

OUR NATIONAL SINS TO BE REPENTED OF,

AND THE

Grounds of Hope for the Preservation

OF OUR

FEDERAL CONSTITUTION AND UNION.

A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED

FRIDAY, JANUARY 4, 1861,

ON THE

DAY OF FASTING, HUMILIATION AND PRAYER

APPOINTED BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.

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A DISCOURSE.

1. PSALM 78: 37, 39. Their heart was not right with Him, neither were they steadfast in His covenant. But He being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity and destroyed them not; yea, many a time turned He His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath; for He remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passeth away and cometh not again.
 2. PSALM 79: 8, 9. O remember not against us former iniquities; let Thy tender mercies speedily prevent us; for we are brought very low. Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Thy name; and deliver us and purge away our sins, for Thy names' sake.
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BUT five weeks have passed, since we assembled in this place, to render our thanks to Almighty God, for His great goodness to us as a nation. A dark cloud then had risen above our horizon, portentous, to some, of a coming storm. But the mass of politicians and people had either not noticed, or did not regard it, then, as at all ominous of evil. We took occasion to press the admonition, as intimated by the divine providence, to rejoice with fear and trembling, and to mingle repentings and humblings of heart before God for our sins, with our thanksgivings.

To-day we assemble, in accordance with the proclamation of the President of the United States,

to implore the mercy and forgiveness of God, in the midst of discord, perplexity and perils. "Hope," says he, "seems to have deserted the minds of men. All classes are in a state of confusion and dismay, and the wisest counsels of our best and purest men are wholly disregarded. In this, the hour of our calamity and peril, to whom shall we resort for relief, but to the God of our fathers? His omnipotent arm only, can save us from the awful effects of our own crimes and follies, our ingratitude and guilt towards our Heavenly Father." The trumpet of alarm has been blown from the very citadel. In bewilderment and trepidation, the head of the army, cabinet, civil government, and this once flourishing confederacy, invokes the nation to repentance and confession of individual and national sins; "to acknowledge God's justice in their punishment; to implore Him to remove from our hearts the false pride that might prompt to persevere in wrong; to restore the good will and friendship of former days between the people of our several States; to save us from the horrors of civil war and "blood-guiltiness;" to "desert us not in this hour of extreme peril, but to remember us as He did our fathers, in the darkest days of the revolution, and preserve our Constitution and our Union, the works of their hands, for ages yet to come."

These are all matters legitimate and appropriate to the present exigencies. Whatever different persons may think of the spirit, and motives, and policy of the President, it ill becomes any one, especially members, elders, and ministers of the

church of Christ to set an example of party spirit, pride of opinion, disrespect for the highest governmental authority, and thus sanction the lawlessness, contempt of rule, and atheistic idea of liberty prevalent, by refusing to unite in an humble appeal to God for our common country, at the request of the chief magistracy. This is virtually to aid and abet the scoffs and sneers of the infidel partisan, "the wicked," who, as the psalmist says, "through the pride of his countenance will not seek after God," "whose judgments are far above out of his sight; who puffeth at his enemies, and saith in his heart, there is no danger, we shall not be moved, we shall never see adversity."* Even should there be bewilderment, misapprehension, neglect of duty, or worse—so that there might be reason to fear the betrayal of trust, or the manifestation of imbecility on the part of those to whose courage, and wisdom, and counsels, the management of the great affairs of State is confided—the greater is the reason, the louder is the call of providence, to make an appeal to the God of our fathers, and enroll our names under His banner, when He demands "Who is on the Lord's side?" "Who will rise up for Me against the evil doer? or who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity?"†

"Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? Shall there be evil in a city and the Lord hath not done it?"‡ Whatever we may think about the political and partisan causes, that have led to the present trouble and tumults

* Psalm 10 : 4, 6.

† Psalm 94 : 16.

‡ Amos 3 : 6.

among the people of this land; however foolishly or wisely and reproachfully, men may talk and reason about the nature and sources of the peril and perplexity of the country, the Lord's hand is in it. "The Lord God of hosts," the prophet says, "is He that toucheth the land, and it shall melt, and all that dwell therein shall mourn."* If He had not seen sin in us, and we had not, in some way, as a people sorely displeased Him, He had not smitten us, and brought upon us the things we fear. It is His righteous providence that has commanded and raised the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves that toss the great ship of State like a foundering bark upon the billows, and cause our rulers to reel to and fro, to stagger like a drunken man, and be at their wits' end.

It is well that there is a God to whom we may pray. As many a bewildered crew upon the stormy deep, when their creaking, shattered vessel has mounted up to the heavens, and gone down again to the depths, and their soul melted because of trouble, have cried unto the Lord, and He brought them out of their distress, and made the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof were still; so has He done for us as a people—and so can He again do, and will—what all human wisdom and valor cannot accomplish, if we call upon Him with penitent and believing hearts, in this day of our calamity.

The passages of Scripture we have selected and

* Amos 9: 5.

read, as a guide and foundation for our reflections, are full of encouragement, and unfold to us abundant sources of hope. The one shows what God, replete with mercy and compassion, was willing to do, and often had done, for a people whose sins and iniquities had forfeited all just claim upon Him. The other is the prayer we may be emboldened to offer, if with penitent and believing hearts we seek forgiveness, purification, and the interposition of divine aid. The motives and argument of such prayer are to be derived from His own merciful nature, the abounding of His compassions in Jesus Christ, who is the glorious name of God—the embodiment and manifestation of His own infinite and adorable excellence—the brightness of the Father's Glory, the express image of His person, the only hope and standing plea for mercy, at all available and efficacious, for a guilty sinner or a guilty people.

