

THE NATION'S WAIL.

A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED IN THE FIRST

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

OF DETROIT,

ON SABBATH, THE 16TH OF APRIL, 1865,

THE DAY AFTER RECEIVING THE INTELLIGENCE OF THE

BRUTAL MURDER

OF

PRESIDENT ABRAHAM LINCOLN,

BY A BRUTAL ASSASSIN.

GEORGE DUFFIELD,
PASTOR OF THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF DETROIT.

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DETROIT, April 17th, 1865.

REV. AND DEAR SIR,—The undersigned, who listened with the greatest interest to your discourse on the death of President Lincoln, delivered in the First Presbyterian Church on the 16th inst., request a copy for publication. Believing we express the wishes of the entire congregation, we await your reply.

Very respectfully, your obedient servants,

WM. A. HOWARD,	N. D. STEBBINS,
GEO. W. HOFFMAN,	DAVID COOPER,
JACOB S. FARRAND,	LOUIS BENFEY,
W. W. WHEATON,	A. SHELEY,

And many others.

REV. GEO. DUFFIELD, D. D.

To the HON. W. A. HOWARD, GEO. W. HOFFMAN, W. W. WHEATON,
N. D. STEBBINS, LOUIS BENFEY, *and others* :

GENTLEMEN,—I cheerfully furnish the manuscript you request, and will be happy, if, at your wish, you can make it subserve the interests of our beloved country, in any degree, in this hour of sore distress and terrible calamity.

Very respectfully, your most obedient servant,

GEO. DUFFIELD.

DISCOURSE.

2 Chron., 35: 23-25 — "And all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah."

The nation is deluged with woe. Our patriotic, virtuous and devoted President has fallen by the hand of the assassin. In the midst of our rejoicings over victories, and the crushing of rebellion; from the loftiest pinnacle of our joy, we are hurled down into the depths of heart-breaking anguish. The firm and faithful hand that held the reins of government, lies cold and motionless in death. The heart that never ceased or tired in its throbbings of love and zeal, and heroic consecration to the safety, interests, honor and happiness of our beloved country, no longer wells out the gushing streams of its intense, unselfish and ardent affections. He, for whom the nation has so long and ardently prayed, whose appeals to the hearts of all Christian people for their sympathy with him in the midst of his solemn and heavy responsibilities, and for their remembrance of him at a throne of grace — has gone forever beyond the reach or need of our supplications. He has passed away without a note of warning, like a brilliant sun, in the midst of his glory, from the very zenith of its splendor. The hearts of millions, through whose loves, and hopes, and lofty exultations, but yesterday, his name and fame had circulated with an

all-pervading, animating and invigorating force, now droop and languish, sicken and faint. The nation weeps and clothes itself with sack-cloth and ashes. From the palaces of the rich and the great, through all the habitations of the land, in every cottage and lonely chamber of the broken-hearted, the wail of grief ascends to Heaven. Like a thunder peal of terrific lightning, a bolt of desolating fury has burst over us, as from a clear sky, and felled to the dust the idol of his country. Another Josiah has been smitten by the murderous weapon of well-directed malice, and lamentations overspread the land.

What shall we say? What can we say, while weeping in the amazement and bewilderment of our grief, but that God hath done it? His hand arrested not the arm of the assassin. No angel messenger was dispatched to avert the fatal shot. Known to Omniscience was the plot of hellish treason, and the instruments of its accomplishment. Yet His providence, which could have easily prevented the fatal result, averted it not. "Is there evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it?" A holy and righteous God allowed it for His own wise and holy ends. What remains for us, and what can we else do, than to accept it as of His ordering, and humbly, prayerfully, and penitently improve the lesson, which the infinite wisdom and adorable sovereignty of Him who doeth His will in the armies of Heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, designs to teach us by this overwhelming calamity?

