coates' Street Presbyterian Church,

PHILADELPHIA,

ON

FAST DAY, JANUARY 4, 1861.

BY

GEORGE DUFFIELD, JR.,

PASTOR.

WITH COPIOUS NOTES, AND AN APPENDIX.

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*"The longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth, that God governs  
in the affairs of men."*—BENJAMIN FRANKLIN.

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Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels.

And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hands of the potter : so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it.

Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel.

At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it :

If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.

And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it ;

If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then will I repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them.—*Jeremiah* xviii. 3-10.

## APPENDIX.

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AT Pine Street Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, March 17, 1776, by Rev. George Duffield, D.D., Pastor. Isaiah xxi. 11, 12. "The burden of Dumah. He calleth to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will inquire, inquire ye: return, come."

\* \* \* \* \*

The instruction afforded in these words is as follows:

I. That it is the duty of a people, under a pressure of trouble and distress, to be earnest in applying to God respecting their affairs.

II. That such a people have encouragement to expect God will answer them, and with the affliction administer comfort to them.

I. What is implied in applying to God in such circumstances?

1. A generous concern for the public good.

Idumea's watchman, representing all those of the inhabitants of that country suitably exercised in that day of trial (and every true patriot in our day), seems to have abandoned every meaner consideration—to have lost every thought of private concern for himself or his own peculiar interest, in an ardent glow of zeal for the good of the common cause, by which, while others indulge in repose, his eyes slumber not; he watches for his country's good; his thoughts are all on this; and his busy laboring mind is consulting, planning, and inquiring for its good.

View him a moment on his watch-tower on Mount Seir; his looks are the picture of deep concern; anxious care dwells seated on his brow; painful study for his country's good has emaciated his frame; spread a solemn composure over his countenance, and hastened his age faster far than hurrying time itself would roll away his years!

Such a patriot was good Hezekiah, who lived only to serve his country—whose days were measured by diligence for its good, and planning for its greatest benefit; and whose constitution was so enfeebled by unremitting care, that ere he had

reached his fortieth year, he had sunk before the first attack of disease, had not a miracle interposed for his deliverance.

Such patriots of old were Samuel and Ezra, and, in the field, the brave Uriah. Such may thy councils, O America, and such thine armies ever contain.

(“*Hiatus valde defendendus!*”)

2. A sense of the overruling government of God determining the affairs of men.

Without this, the Idumean patriot had never callèd with such ardor, to the watchman God had appointed to observe and declare his will. So intimately is a reverence for God, connected with the proper discharge of every duty we owe to our fellow-men, as individuals, or the community at large; both proceeding from the same good principle within; that never can there be a proper and sincere discharge of the latter where the former is neglected. TRUE PATRIOTISM IS FOUNDED IN TRUE RELIGION; and where the latter is not, *there is great danger of the former being bought or bribed by an adequate price*, or in some way blasted, like the seed sown in stony ground, that perished through want of root.

3. A diligent attention to the use of means.

God has so determined, in the ordinary course of his providential dispensations, that the blessings he designs to bestow, are yet to be sought after and obtained in the use of the proper means. Eden itself was not to nourish Adam without dressing. The same God that fed Elijah by the brook, could have commanded the ravens to feed the family of Jacob, but they must travel to Egypt for bread. Canaan was given to Israel, but they must march, and fight, and toil, to subdue and possess it. Paul was assured that the ship's crew would all be saved, but the mariners must stay aboard, and ply their endeavors, or not a soul would be safe. And who that considers the engagedness of this earnest Edomite, “calling from Seir,” can doubt his diligence in every measure adapted to obtain the end.

4. The true patriot must be earnestly engaged in prayer.

In the common affairs of life, as well as in religion, we may adopt the language of the Apostle, and whether Paul plant or Apollos water, it is God must give the increase. This is the Psalmist's idea. Ps. cxxvii. 1. “Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it,” &c. It is this blessing that makes prosperous as well as rich, &c. To Him, therefore, with great propriety does the pious Idumean look, and ardently pray in our text; and it will generally be found that when God is about to bestow any remarkable favor on a person or people,

he previously pours upon that people or person a spirit of earnest supplication to God for his favor.