That we may, intelligently and in faith, present our supplications to God this day, on our country's behalf, we propose to inquire:

I. What are the sins for which God is contending with us as a nation?

II. On what grounds we may venture to pray for the preservation of the Constitution and the Union of our national confederacy?

Every form and variety of sin and crime among a people does not deserve to be called national, however it may swell the amount of popular guilt. National sins are those, and those only, which, by reason of their commonness, frequency, popularity, and the state, grade, and condition of those who commit

them, are allowed to pass, either without the prohibition of law, or without punishment by the enforcement of law. Government is ordained of God for the protection of society against evil, and for the promotion of the public good. The moral law, or law of the ten commandments, is God's legislation against crime, for the individual and general good. It lies at the foundation, and should ever be magnified as the basis, of all civil, political, and criminal statutes. Whatever tends to subvert the authority of the moral law, in any of its great organic provisions, and conflicts, or is inconsistent with its spirit and precepts, is, and ever must be, injurious to the peace, purity, and safety of individual citizens, and to the public good.

What are the gross sins, against which God has denounced national judgments, and which, when unrestrained and unpunished by the civil magistracy, He, in His providence, will visit with the rod of His chastisement, the sacred Scriptures have clearly declared, and abundantly illustrated in various historical precedents therein recorded. Ordinarily, He does not interfere by any temporal visitations of His punitive providence, to correct the crimes of men, where the magistrates or governmental authorities are attentive and faithful to their obligations in this respect. For such interposition is thereby rendered unnecessary. But, where they neglect their duties, and the people love, or consent, to have it so, and will elevate to, and sustain in office, corrupt men, so that the laws against the vices of society become a dead letter, and crimes prevail on

every hand, there is nothing left for the general welfare and safety, but for God to interfere with His retributive judgments. Accordingly, He has said, "when the land sinneth against Me by trespassing grievously, then will I stretch out my hand."*

The most superficial observer cannot fail to discover, in this country, the prevalence of various forms of vice, which have been tolerated and practiced so extensively in society, that judgments from the hand of God have fallen upon us, frequently and extensively. Often have they been so marked, that they could not well be mistaken. Such are the intemperance in all classes,—the utter disrespect of truth—the prevalent falsehood and frauds in business, social intercourse, and the press,—the want of good faith and fidelity in the trusts and relations of life—the desecration of the Sabbath—the contempt of compacts and oaths and obligations of office—profanity—licentiousness—lawlessness—oppression—polygamy among the Mormons—adultery, sanctioned by divorce laws—avaricious extortion—and swindling operations of speculators, bankers and corporations almost without end, which almost every where in our land corrupt society. Of these, and such like, the legislation and government of our several States have immediate and principal cognizance. However widely diffused are such, and kindred forms of vice and immorality, which, by reason of general extent may be, or become, national, all our

* Ezekiel 14 : 13.

different States are not equally involved in the growing corruption and consequent condemnation.

In estimating our national crimes, reference must be had to the peculiar features and functions of our Federal government.

The want of any recognition of God, in the constitution of the United States, and even in the form of the Presidential oath of office which it prescribes, taken in connection with its declaration of absolute, unqualified sovereignty of the people, as the source of its authority, and the supreme law of the land, affords apparent and formal ground for this charge. The christian forms of oath, as sometimes, and commonly in the States, administered under it to different United States' officers, and the opinions and ruling of some of our State Judges, may, in practice have somewhat mitigated this charge: but, unquestionably, there is—in that non-recognition of Almighty God, and of Jesus Christ, the Lord of Lords and King of Kings, by whom princes decree justice, and of the divine authority of the sacred Scriptures—sufficient reason to awake the fears, as it has ever done, of many virtuous, sober-minded, religious citizens, that its unqualified and virtually atheistic claim of popular sovereignty, irrespective of the law, the word, and the providence of God our Saviour, may have subjected us, as a nation, so far to His displeasure, as, to have forfeited for us the perpetuity of the Federal government, it established as the bond of union, and to secure, eventually, a demonstration from Him, of the danger and licentious excesses of a liberty—and the

weakness, folly, and falsehood of any asserted right or ability for self-government—independent of Jehovah, and unrestricted by His supreme, universal, immutable law, and the counsels of His holy Scriptures.

It has been thought also, and much more frequently, extensively, and confidently affirmed, that the slavery practiced in this land forms THE great national sin. On this account, more than any other, it has been, and is, as confidently believed and proclaimed, that mainly, if not exclusively, the Lord is dealing with us in His providence, and threatening to pull down upon our heads the fair and noble structure of this confederacy. The evils and the crimes, however, either incident to or involved in the system of southern slavery—which makes human persons property equally with chattels and cattle, and thus degrades human beings originally created in the image of God,—do not, as we think, implicate directly, either the Constitution of the United States, or the compact under it, or all of the States, much less the citizens, generally, of our confederacy. Were this the fact, we could have no faith or hope in the efficacy of prayer to God to preserve and perpetuate our Union. For we can cherish no hope of permanent security and prosperity for any people or nation whatever, if its constitution, or legislation under it, should be in direct and flagrant violation of any of the great fundamental provisions of the law of God, the moral law, or law of the ten commandments, especially as expounded in the Scriptures by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Whether slavery, as it exists in our country, is in violation of that law of God, which is the law of love, holy, and just, and good, and true, requiring us to do to others as we would have them do to us, is a question of deep and vital moment. The moral bearing and aspect of this question, we have ever thought, should have been examined and discussed, testified and proclaimed, in the spirit of love and forbearance. The church in this matter should have been the witness of Christ. From the moment it became entangled with party political strifes, and the slavery question and discussions began to assume a sectional consequence, through the collisions of interest, commerce, politics, and struggles for office and authority, we feared, and averred, that the results would prove disastrous.

