

12

PRAYER FOR OUR COUNTRY.

Three Sermons.

BY

1769-1858

SAMUEL MILLER.

PHILADELPHIA:

HENRY B. ASHMEAD, BOOK AND JOB PRINTER,

Nos. 1102 AND 1104 SANSON STREET.

1862.

THREE SERMONS.

I. THE RIGHTEOUS WAR OF A CHRISTIAN PEOPLE.

II. NATIONAL PRAYER.

III. THE UNION PRAYER-MEETING.

 The reader's attention is particularly called to the plans suggested in the *third* Sermon.

PRAYER FOR OUR COUNTRY.

IF THY PEOPLE GO OUT TO WAR AGAINST THEIR ENEMIES BY THE WAY THAT THOU SHALT SEND THEM, AND THEY PRAY UNTO THEE TOWARD THIS CITY WHICH THOU HAST CHOSEN, AND THE HOUSE WHICH I HAVE BUILT FOR THY NAME; THEN HEAR THOU FROM THE HEAVENS THEIR PRAYER AND THEIR SUPPLICATION, AND MAINTAIN THEIR CAUSE.—2 Chronicles vi. 34, 35.

SERMON I.

The Righteous War of a Christian People.

THIS is part of King Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple. He was an inspired man, author of a considerable portion of the Old Testament Scriptures. That alone would strongly favour the conclusion, that this prayer was inspired; which is clearly proved by the facts, (1) that in an age when the leaders of religious worship were ordinarily, or often, "moved by the Holy Ghost," Solomon was the divinely approved leader in the chief scene of the dedication services—services undoubtedly the most important and impressive of the times; (2) that the prayer was immediately acknowledged by fire, falling from heaven and consuming the sacrifices; as also by a visible, dazzling glory, which filled the temple;¹ (3) that Jehovah afterwards, in vision, expressly promised the king to answer it,² thus adopting it as the expression of his own truth, his own mercy, and his own good pleasure; and (4) that, with such attestations, it has been handed down to us as part of an inspired record. Regarding then the principles of God's government of men, as founded in his own nature and the nature of his creatures, and therefore as always remaining the same, we may safely conclude, that he still deals with nations according to the principles of this prayer. On no other ground,

¹ Chap. vii. 1.

² Ibid 12, &c.

indeed, can we well account for its place in Holy Writ, which is intended, all of it, for our religious instruction and guidance.

The general truth contained in our text may consequently be presented in this form:—A CHRISTIAN PEOPLE, WAGING A RIGHTEOUS WAR, MAY SECURE A HAPPY TRIUMPH OVER THEIR ENEMIES, BY PROPER, UNITED PRAYER. My object is at once to illustrate this truth, and to apply it to the present condition of our own distracted, suffering country.

I. I speak of a CHRISTIAN PEOPLE. In ancient times other terms—*Seed of Abraham, Sons of Jacob, Israel, People of God*, and the like—were employed to designate the single nation, which then professed the true religion. Now, to the many nations, which, more or less expressly, make a similar profession, the term *Christian*, for obvious reasons, is usually applied. Solomon's words are, "thy people," and beyond the significant limit which they fix, we are not authorized to extend his doctrine. But within their unquestionable scope, we may safely include every people properly called Christian.

We are not, indeed, here or elsewhere in Scripture, taught that God never listens to the prayers of those, whether nations or individuals, that are not his people. Nay, while to the latter alone his absolute promises are given, he who hears even the young ravens when they cry,¹ encourages, strongly, both in word and by example, the hope that those who pay proper outward respect alone to his majesty and his ordinances, shall receive, usually, a large temporal reward. A striking illustration of this is offered to us in the case of the Ninevites. They were heathen; yet when as a nation they fasted strictly, most earnestly prayed, doubtless to the true God whom the Prophet Jonah represented, and forsook those abominations which had provoked the divine anger, Jehovah was entreated of them, and destroyed them not.² Again, the inspired writer tells us, that "there was none like unto Ahab," king of Israel, "which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord;" that "he did very abominably in following idols," like the polluted

¹ Psalm cxlvii. 9.