That it is the incumbent duty of a people, and especially when involved in calamitous circumstances, thus to pray; consider 1. God has commanded it, and to his injunction added great encouragement. Ps. l. 15. "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." Ps. xxxvii. 5. "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass." Joel ii. 32. "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord, shall be delivered; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord has said." Hence,

2. Prayer is one of the most probable means of obtaining deliverance from trouble.

As the calamities of a people are the chastening of God for their sins, and one end designed therein is to bring them back to him from whom they have departed, the more they are brought to a sense of their dependence on God, and engaged in returning and making their supplication to him, the greater is their prospect not only of being delivered, but of having their calamities converted into blessings. Micah iv. 6. And "I will gather her that is driven out, and her that I have afflicted, and I will make her that was cast off a strong nation."

3. Prayer brings down the perfections of God to the assistance of those who are thus exercised. Ps. xvi. 1. "Preserve me, O God, for in thee do I put my trust." Ps. cxviii. 5-12. "I called upon the Lord in distress: the Lord answered me, and set me in a large place. The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me? The Lord taketh my part with them that help me: therefore shall I see my desire upon them that hate me. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes. All nations compassed me about: but in the name of the Lord will I destroy them. They compassed me about; yea, they compassed me about; but in the name of the Lord I will destroy them. They compassed me about like bees; they are quenched as the fire of thorns: for in the name of the Lord I will destroy them."

II. Let us now consider THE ANSWER, and point out some signs that promise a morning of deliverance to a people afflicted.

Known unto God are all his ways from the beginning, and from the perfections of Deity we may safely assert that all moral and natural evil will finally be rendered subservient to the perfection of the divine plan; but *in what manner* this shall

be done surpasses the contracted power of the feeble mind of man to determine, and rests perhaps among the mysteries of heaven that Gabriel himself has not explained, but waits for the finishing scene to explain the mysterious drama. Yet so it is. As day and night succeed each other in the natural, so both the natural and the moral world have their nights and their days in successive interesting periods, since the memorable hour when Adam forsook his God, and introduced moral evil, and its inseparable attendant, natural evil, into this small province of the Great Creator's kingdom. The whole world throughout is as of the Jews in our text, "The morning cometh, and also the night," and so shall continue until night and day be blended no more.

Eternal day and eternal night will possess their eternally-separated regions, and separate the inhabitants in endless happiness and joy, or everlasting horror and despair.

The particular time of the Jewish state, designed in our text by the morning and the night here mentioned, may be hard to determine; but it will with great propriety apply to various periods.

It was, at the time of the prophecy, *a night* of sore impending distress from Sennacherib the Assyrian King. A MORNING of deliverance came in the destruction of Rabshakeh's army. 2 Kings, xix.

The troubled state of affairs for a series of years before and through the Babylonish captivity, was a season of night. A *morning* came in the return under Cyrus!

It was a long night, in respect of religion, through the whole of their ceremonial service—this was still darker before the coming of Christ, but in him arose a bright morning.

"A dayspring from on high visited them, to give light to those that were in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide their feet into the way of peace." Luke i. 78, 79.

Night came on them in the destruction of their city and nation, and has continued now 1700 years; but the prophets and the apostle Paul (Rom. xi. 15, 26) promise them a glorious morning in the latter days of the world.

The Christian Church has had its nights and its mornings.

And the like has been the case with every nation in a measure.

But it more especially concerns us to attend to the improvement of this doctrine, both with respect to individuals and to the present state of our own public affairs.

*Improvement.*—1. In the way of comfort to the people of God, for

(a.) All their affairs are ordered by God, who is their God, and to whom they have a right to go as their God and inquire.

(b.) Though they have a night, there is an eternal morning in reserve. But

2. Our subject is full of gloom to sinners out of Christ. Now, they have a night of spiritual darkness and death—an eternal night of dreadful misery and despair awaits you—very shortly—hereafter.

3. The improvement of our subject naturally leads our thoughts to the state of our public affairs.

*It is at present a night scene over this vast northern part of the New World.* God, to chastise us for our offences, and for wise and important purposes, has suffered dark clouds to envelope our sky. It becomes every one, who wishes his own or his country's good, to inquire—"Watchman, what of the night?" It is a time for earnest prayer, joined with diligent endeavor. There is in store an answer of mercy! There is a morning in reserve, though the night may continue some time.