The attributes of slavery in the South, are to be mainly traced, in the statutory codes, the social regulations, practices, and habits, with their legitimate fruits, in the different States, where, by local laws it is defined, characterized, protected and maintained, both as a species of chattel property and a domestic institution, forming an element, or entering into the very structure, of the civil State, but not of general national society. The Federal constitution, while it recognizes a right to service from one human person to another, degrades not our common humanity by making men property like beasts of burden.

The original patriarchal idea of servitude, recognized in the Bible history of Abraham, although sophistically referred to by the advocates of Ameri-

can slavery as its "sanction," went no further. Such, also, was the slavery originally, to a great extent, if not generally, in our own country, anterior to the adoption of the Federal constitution. All of the colonies had more or less of it in them before the American Revolution. In all but Massachusetts it still existed at the adoption of the Federal constitution. Whatever, and however, great were the evils and sins to which slavery led, the slaveholder was not regarded as a sinner above all others; nor slavery as criminal under all circumstances, and the very worst of crimes. The Northern and some of the Middle States repented of it—modified as it then was in them, in accordance with the letter of the constitution, and its spirit,—and put it away, by a wise and salutary system of gradual emancipation, believing, that what God denounced by Noah as a curse upon Canaan, neither was, nor ever could be, meant by Him to be understood and practiced as a blessing, and desirable in the social state.

Nevertheless, commercial interests and relations, various social ties of marriage, kindred, trade, bequest, and enterprises of business, involve, no doubt, a considerable portion of the citizens of our free States, indirectly and incidentally, as well as directly in the guilt and evils of this thing, and thence, create a sympathy and sensitiveness touching it, which often, and naturally, expresses itself in the conflicts and platforms of party politics. But, by no public act of organic law or of their governments, can it be said, that the free States have made themselves

partakers of the sins of slavery, appropriate and peculiar to the degrading of human beings or persons, by making and regarding them as chattel property.

Some, indeed, have contended that they did so, by the adoption, first, of the Federal constitution, and, subsequently, of the Missouri compromise, in 1820, and especially by the legislation of Congress, pursuant to the constitutional compact, requiring fidelity in carrying out its provisions, relative to the rendition of fugitives. A party, in a few of the free States, especially Massachusetts and Pennsylvania—whose leaders have been characterized by what we regard the most arrant infidelity, and repudiation of the plenary and miraculous inspiration and divine authority of the sacred scriptures, zealous, mistaken fanatics—under erroneous pleas of philanthropy, have, while blaspheming the word of God, denounced the Federal Constitution and Union as fraught with guilt, sufficient to provoke the judgments of heaven. Their language and abuse of Washington and the constitution, it is not fitting here to quote; but they have thought they were doing service to both God and man, especially the slave, to rend and destroy our Union. We have never been able to see that their construction of the constitution is just, or capable of being sustained; either by the legitimate meaning of the language, or by the debates and history of the convention that formed it, and of the legislatures that adopted it. The Missouri compromise—which indeed changed the policy of the Federal administration and the dominant party, and which we deplored at the time as mischievous, however it

may have been a great mistake—was nevertheless conceived and formed in 1820, for the maintenance of treaty-faith, pledged as it was thought, in the purchase of Louisiana.

Immediate and *unqualified* emancipation began in 1833-4, to be proclaimed and demanded by certain moral and political extremists, as the only proof of repentance, and the only salvation of the country. And because the Constitution of the United States neither possesses, nor could be made by amendment to possess, power to accomplish this, whatever might increase the friction and hasten the dissolution of the Union, found ready and cordial entertainment and sympathy.

Many of the ministry, and members of different evangelical churches, were zealously affected with the thought of immediate emancipation as alike the duty and safety of our country. The relation of master and slave, slavery *per se*, without any reserve or qualification whatever, was pronounced a God-provoking sin, the greatest men can commit, and all involved in that relationship denounced as guilty of man-stealing, robbery, murder, and whatever other crimes are incident to the system as spread out in the statutes, sustained by law, and, in flagrant cases, carried into practice, in all, or any of the southern States! This rampant zeal—sustained, as we have ever thought, by fallacious logic—agitated and rent churches, united ecclesiastically, and previously walking in harmonious christian fellowship. It engendered alienations, strifes and divisions between Congregationalists and Presbyterians; repudi-

ated the plan of union upon which they had, for more than the third of a century, happily co-operated; separated them completely as distinct and rival denominations; drove the ploughshare of division between the northern and southern churches; and carried the war of angry debate and irreconcilable antagonisms, into the different great national associations for missionary and tract operations.

The judgment of a large portion of the ministry and churches, in the southern States, and also in the northern, could not see and admit, either the obligation, the benevolence, the practicability, or the safety of immediate emancipation, as then and thus urged. The consciences of multitudes who sustained the relation of master to slave, did not, or could not be made to feel, that the simple relationship of master to slave, or slavery under all circumstances, was sinful; and especially, when they knew, that there were obligations of guardianship, dictates of humanity, and claims of enlightened charity, which not only forbade immediate and unqualified emancipation, but required the continuance of that relation and sometimes its formation. From the denunciations of those—who neither saw nor would admit such obligations, but who held them up to scorn and infamy, and sought to *excommunicate them by declarative resolutions* from the church of God, as unworthy a place in it—they turned away, and said, “how can two walk together unless they be agreed!” preferring secession and separation to strife and obloquy.