I. God has found it needful to mingle judgment.

with mercy. The aspect of terror thus assumed by His providence, need not appal. For judgment is His strange work, but mercy is His delight. Dark and tempestuous may be the clouds that gather and threaten at such a time around his throne, and seem sufficient to drive us to despair. But that throne is occupied by "the Lamb that was slain, from the foundation of the world." The Lord Jesus Christ, who "loved us and died for us," is "the Lord God Omnipotent," in whose hands are entrusted all authority and power in Heaven and in earth. It is He that rules in providence and guides the destiny of nations. Our safety and interests, as a people, could be lodged in no better hands. For there is no human heart that loves like Jesus—so intensely, so persistently, so efficaciously. It is alike our duty, and the means of our security, to accept and bow submissively beneath the strokes of this, His sore judgment. "Be wise now, therefore, oh, ye kings! be instructed, ye judges of the earth! kiss the Son, lest He be angry and ye perish from the way when His wrath is kindled but a little"—*i. e.*, shall suddenly blaze forth. "Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him." Ps. 2, 11. His throne can never be subverted. His life is forever beyond the reach of foes. His administration is the salvation of the earth. If we link our destiny, as individuals or a nation, with the rights, supremacy, and interests of His throne—all is well! However terrible may be His judgments, they shall prove themselves but the ministers He sends, to teach us righteousness, and help us rear the bastions needed for our national security.

II. A terrible crisis has been precipitated on our country, that calls for the most solemn consideration of every one of us. Elate with joyous prospects of peace, our hearts were already indulging their fond felicitations, which possessed a zest of peculiar tenderness and power, in the thought that the great and noble soul of our beloved President was in sympathetic fellowship with the masses. We caught the inspiration of his joy; and imagination painted a glorious future near at hand for our land, quickly to develop itself under the guidance of his fostering wisdom, and fraternal counsels and care. We gratefully hailed for him a period of relief from necessary burdens, and, with the end of warfare, began to welcome the rich benefits to be secured by his statesmanship and common sense, his vigilance and honesty, his disinterestedness, and absorption in his country's welfare. But suddenly the scene is changed. The heavens gather darkness. We sigh and groan, and in agony exclaim: Oh! what is to be our future? Shall treason and conspiracy gather strength? Shall the frenzy of partisan passion rise like the driving whirlwind? Shall confusion of counsel, distraction in the administration of government, and change and conflicts of policy, and ambitious factions bewilder the people? Has the great balance wheel in our machinery been broken and hurled from its place, to bring on the terrible crash and chaos of our destruction? These, and such like thoughts and inquiries, agitate the public mind. Every one feels that, compared with all the past crises of the nation's history, within the last four years, we have

reached the greatest, most portentous, most trying and most perilous to the unity and stability of the nation. How much do we need the assurance, on good and solid ground, that, like all the past, this most terrible crisis will prove, that public virtue, and the cohesiveness of our Government, will be abundantly adequate to the present emergency?

The event we this day mourn is a novelty in our history. Never has the land been stained with the blood of the Chief Magistrate, murdered by the hand of the assassin. Other lands have thus suffered. A similar case is referred to in the context.

Josiah was one of the most illustrious kings of Judah. He was a good and great man. The fear of God from early youth controlled him, and, through faith in His word and providence, he was rendered eminently successful in the administration of his government. The nation prospered greatly under it. Its military resources, and civil and religious institutions, were successfully developed by him, so that his country became eminently prosperous. He was honored and beloved by his people universally. But, in the providence and allotments of God, he fell on the field of battle, in the splendor of his glory. "And all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah."

We, too, lament our illustrious head, fallen among the slain. But the fact that he was murdered by the assassin's dastardly hand, gives poignancy to our grief.

The nearest parallel event, however, in history, that we recall to mind at the moment, was the murder of William the Silent, the Prince of Orange.

“It is difficult to imagine,” says the historian, “a more universal disaster, than the one thus brought about by the hand of a single obscure fanatic. Habit, necessity, and the natural gifts of the man, had combined to invest him, at last, with an authority which seemed more than human. There was such general confidence in his sagacity, courage and purity, that the nation had come to think with his brain and act with his hand. It was natural that, for an instant, there should be a feeling as of absolute and helpless paralysis.” Yet did the united Netherlands survive the shock, administered by the working machinery of the government of Phillip, which adopted assassination as an engine of its power. But the contest between freedom and despotism, religion and fanaticism, was irreconcilable. Never in human history was a more poignant and universal sorrow for the death of any individual. The despair was, for a brief season, absolute; but it was soon succeeded by more lofty sentiments. It seemed, after they had laid their hero in the tomb, as though his spirit still hovered above the nation, which he had loved so well, and was inspiring it with a portion of his own energy and wisdom. By the blessing of Providence, it survived and triumphed, and shed forth its gleam of glory to enlighten the world. The same Providence can make a similar crisis in our history the occasion for still more radiant light to be poured from us upon the nations of the earth. The lesson of the crisis is to trust still more firmly in, and triumph through, the God of our fathers.