REASONS TO EXPECT A MORNING.—1. God never has cast off and destroyed a nation so soon, as it would be to deliver America now to ruin. Look at the ante-diluvian world—the Amorites, and other nations of Canaan—the Jews, &c.

2. This western world appears to have been retained for that purpose, and designed by an ordinance of heaven as an ASYLUM for LIBERTY, civil and religious. Our forefathers, who first inhabited yonder eastern shores, fled from the iron rod and heavy hand of tyranny. This it was, and no love of earthly gain or prospect of temporal grandeur, urged them, like Abraham of old, to leave their native soil and tender connections behind, to struggle through winds and waves, and seek a peaceful retreat in a then howling wilderness, where they might rear the banner of liberty and dwell contented under its propitious shade, esteeming this more than all the treasures of a British Egypt, from whence they were driven forth. Methinks, I see them on the inhospitable shore they were hastening to leave, and hear them adopt the sentiment of the Psalmist iv. 6, 7, to give it in the expressive language of Watts, with a small variation :

O were I like a feathered dove,  
And innocence had wings ;  
I'd fly, and make a far remove,  
From persecuting kings !

Nor was it the fostering care of Britain produced the rapid populating of these Colonies, but the tyranny and oppression, both civil and ecclesiastical, of that and other nations, con-

strained multitudes to resign every other earthly comfort, and leave their country and their friends, to enjoy in peace the fair possession of freedom in this western world. It is this that has reared our cities, and turned the wilderness, so far and wide, into a fruitful field. *America's sons, very few excepted, were all refugees; the chosen spirits of various nations that could not, like Issachar, bow down between the two burdens of the accursed cruelty of tyranny in church and state.* And can it be supposed that the Lord has so far forgot to be gracious, or shut up his tender mercies in his wrath, to favor the arms of oppression, and to deliver up this asylum to slavery and bondage? Can it be supposed that the God who made man free, and engraved in indefeasible characters the love of liberty in his mind, should forbid freedom, already exiled from Asia, Africa, and *under sentence of banishment* from Europe—that he should forbid her to erect her banner here, and constrain her to abandon the earth? As soon shall he reverse creation, and forbid yonder sun to shine! To the Jews he preserved their cities of refuge; and whilst sun and moon endure, America shall remain a CITY OF REFUGE FOR THE WHOLE EARTH; until she herself shall *play the tyrant, disgrace her freedom, and provoke her God!* When that day shall come, if ever, then, and not till then, shall she also fall, “slain with those that go down to the pit!”

3. The spirit and ardent love of liberty that has possessed these colonies so wide and far, is a strong evidence of a *morn- ing*, a bright morning hastening on. It is the same spirit that inspired our forefathers' breasts, when first they left their native shores, and embarked for this then howling desert. Their mortal part has mingled with the dust, but the surviving spirit has triumphed over death and the grave, and descended to their sons; and it is this spirit, beating high in the veins of their offspring, has roused them so unanimous and determined in the present struggle. 'Tis this spirit has formed our extensive UNION, and inspired our councils with that magnanimity and lustre that astonishes half the world. 'Tis this spirit has enrolled your congresses and conventions in the annals of immortal fame. 'Tis this spirit has enabled your dear, suffering brethren, in yonder once flourishing city,\* now almost a ruinous heap, to endure joyfully the spoiling of their goods; glorying to be accounted worthy to suffer in the honorable cause! 'Twas this spirit that ranked a WARREN, a MONTGOMERY and others, upon the list of proto-martyrs for American liberty. And this same spirit has led you forth, ye patriot bands, associated in

\* Boston.

your country's cause, and will, I trust, still urge you on to noble deeds, and bravely to prefer a glorious death to slavery and chains!

And this—what shall I call it less than a DIVINE AFFLATUS so generally prevailing through all ranks, in the cabinet and in the field—is an argument from heaven that America shall rise triumphant over the proud waves and raging billows that now threaten her ruin! When a nation is to be destroyed, she is, as described by Hosea vii. 11, “like a silly dove without heart;” but when [here, again, the enthusiasm of the writer becomes too great for words, and we have another *hiatus*. May we venture to complete it?] but when this divine afflatus comes upon a nation, and it is refreshed, like a giant with new wine, the omen is sure and the victory inevitable!