In their attempts to interpret the report of their own consciences, which acquitted them from the false, unqualified charges of guilt, made against them by their northern brethren, they found themselves in circumstances where the temptation became natural and powerful, to justify slavery as a system, as well as to excuse all its developments, and exonerate themselves from the criminality personally and promiscuously charged upon them. Inasmuch as the Bible,—which gives an account of God's civil legislation concerning slavery, and the counsels and precepts of divine wisdom in relation to the moral duties and obligations growing out of the relation of christians to it, and to the governments that tolerated or enacted it,—has thus distinctly recognized the existence of that relation, and enjoined reciprocal duties on masters and servants, the judgment and conscience of southern ministers and churches began to claim, what none of a former generation had ever thought of doing, that God, by such legislation, had SANCTIONED it, and made it as truly a DIVINE ORDINANCE as He had government itself; and that, indeed, it was but a species of government, provided and ordained by His wisdom and benevolence for the benefit of the domestic and social state. Rev. Mr. H. J. Van Dyke, of Brooklyn, and Dr. Palmer, of New Orleans, have volunteered their casuistry in this matter, as a writer in Mississippi, years ago, had done, in opposition to the ultra views of immediate emancipation that had been inculcated and propagated in the North. It is proof to us of the blinding influence, which sympathy with party

politics, and polemic casuistry, can exert upon the mind and conscience. These excellent brethren seem not for one moment to have adverted to what is undeniably true, that God, when legislating as the civil head of Israel,—just as human governments ever find it necessary for them to do,—enacted laws in view of evils nascent or innate in corrupt society, for the purpose of restricting, restraining, and ultimately curing them; and that such legislation is far, very far, from implying His *allowance* or *approval*, much less His *sanction* of them. To claim that slavery is a divine ordinance, because God has legislated concerning it, indicates, either an inability or unwillingness, through prejudice or passion, to distinguish between enduring a present evil, in a given state of society for the prevention of greater, and sanctioning such evil in every condition of society. Never was there a greater nonsequitur, more palpable and offensive sophistry, than that into which these writers have been betrayed.

Such casuistry has been one of the melancholy results of the alienations and separations produced in the churches by the political agitation of this subject. Shut out and cut off from the sympathy of the churches and the christian community, generally, of the North, the southern churches and christians, very naturally, received and relished the sympathy of unbelieving men and political partisans, who, from mistaken considerations of State and national policy, were seeking to protect and propagate and perpetuate the slavery, in connection with which they had been born and nursed, *educated* and *trained*. Nor

have the ministry and churches at the North been wholly exempt from a similar and hurtful influence upon their judgment and consciences, by sympathy with political partisanship, inducing a rancorous spirit of denunciation often mistaken for, and claimed to be, a superior piety.

The essential and irreconcilable antagonism between free labor and slave labor can never be cured, permanently and completely, by any system of human legislation that attempts to harmonize them. Light and darkness are not more at variance, radically and immutably, than are liberty and bondage. The conflict between them has well been pronounced, by one of our eminent statesmen, "irrepressible." Compacts and legislation may ease its violence; and, if wise and just, lead to the gradual salutary disappearance of the one before the other. But the experiments of past ages and nations from the first, have proved, in the recorded history of mankind, that freedom and slavery cannot dwell permanently, harmoniously, safely, and prosperously, together.

God's legislation on the subject, found in the book of Leviticus, so far from being a sanction of slavery, was actually a wise and wonderful system of gradual, but certain and inevitable emancipation. The history of the Jewish nation proved and illustrated it.

The patriarchal slavery, claimed to have been sanctioned by the example of Abraham, was not hereditary. There is no proof that it descended to Isaac or Ishmael. Certainly none that it was

transmitted to Jacob and Esau, in the third generation.

God's ethical precepts on the subject in the New Testament, on which Mr. Van Dyke and others have founded their erring deductions, were explicitly designed, as the context shows, not to *sanction* the political code and usages of the Roman Empire; but to bring out and exhibit, in the clearest and strongest possible light, the moral power of that christian benevolence, which makes the master and the slave alike feel that they are brethren of one family, and which is a much more potent force, to remedy and overcome the evils and existence of slavery, than any mere political expedients, or system of civil legislation, that human wisdom without it can ever devise.

The extremists' views, on both sides of this question, and in both sections of our country, which have, for the last twenty-six years, been pressed in various political and ecclesiastical contests, have resulted in deep, permanent, and, we fear, fatal estrangements. The doctrines of immediate emancipation, and of the sin of slavery *per se*, as taught by ultra abolitionists, have irritated the South far more than personal liberty bills, or the election of a republican candidate for the President. The pro-slavery teachings and violence of southern preachers and politicians, have, in their turn, exasperated the North. The thrift and prosperity of the North, their progress in wealth, population, and improvement, whatever may have been the policy of the Federal government,—forcing, at one time into commerce, another manu-

factures, and at another free trade—have proved so illustrative and demonstrative of the value and efficiency of free labor, as to have increasingly excited the envy, jealousy, and rivalry of the South, whose exhausted farms, dilapidated domiciles, disordered finances, mortgaged property, depreciated lands, and other evidences of decay, made them look, with an angry and suspicious eye, upon the commerce, manufactures, enterprise, capital, resources, and enhanced prosperity of the free States. Socially, politically, religiously, there have been developed, and are, antagonisms, which have already rent the most solemn compacts, and destroyed the most sacred sympathies. How they are to be reconciled, if possible, is the great problem of the day, which leaves all our sages and statesmen utterly at fault. Well has the President, in his proclamation for a fast, invited one and all, both North and South, to implore God to remove “the false pride of heart which impels, for consistency’s sake, to persevere in wrong.” It is God only who can do it.