III. The event we mourn develops and demonstrates the horrible malignity of human corruption, to restrain and punish which a good and just government is bound by every consideration of fidelity to God, and respect for its own safety and prosperity. As a people, we have, of late years, lost sight of the great end and obligation of civil government, designed of God, as His ordinance, for the punishment of crime and the promotion of the general good. Law has lost its sacredness. Fanaticism has been substituted for religion. In the North, a spurious self-righteous humanitarianism, claiming to be wiser and more benevolent than the God of the Bible, has sympathized with the perpetrators of evil, in the indulgence of a mawkish and murderous charity, so-called, denouncing capital punishment, destroying the sanctions of law, and undermining the authority of government, until the idea of liberty has become identical with that of licentiousness. Property and life are sacrificed with impunity; and a low estimate is made of human virtue and personal security. Our officers of justice have extensively become the patrons and promoters of crime; and the functions of authority are sought to be discharged by the veriest traitors to the peace and welfare of society. In the South, the monster iniquity of Slavery, with all its crimes and abominations, interwoven into codes of law, had blinded the popular mind, and besotted the popular conscience, until, with fanatical madness, its advocates and abettors had claimed the sanction of religion, and believed themselves to be the possessors of a purer Christianity, and much more consistent

and devoted asserters of the inspiration and authority of the sacred Scriptures. Who can tell the enormous amount of hideous corruption which has been, on either hand, developed in the history of this people, by the aid of an infidel humanitarianism and a self-applauding orthodoxy, alike opposed to a simple, practical, evangelical Christianity?

In the providence of God, a delirious and maddened conspiracy for the overthrow of the Government of the United States, has made an open issue as to the religion professed; and, for four years, appealed to arms for the decision of the question of the moral right of Slavery, and the sanction of Christianity for the fanaticism that sought to make it the corner-stone of a Confederacy, whose history has been stained with crimes that astound the world, and, when fully written, will hand it down to coming generations, branded with indelible infamy. Developments of corruption, in the instigation and conduct of the rebellion by its leaders, have taken place, beyond description, beyond conception — which, when the proof already possessed shall blazon forth, will fill the nations with horror. We refer, in part, to the brutalities of their warfare — the 66,000 of our murdered prisoners of war, starved to death with deliberate intent; to the worse than savage ferocity displayed in the cruelties inflicted on hundreds and thousands tortured and slain by their guerrilla bands. But we refer more immediately to the spirit of demoniac malignity, and designed systematic assassination, adopted and pursued by the instigators and leaders of the rebellious conspiracy.

There is strong circumstantial evidence to prove, that the death of President Harrison, and of President Taylor, was secured by poison, administered slowly, in pursuance of a plan and purpose that no Northern man should ever be President of the United States. The abortive attempt to poison President Buchanan, and the failure of measures to murder President Lincoln, at or on his way to Washington, are events already recorded in history. And, during the four years of the rebellion, facts have accumulated, showing that there was no deed of desperate, malignant crime, that could be perpetrated, which, found not its instruments, and was not stimulated by the promise of reward from men high in place and influence, connected with and supporters of the Confederate Government. It needed just such a hot-bed as Slavery to force the monstrous growths of corruption produced by the rebellion. The St. Albans raiders; the piratical enterprises; the plots of incendiaries for the conflagration of New York, and other large cities at the North; the abortive effort, and plans for the pillage of our commerce, and the invasion of our own and other Lake Cities, by desperate Southern renegades in Canada, have all been part and parcel of a regular system of measures of fiendish malice, unknown to the warfare of civilized nations. The evidence will be forthcoming in due season, of a Satanic sagacity in appeals to the laws of nature, and discoveries of science, for the generation and diffusion of pestilence of various sorts in our large cities. Scientific and medical professors, lauded for their benevolence and social