² Jonah iii.

Canaanites themselves ; yet that when he yielded to Elijah's threatenings, so far as publicly to rend his clothes, put on sackcloth, fast and prostrate himself before the Lord, though evidently his heart was unchanged, God said to the prophet—"Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? Because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days."¹ And may we not safely believe, that the prayers of a nation honoring Jesus Christ, by simply bearing his name, are more likely to be heard than those of the heathen ; that the prayers of men, moral and exemplary in outward conduct, are more likely to be heard than were those of Ahab ; that the more generally and respectfully a nation prays, and the larger the proportion which it embraces of sincere, pious, earnest worshippers, the more likely are its prayers to prevail with God ?

But I would not rest here our national hope of acceptance with the Most High. We surely are entitled to be called a Christian people. Under the Mosaic system, the visible church was co-extensive with the nation ; every citizen was a professor of religion ; and an apostate from the faith was cut off from civil privileges. In some countries, during our present era, Christianity has been established by law in very much the same way, none being tolerated as citizens, who were not professing Christians. In other countries Christianity has likewise been established ; but dissent from the establishment, whether by those adopting a sectarian creed, or by infidels, has not been made inconsistent with citizenship. And elsewhere, as in this land, there has been no state religion, at least none receiving state support, or under state control. Now, from analogy, perhaps, some would incline to the opinion, that a nation which has established the religion of Christ by law is more clearly entitled to the Christian name than any other ; yet only if such an establishment be ordained, as of old, by God. And if so far from ordaining, he has discouraged, if not virtually forbidden, the union of church and state, under the present dispensation, those maintaining such a union cannot claim, on

¹ 1 Kings xxi. 17-29.

that account, any superior relation to him. But it would have been just as easy for Jehovah to establish Christianity in connection with a state government, as it had been so to establish Judaism; and the mere fact that this was not done, clearly demonstrates the divine approbation of an independent, if not the divine condemnation of an established, church.

How, then, are we to determine whether any people may fairly be called Christian? I suppose that if Christianity be the preponderating religion, as regards the number of its adherents, and no other be established by law, the former must be regarded as national; and the rather if the government, without establishing, really recognizes, it as the religion of the country. Applying this test in its fullest extent, we are evidently and by perfect right a Christian people. *First*, probably not one person in two hundred of our population refuses to adopt the Christian name. *Secondly*, both our general and state governments constantly, and in various ways, recognize the people as distinctively Christian. This is seen in our judicial, official and other oaths; in laws and usages of Sabbath observance, as well as laws against blasphemy; and in the provision made for Christian worship in Congress and in state legislatures, in our army and navy, and in a multitude of government institutions.

It is not likely that in Israel of old, even at the time of its greatest religious prosperity, the major part of the adult citizens were truly pious: the Old Testament narrative alone would seem to force us to this conclusion. And our Saviour plainly teaches us, that we are not to expect piety to prevail to anything like that extent, under the present dispensation. His words are—"Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."¹ It is evident, therefore, that the absolute piety of the larger part of the nation is not essential to our prevailing in prayer as a Christian people.

Neither is a very pure state of the church itself essential to

¹ Matthew vii. 13, 14.