Concession, without the sacrifice of moral principle, and in the spirit of forbearance and forgiveness, may, and we would fain hope, by God’s blessing, will do it. Crimination and recrimination, charges of provocation and blame primarily and mainly, by either party, will never accomplish it. Civil war and bloodshed will render it forever impossible. Here, in this very pride of opinion, we think, lies much of the guilt, the peril and perplexity connected with the question of slavery in our Federal relations. If the North

will consent that the South adjust for themselves the evils of their own social state, and, ceasing to traduce, denounce, and vituperate, will extend to them the good will and charities of christian brotherhood; and *if* the South will not insist upon extending the acknowledged evils of their own social state, by demanding their admission and approbation in new States and Territories, there to spread and prolong this cancer in the body politic, there may be hope. But *if* the North can only be reconciled, on the ground of anti-slavery propagandism within the southern States, or the South, upon the ground of the extension of slavery by right of their construction of the constitution; and *if* the constitution must be changed to meet the views of either, then is our unity forever at an end. The antagonisms of party should never regulate the administration of our government. It should be conducted on higher principles. If the pride of opinion and the oppositions of party, cannot be overcome, by the spirit of patriotism and devotion to the public good, there can be no safe and peaceful deliverance for us from our present perplexities. The gaping fissures must increase. The separation must become fragmentary; and dissolution follow, without hope or possibility of ever again crystallizing or aggregating, in the same or any other happy consolidated Union, similar to that, which, for more than half a century, has made us, as a nation, the wonder and glory of the world.

Our social, political, moral and religious strength as a nation hitherto, has been in our union. The

one tie, that binds all together, once severed and acknowledged to be so, divides not, by a wide and yawning chasm. As in the human body, the disintegrating process of dissolution supervenes, the moment that the vital forces, through their constitutional channels, cease to operate; so will and must it be in the national. Discordant interests, rival factions, predatory incursions, servile insurrections, despotic oppressions, rapacious robberies, contending ambitions, selfish demagogism, phrenzied excitements, hostile religions, civil wars degenerating into contests of aspiring military chieftains, and intriguing schemes of corrupt monopolies and men of wealth, will not fail to repeat, in more aggravated and distressing story, the revolutions and disasters of disordered, wretched, ruined Mexico. May the God of heaven mercifully interpose to prevent it!

We fear, however, that the complications and exacerbation of this great moral, social and political evil of slavery, around which the eyes and hearts, the hopes and fears, the anxieties and lamentations of the nation this day cluster, may be traced to a guilt, even more strictly national than it, and which, we have judged and felt for nearly the third of a century, is the great public national crime God is now punishing, by the present agitation, excitement and alarm, as He has been in years past, by various processes of demoralization. The slavery trouble has been the entering wedge and battle axe, that quickly followed, with its strokes of wrath, after the offense of which we shall now speak.

By treaty both with Georgia, and with the

Indians in the territory, which she ceded to the United States, the Cherokee Indians were put under the fostering care of the Federal government. Their lands, eight million acres of which they refused to sell, were recognized as their own, and reserved to them, by solemn treaty. Their absolute title to them was admitted to be beyond the power of the States or of Congress, and to be alienated only, by treaties honorably and fairly made, and with full assent of their own. Missionaries were established among them, under the direction and support of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions, and of other missionary associations of different religious denominations. By express stipulations, on the part of the United States Government, a limited territory, protection, and inviolate territorial limits, were guaranteed to the Cherokee nation of Indians. They had attained to civilization, and established among themselves the trades, arts, and religion, upon the lands of their ancestors. Having, by the advice of the President of the United States, organized a government of their own, consisting of legislative, judiciary, and executive departments, administered on republican principles, they had risen in character, condition, and prospects; and were bound to us as brothers, by the ties of that christianity, which, in common with us, they had professed. But it was discovered that their lands contained gold.

Georgia claimed, that according to her construction of the treaty with the United States government, by which she ceded her territory, the Federal government had failed to fulfill its provisions of that treaty; although

Washington, Jefferson, Jackson, and Calhoun, had been the foster-fathers of the citizens of the Cherokee nation, as they were called in the Holsten treaty, and the Senate of the United States had sanctioned the acts, by which they had risen into a highly civilized state. While refusing to sell their lands, and planting themselves on the treaty guaranty of the Federal government, with covetous and impatient eye, the State of Georgia claimed the right of possession; and extended her laws over her fellow-christians of Moravian, Presbyterian, Baptist and Methodist churches; by which they were brought into a state of degradation and defenselessness like that of slavery, and declared to be incapable of being witnesses or parties in a court of justice. They were made outlaws upon their own lands, and allowed but the privilege of choosing between exile and chains.