worth, have been, and are still, employed, with the countenance and promise of reward by the Confederate authorities—whose names are known as associated with them—for the importation, from Bermuda into Washington City, Norfolk and Newbern, of goods artfully infected with the virus or miasm of the yellow fever, for the introduction and diffusion of pestilence as an element and agent of the warfare waged by rebellion. The like experiments have been made for the generation of the small-pox. To the good providence of God alone is to be referred the escape of Norfolk and Washington from the deadly scourge of the yellow fever, which only succeeded in Newbern. All the elements and means of destruction that science can furnish, have been boastfully claimed by maddened bloviators, as sure to give success to the rebellion. And the young men of the South have extensively been trained, and incited, to deeds of enthusiastic desperation, as though it were glorious and martyr-like to sacrifice themselves by deeds of infamous daring and criminality. The assassination of the President was but the culmination of this system of diabolical enterprise, steadily, persistently, and Satanically pursued, notwithstanding frequent failures. Seldom, if ever, have such developments of corruption been made in the history of any people, as have been, in the rise and progress of the rebellion, that has caused the sacrifice of nearly half a million lives of our brave and noble citizen soldiers. Away with all apologists for the chivalry, and honor, and Christianity of the Southern conspirators, and their

religion, who have not hesitated, but gloried, in the use of such methods of revenge for warfare! The President was not only the honored functionary of his country, but especially the representative of the Christian people in it. The cowardly assassination of such a man, has forever stamped with infamy the State that gave his assassin birth.

Treason has done his worst ; nor steel, nor poison,
 Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing
 Can touch him further.— He
 Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
 So clear in his great office, that his virtues
 Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against
 The deep damnation of his taking off ;
 And pity, like a naked, new-born babe,
 Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim, horsed
 Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
 Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
 That tears shall drown the wind.

IV. Finally, the event we deplore is eminently adapted, and, we think, designed, in Providence, to impress deeply the public mind with a sense of our danger and obligations as a free people. Our danger springs not from the nature of our government, or social and political institutions. Never had a people so wise, and, in nearly every respect, so well-adjusted a Constitution and charter of civil rights. It remains unharmed amid the perils and trials of four eventful years of bloodshed and agony, and is, in process of being expurgated from the chief blot that stained its sacred pages. The providence of God — blessed be His name — has cut the cancer out, and but few of its baneful roots yet remain for the future and perfect process of eradication.

The nation needs to stand erect in all the glory of its moral majesty, and say that Slavery shall cease forever. God grant that this high behest be speedily proclaimed!

The providence of God has also placed in the most glaring light the necessity of vindicating the honor of Government, and the majesty of Law, by the infliction of retributive justice on the perpetrators of crime. We have allowed pseudo philanthropists to insult the God of the Bible, and extensively, by legal enactment, and much more extensively, by corrupting public sentiment, to disannul the death penalty. Murders and homicides, by hundreds and thousands, have been overlooked, or have passed unpunished. Life has been held even less sacred than property. And now a righteous God, who will not allow His Constitution to be violated with impunity, has allowed the murderer's hand, in the face and eyes of the whole country, to strike down its pure and honest, its noble and patriotic President, and, by conspiracy, attempt the destruction of his Prime Minister, whose lofty statesmanship has shone forth in resplendent lustre, and who, like the illustrious Pitt, has towered in his strength, and proved himself ready and mighty in every emergency—a bulwark invincible against all the jealousy and insidious opposition of foreign nations. The Lord preserve his life, yet periled by the assassin's cowardly stab! Perhaps just this, and nothing short of it, was needed to bring the public mind to a just and proper estimate of human life, and demand the restoration of the death penalty to the place a God

of justice and mercy has assigned it in the administration of government.