4. There is great reason to believe that the Church of Christ is yet to have a glorious day in America.

Religion, like the sun, rose in the east, and has continued its progress in a western direction. Once it flourished in Asia. Now it is almost total darkness there. From thence, it came to Europe, and there shone bright for a season; but scenes of persecution harassed it, and the shadows of a dark evening have long been gathering round it. AMERICA seems to have been prepared as the wilderness to which the woman should fly from the face of the dragon, and be nourished for a long series of time. Rev. xiii. 6. God has here planted his church—he has hedged it round, and made it to flourish; and though there have been some few, some very few remains of a mistaken zeal for piety, in attempting to fetter the minds of men with pains and penalties, yet it may with great justice be said, in no part of the earth does religious liberty equally prevail, and just sentiments of the rights of conscience obtain, as in this land. Here has pure and undefiled religion lengthened her cords and strengthened her stakes. Yonder to-day are the praises of God singing, and the word of his grace proclaimed, where but a few years back his name was not known, nor anything heard but the yells of savage beasts, or poor indarkened Indian tribes, equally ignorant of the true God as the beasts themselves.

How large an addition to the kingdom of Christ has been made in this land! The king of glory has here indeed gone forth, with his sword on his thigh, riding prosperously in state, conquering and to conquer! The progress of this kingdom is still continued with a rapid career; and shall his foes tear the laurels from the brow of the great Redeemer? and deliver his victory and glorious prospects into slavery and thralldom! Forbid it, Jesus, from thy throne! It shall not take place! The

church shall flourish here and hold on her way triumphant, in spite of Kings, Lord, Commons, and Devils, until yonder vast unexplored western regions shall all resound the praises of God, and the unenlightened tribes of the wilderness shall know and adore our Immanuel. And as civil and religious liberty live or languish together, so shall the civil liberty of America hold pace with the triumphs of the Gospel throughout this extensive land.

Though we are wicked enough, God knows, and have much need of repentance and returning to our God, as we would wish and hope for his favor, yet we are not arrived to that degree of impiety, or that so generally prevailing as is usually, and, I may say, always the case before God gives up and delivers a land into the hand of their enemies; and this is an argument why we may yet hope for a morning and a further day.

6. The peculiar hand of Providence that has evidently led us hitherto, and the remarkable smiles of heaven on our attempts thus far for our defence, and his frowns upon those that have risen up against us, afford also a pleasing prospect. "Had not the Lord," now may America say, "had not the Lord been on our side \* \* the proud waters had gone over our soul." "Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Psalm cxxiv.

In all these things I have mentioned, to which more might be added, God speaks clearly in his providence, as on Sinai out of the cloud; and to us is the watchman's reply, *THE MORNING COMETH*, though a space of night may intervene. How long before it may arise, or in what manner the clouds shall break before it, or what connection America then shall have with any other nation (Britain going down to the deep!) or whether with any at all, that God who directs her counsels will determine!"

If the old Pine street Pastor was wont to preach such sermons as this, we are not at all surprised at the continual outbursts against him of Tory malice, of which let the following extract from "The Word of Congress," by Rev. (?) Jonathan Odell (1779) suffice:

"A saint of old, as learned monks have said,  
Preached to the fish, the fish his voice obeyed;  
The same good man convened the grunting herd,  
Who bowed obedient to his powerful word;  
Such energy had truth in days of yore,  
Falsehood and nonsense in our days have more;  
Duffield avers them to be all in all,  
And mounts or quits the pulpit at their call.

In vain "New Light" displays her heavenly shine,  
 In vain attract him oracles divine ;  
 Chaplain of Congress give him to become,  
 Light may be dark and oracles be dumb.  
 It pleased Saint Anthony to preach to brutes,  
 To preach to Devils best with Duffield suits."

The Congress of 1776 Devils! The verdict of posterity is somewhat different. So, truly, says the poet :

*Multa renascentur quæ jam cecidere, cadentque,  
 Quæ nunc sunt in honore!*