It may be proper here to enter into details. In 1829 the Cherokees possessed a regularly organized civil government, and a written language. The latter was an invention of a native uninstructed Cherokee. Unlike to any that ever existed, it was yet so complete, that adults, by the use of it, could learn to read their native tongue in ten, five, and even three days. The mass of the people, in their dress, houses, furniture, agriculture, implements, manner of cultivating the soil, raising stock, providing for their families, and in their estimate of the value of an education, did not suffer by a comparison with the whites in the surrounding settlements. The great body of the people had ex-

ternally embraced the christian religion. Intemperance, the bane of the Indian as well as of the white man, had been checked. The laws of the nation rigorously excluded intoxicating liquors from all public assemblies. In this respect they set a noble and lofty example, worthy of being imitated by our Congress and State Legislatures. Numerous and efficient societies for the promotion of temperance, had been organized, and prosperity smiled upon them. But, in two years afterward, in spite of all their improvements, by the action of Georgia, the nation had been thrown into a distracted state; their government prostrated; their council forbidden to assemble; their laws declared null and void; their magistrates prohibited, under severe penalties, from enforcing them; intoxicating liquors introduced without restraint; the country traversed with armed troops; their property plundered; their persons arrested and imprisoned; their land,—known to be theirs by ancestral and immemorial possession, and guaranteed to them by numerous and perfectly explicit treaties,—claimed by others; and they themselves threatened with immediate ejection!

The missionaries, at four stations lying within the territory claimed by Georgia, were served with copies of a law, requiring an oath of allegiance to that State within a limited period, or imprisonment for four years in the penitentiary for refusal. Important civil, moral, and religious rights, and personal liberties, were thus invaded and violated. The missionaries could not, in good conscience, take the oath; for it would be an abandonment of the

Indians' rights secured by treaty with the Federal government, and an admission that Georgia was right.

A detachment of the Georgia guard, consisting of twenty-six men, armed and mounted, proceeded to each of the four missionary stations, and arrested three of the missionaries found there. They were, however, set free, by the Judge of the Superior Court of Gwinnet county, on the ground that they were under the patronage of the United States government, and were in such sense its agents, that the laws of Georgia did not apply to them. The Governor of Georgia corresponded with the President of the United States on the subject. The result was, that the latter did not consider the missionaries as in any sense agents of the government. Thereupon the missionaries were ordered, within ten days, to remove out of the State, or take the required oath.

Several of the missionaries, Messrs. Buttrick, Proctor, and Thompson, thought it expedient to remove, with their families. Mr. Thompson was subsequently arrested, and treated in the most brutal manner, for visiting his station. Mr. Worcester and Dr. Butler were arrested, and subjected to cruelties and indignities, such as savages themselves would scarcely inflict upon their captives. They were tried; and along with eight other white men, one a missionary of the Methodist Episcopal church, were sentenced to four years' hard labor in the penitentiary. On their arrival at the door of the prison, they were all offered a pardon and release, on condition, of their removing from the Indian territory

claimed by the State of Georgia, or of taking the oath of allegiance to its laws. All but two of them accepted these humiliating terms. Mr. Worcester and Dr. Butler, feeling that obedience to such laws would be treason against God, conceded nothing, and were committed to the penitentiary.

The matter was brought before the Supreme Court of the United States, on a writ of error. Having been ably argued by Messrs. Wirt and Sergeant, Chief Justice Marshall pronounced his decision. He reviewed the whole subject of the Indian titles, the treaties made with the Indians, and the laws of Georgia, which extended the jurisdiction of the State over the Cherokee country. The laws of Georgia were pronounced repugnant to the constitution, the treaties, and the laws of the United States. The mandate of the Supreme Court was instantly issued, reversing and annulling the judgment of the Superior Court of Georgia, and ordering all proceedings in the indictment against the prisoners forever to cease, declaring the prisoners to be thereby dismissed. The Superior Court of Georgia refused to obey the mandate, or discharge the prisoners. The authority of the Supreme Court of the United States thus set at defiance, the country became excited, especially the religious and order-loving, law-abiding citizens.

There existed a difference of opinion, if not a contest for the ultimate authority, between the President and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. The latter, it was known, would require a military enforcement. The

counsel of the imprisoned missionaries prepared a memorial to the former, praying for the interposition of his authority to enforce the decision of the court. The missionaries gave notice of their intention to move the Supreme Court for a further process. They had been sustained by the public sentiment of the christian community, especially at the North, as well as by their official advisers and directors in the work of missions, the prudential Committee of the American Board of Conference for Foreign Missions. It was thought by many to be a proper juncture and opportunity to settle the question, whether the Supreme Court or the President of the United States, the Judiciary or Executive, possessed the ultimate authority; and especially, amid the rising excitement of South Carolina nullification, to put to the test the authority of the treaties, laws, and Constitution of the United States, and the strength and integrity of the Federal government and Union. Georgia had bid defiance to the authority of the Supreme Court; and, by a corrupting policy,—appealing to human cupidity, for the distribution among her citizens, by lottery, 140 acres each, of the whole Cherokee country lying within her chartered limits, previously surveyed and divided into lots for that purpose,—had rendered her legislation and defiant claims popular.

We shall not further trespass on your time here, to enter into other details of this disgraceful history. It may suffice to say, that upon various consultations it was thought inexpedient—we say not by whom, but not by the imprisoned missionaries them-

selves or their counsel,—to present their memorial to the President for the enforcement of the decision of the court. My personal reminiscences here of matters learned from Dr. Butler himself—who spent several days in my house as my honored guest, soon after his removal from the penitentiary—are as painful at this distant day, as they were in their commencement, having been subversive of the respectful consideration previously entertained for the patriotic and religious men, whose timidity, called and mistaken for prudence, led them to change the counsel and policy, in accordance with which the missionaries had all along acted in the assertion of right and liberty.