Unquestionably, there was reason to fear, that treason would be dealt with too leniently, in the flush and joy of our victories, and triumph over rebellion. Perhaps our venerated President, fraught with benignity and mercy, and prompted, by his kindness of heart, to use the pardoning prerogative too freely, may not have been the man for the keen and necessary work of punishing treason, as it deserves, with the full penalty of the law. God has removed him in the hour of his triumph, and left this work to be performed by other hands, while He has roused the nation to demand it, as the atonement needed for the maintenance of government and the honor of His majesty. A rebellion once in Israel was signally punished, by the infliction of terrible judgment and desolation by the hand of Providence, upon its leaders. But the people who sympathized with the rebellion murmured against Moses, and reproached him with murder, for the course he adopted for the vindication of the majesty of the law. It offended the Lord God of Israel, and He let the plague loose among them, to destroy them for their complaint against the enforcement of the demands of retributive justice; and 14,700 of them were made to pay the forfeiture of their lives. This, as an atonement, was required before the plague was stayed.

On another occasion, treason was perpetrated in the camp of Israel, and the anger of the Lord was kindled against them. The plague again broke

loose upon them, nor was it stayed till the command of God was executed, and "all the heads of the people," that had led them off in the treason, were hung up before the Lord against the sun. The zeal of Phinehas in executing the penalty of death upon the traitors, is recorded to his praise. Nor was the plague stayed till 24,000 had paid the forfeiture of their lives. It is the same God, who required such atonement, with whom we have, as individuals and a nation, to do. He changeth not. If we, as a nation, profane His ordinance of government, and prove false to His honor, and our obligations, and the interests of society, we, too, shall not escape the vengeance of His law. Talk as men may, in their impious and boastful infidelity, atonement forms a marked and essential feature in the divine government. That atonement He will exact; and He has abundant means at His command to enforce it. How easy would it be for Him to let factions arise, and the leaven of tolerated rebellion diffuse itself among us to our utter ruin, to say nothing of other natural, moral and political means of punishing us for our contempt of justice, law and good government! We have a solemn duty to God and society to perform. If, as a nation, we humble ourselves before Him, and, as individuals, accept and rely upon the atonement He has provided for us, in Jesus Christ, through which alone He can exercise consistently His clemency and mercy in the forgiveness of sin, He can and will heal our land, and cleanse it of the blood which has been so wickedly and wantonly shed. The indications and interpositions of His

providence, from the very beginning of the war, have been so marked, and so peculiar in our favor, that he must be stricken with the like blindness which has smitten the rebellious, who sees them not. God has done great things for us whereof we have been glad. Through Him, our forces, by land and sea, have done valiantly; and by Him they have trod down our enemies. But our loved and honored Josiah has been among the slain; and to-day the land mourneth. Lamentation is heard in every direction, and the tokens and habiliments of woe are spread out before the heavens. How jealous has God been for us! He has overturned every human idol, one after another, which we have set up among our Generals, and glorified for triumph; and, when He was prepared to lead us to victory, gave us men of valor, wisdom, humility and patriotic zeal, to exalt their country's honor, above selfish ambition and fame, and give the glory of our success to whom it is due. In the death of President Lincoln, He has pursued the same plan of His gracious providence toward us. We might have put him in the place of God, and forgotten whose right hand hath gotten us the victory. In an instant He removed him from us, without one opportunity of uttering a final adieu. We look to his life for the proofs of his acceptance with God, and cherish gratefully his own story of the consecration of himself to God.

Would that he had fallen elsewhere than at the very gates of Hell—in the theatre, to which through persuasion, he so reluctantly went. But,

thus a stain has been put upon that so falsely called school of virtue. How awful and severe the rebuke, which God has administered to the nation, for pampering such demoralizing places of resort! The blood of Abraham Lincoln can never be effaced from the stage. God grant that it may prove the brand of infamy consigning the theatre, which even Solon and the old moral Greeks abhorred, to the disgrace it merits, and the abhorrence of this nation.

The memory of the just is blessed. His name is embalmed in the hearts of this people, and his fame, like that of Washington, shall last while these United States endure; which, may God grant, shall be to the coming of the Lord.

His toils are past, his work is done,
His spirit fully blest,
He fought the fight, the victory won,
And entered into rest.

Then let our sorrows cease to flow —
God has recalled His own;
But let our hearts in every woe
Still say "Thy will be done."