prevalence with God. In the history of Israel, both before and after Solomon's dedication prayer, we find memorable instances of the nation's successful recourse to Jehovah, by earnest supplication, in time of war. The Ethiopians came against Asa, king of Judah, with about double the force which he could muster. "And Asa," we are told, "cried unto the Lord his God"—doubtless in public worship, as the terms of the prayer seem to imply—"and said, Lord, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many or with them that have no power: help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude. O Lord, thou art our God; let not man prevail against thee." It is added—"So the Lord smote the Ethiopians before Asa, and before Judah; and the Ethiopians fled."¹ In the reign of Jehoshaphat, the Moabites, Ammonites and others, in great force, invaded Judah. "And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. And Judah gathered themselves together, to ask help of the Lord; even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord." And the king himself, in the court of the congregation, prayed most earnestly. Again the Lord heard, and the enemies of his people were blinded and maddened to turn their swords against one another. Great spoil was taken by Judah; and the fear of God fell on all the surrounding nations, so that long peace and prosperity followed.² The miraculous destruction of the hosts of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, in answer to the prayers of King Hezekiah and his subjects, afford another example, to which, however, I will here but thus briefly refer.³ When these deliverances were vouchsafed to God's people, they had already become very corrupt, even gross idolatry having again and again usurped the place of Jehovah's worship, and many other heathen abominations having been from time to time introduced. The inspired history will at least justify serious doubt, whether there was as much real piety in Judah, in those days, for the number of inhabitants, as there is now in our own country. It is to be remarked,

¹ 2 Chron. xiv. 11, 12.

² 2 Chron. xx. 1, &c., &c.

³ 2 Kings xix.

however, that in all these instances, the reigning monarchs made prayer truly national, by themselves taking the lead in public self-humiliation before God.

But for our greater encouragement, we are evidently taught in Holy Scripture, that the truly righteous alone, among any people, may often prevail with the Almighty for the salvation of the country. Ten righteous men, had they been found among the inhabitants of Sodom, would have delivered that abominable city.¹ The prayers of Moses, Samuel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel, and other servants of God, did many a time bless the nation.² God's ancient people were directed not only to "pray for the peace of Jerusalem,"³ but also to seek the peace of the city in which they dwelt even as captives, that in the peace thereof they might have peace;⁴ and the apostle exhorts to supplication, prayer, intercession, and giving of thanks for kings and all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life.⁵ Of course it is intimated, that such prayers will be answered. Even when Jeremiah was warned not to make intercession for the people, because God would not hear;⁶ and Ezekiel was assured, that, in particular circumstances, the land would not be spared, though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it,⁷ it was implied that such men might ordinarily save a land. Here, too, every promise that prayer will be heard affords additional encouragement. If the fervent prayer of one righteous man availeth much,⁸ it may evidently secure national as well as individual mercies.

II. I speak of a **RIGHTEOUS WAR**. Of course, this takes for granted, that all war is not unlawful, and that is the doctrine of the Christian world: the very few who hold the contrary can only be regarded as exceptions to the grand rule. And it is evident that passing events, in our own country, are forcing

¹ Gen. xviii. 32.

² Exod. xxxii. 11-14; Deut. ix. 18; 1 Sam. xii. 19; Ezra ix. 5, &c.; Nehem. i. &c.; Dan. ix. 3, &c.

³ Psalm cxxii. 6.

⁴ Jerem. xxix. 7.

⁵ 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2.

⁶ Jerem. vii. 16; xi. 14; xiv. 11.

⁷ Ezek. xiv. 14, 16, 18.

⁸ James v. 16.

a large proportion of those who, hitherto, have entertained exceptional views on this subject, to reconsider the whole matter, and modify their opinions, or, at least, lay them aside for a more convenient season. I shall therefore not argue this point, but take for granted, as the plain teaching of both reason and revelation, that war is sometimes lawful and necessary. A sad, a terrible resort it ever must be; yet in certain cases it is the sole remedy of far greater evils. In our text, Solomon clearly speaks of a righteous war, implying, at once, that there may be such war, and that in such only can Jehovah's help be expected. He says—"If thy people go out to war against their enemies *by the way that thou shalt send them.*" Certainly, God, whatever he may permit, does not send forth any, least of all his own, people, to engage in unrighteous warfare. Moreover, Solomon petitions, that he will "maintain their cause;" or, as you have it more exactly in the margin, "*maintain their right.*" This again evidently supposes the praying people to be in the right, and therefore that there may be a rightful conflict of arms. Of course, we must conclude, that those who unrighteously make war, cannot expect that their prayers will avail anything. To such the language of God, by the prophet Isaiah, is most appropriately applicable. "When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood."¹ As war is one of the most awful scourges of our sinful, sorrow-stricken world, so the deepest condemnation must ever rest upon those who willingly fight in an unrighteous cause. Some of the heaviest denunciations of God's word are levelled against such as shed innocent blood.