It was well understood that the Supreme Court of the United States would sustain its own decision, and demand the support of the executive authority of the government, by military force if necessary. And it was also as well understood, that the President was not inclined to enforce it. To prosecute the case would lead to a collision of the authorities, and the result was thought doubtful. The missionaries were, therefore, often and earnestly counseled to desist from their attempt to obtain release by a military enforcement of the decision of the Supreme Court. They were assured of an unconditional release in case they would do so. But they refused. They spurned a pardon. They would not escape from the prison, even when the doors were thrown open for them. Persons in the confidence of the Governor of Georgia visited them, and earnestly solicited them to desist from the

prosecution. They made "no solicitation, no overture, no compromise" whatever.

Two members elect of Congress visited them, and told them officially from the Governor, that they would be discharged without concession, without condition, or even without application to the Governor. To desist from the prosecution of the suit, they were assured, would end the whole matter. It would relieve the Court, the President, the estimable Governor, the State of Georgia, and the country. Their friends and counselors in Boston, no longer advised to firmness in the prosecution. The prisoners' counsel dropped all proceedings. Messrs. Worcester and Butler were set at liberty by proclamation from the Governor of Georgia, directed to the keeper of the penitentiary; and the Governor's carriage, it was currently reported, was in waiting for them when they left the prison. They immediately returned to the stations which they had respectively occupied in the Cherokee country, and resumed their missionary labors.

The country and its authorities, had passed a crisis. But the fate of the Cherokee was sealed. The robbery and violence of Georgia had proved victorious; and the Supreme Court of the United States then received the first blow which struck it from its lofty position as the ultimate authority,—the grand balance wheel and regulating power in our government—and rendered it, as many fear, rather the dim reflector of the policy of the executive, than the independent interpreter of the constitution. Be that as it may, it has suffered great

loss in public confidence and estimation at the North. The executive policy triumphed over right. By means of a treaty obtained from unauthorized and unfaithful representatives of the Cherokee people, through the aid of intoxicating drinks—a plan for removing the Indians, pronounced benevolent, was carried out. The Cherokees were denationalized; and scenes of pillage, plunder, and mortality, shocking to relate, consummated and aggravated the guilt of a violated treaty. The inspired law-giver of the Jewish nation proclaimed:

“Cursed be he that removeth his neighbor’s landmark, and all the people shall say amen.

“Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way, and all the people shall say amen.

“Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow, and all the people shall say amen.”

The landmarks were removed; the blind and helpless were led out of the way and banished from their habitations and homes, by violence; judgment was perverted; Washington dishonored; the Senate of the United States stultified; and treaty documents, preserved in the treasuries of State, were torn from our statute books, and scattered to the winds.

It was then declared by many, and we felt at the time, no hesitation in saying, that the nation had incurred the guilt of violated treaties; and that a bitter roll of “mourning, and lamentation, and woe,” would be unfolded to the people of the United States. It has been written in characters indelible.

Every where may be met the black traces of that fatal seal, which then was stamped upon the hitherto stainless escutcheon of our country. The natural and legitimate influence of that example has demoralized the land. "We have hatched cockatrice's eggs, and woven the spider's web. He that hath eaten of the eggs has died, and that which was crushed hath broken out into a viper." We have sowed the wind and are reaping the whirlwind. God has withdrawn from us the protection of moral restraint, once mighty to protect and preserve. It is not at all strange, that treaties and compacts have lost their sacredness in the eyes of multitudes; that the constitution has ceased to be a bond of union; that States have repudiated their obligations; that oaths of office are disregarded; that plighted faith is violated; that honor and honesty need the strong power of the law to support them; that the law itself has lost its commanding majesty; that fraud, and peculation, and corruption can be traced from the councils of aldermen to the cabinet of the chief magistrate; and that sober-minded, virtuous citizens stand amazed, and are ready to ask in the language of holy writ, "when the Son of man cometh shall he find faith on the earth?"

The success of Georgia emboldened Alabama; South Carolina soon after proclaimed nullification. The Supreme Court of the United States has lost much of its power and respect. The chief executive having claimed to interpret the constitution for himself, the spirit of lawlessness has grown apace;

and contempt for institutions, usages, and compacts, time-honored and fraught with benefits, now gives indication that the very joints and sinews of society have been *dislocated and strained*. The strifes and agitation of slavery have not only turned the halls of Congress, often, into a bear-garden, and given exhibitions of brutal violence; but churches have repudiated compacts, and set aside at will all corporate rights. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian church, by one party act, through a packed majority, ignored the covenant of the fathers; rode violently over the constitution; set at naught all the obligations of discipline; and by one summary ex-scinding act, cut off four synods, with their presbyteries and congregations, and 60,000 members; seized and held the property and possessions, wrested from those who had largely contributed it; and hold it still, though every decision of courts, where trials have been conducted, have recognized or affirmed the legal and constitutional body, to be that with which they ecclesiastically broke faith, and refuse to resume it.

Other ecclesiastical bodies have been rent also. And our own New School Presbyterian Assembly, in reaching over a synod to express a judgment of censure bearing on a Presbytery, without trial or constitutional right, gave occasion and pretext, on the ground of violated faith, for the separation of southern brethren from us, and the organization of a new body.

The traces of this thing are interminable. Its roots strike deep into every part of society. Its de-

velopments and growths, we regard as even worse, and far more fatal to the welfare and safety of this Union, than slavery itself, however pestiferous that may be, and blighting to the prosperity of the States that cherish it. It is this readiness to violate compacts, to set aside constitutional law, to repudiate the obligations of good faith, that we regard the most alarming feature of the times. If not cured or corrected, it must prove the inevitable precursor of our ruin. How it is to be remedied, God only knows. Our only hope is in the effusion of the Holy Spirit, which the Lord Jesus Christ has power to grant, by which to turn the heart of this people back again unto Him. This can give wisdom, and firmness, and prudence, and zeal, and fidelity in our rulers; and, reforming the masses, counteract the influence of corrupt examples and demoralizing ambitions. God grant a baptism of this Spirit to the whole nation, to bring us to repentance, and teach us to keep His statutes, and commandments, and ordinances, as the means of our happiness and security.

II. A word or two, in conclusion, as to the grounds on which we may venture to pray in hope for this, as the means of preserving us a united people.

First, there is the boundless and amazing grace and compassion of God, toward those that have no just claim upon Him. How often did He exhibit and exercise that grace and compassion, in the history of ungrateful and perfidious Israel! "Their heart was not right with Him, neither were

they steadfast in His covenant; but He being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned He His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath; for He remembered they were but flesh; a wind that passeth away and cometh not again." It is as true in the past history of our own beloved country. Signal have been His interpositions, and abounding His compassions toward us as a nation. Oh, what a flood of grateful recollections does the history of this people bear along with it, from before the days of our revolutionary sires to the present. "He hath done great things for us whereof we have reason to be glad."

When we look at the manifestation of His own amazing grace and compassion, His own lofty and glorious excellence, as the God "who delighteth in mercy," why should we despair? The fountain of His overflowing love is not exhausted. He is loath to execute His judgments in wrath. His own loving heart, His abounding compassions, well up, in exhaustless exuberant overflowings. What may we not hope and pray for from Him, whose name and nature is Love? Could the eyes and heart of this people but be fixed on God Himself, as He comes to us in Christ, filled with the Spirit without measure, all would yet be well. With such a God, and such a Saviour, and such a Spirit, to appeal to, let us drive away our unbelieving, guilty fears, and draw near with the full assurance of faith as we pray: "Oh remember not against us former iniquities. Let Thy tender mercies speedily

prevent us—at this very moment rise before us, and keep us from sinking utterly—for we are brought very low. Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Thy name, and deliver us, and purge away our sins for Thy name's sake.”

This forms the second ground of hope, the conscious exercise of penitence in an appeal to God for His help, that we may be delivered, and our sins be purged from us. Without this, all prayer to Him will prove unavailing. If we fast and pray for party strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness, or practice oppression and deceit, the Lord will not hear us. God knows our hearts; and He has said, “if we regard iniquity in our hearts He will not hear us.” But He says, “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.” If this people, this day, though not universally, yet in sufficient numbers to give to God a public reason for the exercise of His clemency and compassion through Christ, shall truly and heartily renounce their sins, and confess and turn away from those things which have displeased Him, He will forgive, and not destroy us. Let each and every one of us, then, as we love our souls, our country, and our God, renounce and confess to Him, our own personal sins and those of the nation, in so far as we have knowledge and participation of them.

We shall thus find that we can draw near to God with renewed confidence and enlarged expectations,

and be in a better frame and spirit to influence and lead from error and sin, our neighbors and friends who practice what we judge to be wrong.

• It is the glory of God to forgive: all the lustre of His name, all the excellencies of His character display themselves here. He has said, "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions, and will not remember thy sins any more for My name's sake; put Me in remembrance; declare thou that thou mayest be justified." If the hearts of the people to any extent, will only believe this, so that with conscious exercise of repentance for all past sins, they come to God, and throw themselves and this nation upon His grace and compassion, His very name and nature—the infinite, adorable excellencies of His character, as they reveal themselves in the blessed Redeemer, who is the name of God—will form the strong plea, the prevailing argument, so that with Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, we may confidently plead for our country as he did for his. "We acknowledge, O Lord, our wickedness, and the iniquity of our fathers, for we have sinned against Thee. Do not abhor us, for Thy name's sake; do not disgrace the throne of Thy glory."

Finally, we may take occasion, from the terrible character of the evils deprecated, to become importunate with God. Moses prayed with fervor, and fell down forty days and nights before the Lord, in prayer, that He would not destroy the nation. Dissolution and destruction are the evils that threaten us. If God gives not repentance to put away voluntarily, the evils of slavery, and those it has

developed, He will, as He ever has done, interfere by His judgments to do it. Who can contemplate such a procedure of His providence, without shuddering? It is no subject for flippant and angry debates or discussions and bitter revilings. It would seem that He hath smitten already with blindness, and that those more immediately periled, see not the disaster and ruin they are courting by the attitude they have assumed. If gradual emancipation is refused—as past history in every country has shown—insurrection, murder, conflagration, rapine, violence, will do it. Secession and separation will invite to these things, and, ere the crisis comes, who can tell how many hearts shall bleed, and homes be rendered desolate, by the horrors of civil war? It may be, that God shall leave us to folly and madness, to break the pillar of our constitution, shake down upon our heads the great and glorious temple of our confederacy, raised by the wisdom, and consecrated by the prayers of our sires of olden days, and involve ourselves in its ruins. But ere that day comes, while yet there is hope of averting the avenging stroke of heaven's wrath, it behooves every christian and patriot to try what conciliation, repentance, fervent prayer, intercession with God, can accomplish. We tremble in view of His judgments and wrath, for we are guilty. But knowing His great compassion, still let us pray, "O Lord, though our enemies testify against us, do Thou, for Thy name's sake spare, and give not Thy heritage to reproach. Oh, the hope of Israel, and the Saviour thereof in time of trouble, why shouldst thou be as a

stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that
turneth aside to tarry for a night? Why shouldst
thou be as a man astonished; as a mighty man
that cannot save? Yet Thou, O Lord, art in the
midst of us, and we are called by Thy name, LEAVE
US NOT!"

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