The assurance then that our cause is just, is absolutely necessary to a rightful assurance that the Most High will hear our prayer for the country. Any reasonable doubt of its justice should forever deter us from taking up arms. If we are fighting unjustly, and our prayers are mercifully answered, it can only be by opening our eyes to see our true position, and great sin, and by giving us a speedy escape from sin's worst conse-

¹ Isaiah i. 15.

quences. Jehoshaphat, the good king of Judah already mentioned, was seduced by the wicked king of Israel, Ahab, to join in unholy war against the Syrians. Ahab was slain, and Jehoshaphat was in the greatest peril; but in his sore need, God heard and saved him.¹ Yet the righteousness, on our part, of the dreadful conflict now convulsing this nation, I shall not pretend here to argue. About that we are generally agreed. Arguments enough to satisfy any reasonable mind you have, every one, long ago read or heard. I take for granted that you all believe fully, as I do, that the war is not only just, but could not, at the decisive moment, have been in any way by us avoided. In God's providence, although by wicked hands, it was forced upon us.

But is the confidence that we are righteously engaged in war, enough to assure us that we shall triumph? We often hear it said by defenders of the Union, "Our cause is just, and therefore we shall prevail. Our trust is in a righteous God." And for a professed minister of God even to cast doubt upon such a ground of confidence, will seem to many a strange inconsistency. Indeed, to disabuse men of false hopes, those, especially, which are more or less of a religious nature, is ever one of the most delicate, ungracious and dubious of adventures. At the same time, no duty more imperative than this rests upon the minister of truth. To let men go to ruin, temporal or eternal, for fear of attempting to undeceive them, is one of his greatest sins.

I say then, unhesitatingly, that the righteousness of our cause is an utterly insufficient ground of trust. The sooner we understand this, and the more deeply we feel it, the better. You observe that any argument here from right, needs essentially the support of this premise or principle: "Every righteous cause prevails." But is that a true principle, as tested by either reason or Holy Writ; by our own experience and observation, or by history? Has not right, in this world, often been cast down and trampled upon? Has it not become even a proverb, gloried in by the wicked, and frequently causing the righteous to despond and tremble, that "Might makes right?"

¹ 2 Chron. xviii. 31.

Our very text clearly demonstrates the mistake of trusting in the necessary, temporal triumph of right. King Solomon here supposes the case of a just war, yet does not venture to petition, for even God's own people Israel, that in such a war they should always prevail. He asks only that their properly offered, united prayers shall secure the victory. This surely implies, that they could not reasonably expect a triumph, however clear their right, without properly entreating God in this behalf. Right praying must support a right cause, to fulfill the condition of divine succor. This is ever, and just now to us especially, a solemnly momentous truth.

Possibly this reasoning may throw some minds all into confusion. Solomon does indeed seem to teach the doctrine which I have enunciated; but how can it be consistent with the absolute sovereignty of a righteous God, doing his own will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth?¹ This very question has made some men atheists, and has sorely puzzled even many pious souls. The former say, "Our world, in which grievous wrong so often prevails, cannot be under the control of infinite justice. Surely there is no God." The latter are deeply agitated and distressed, as the Psalmist had been, when he acknowledged, "As for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." Even he had said, "How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High? Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world."² To the study of a truth which has involved such consequences, it becomes us to address ourselves most prayerfully. May the gracious Spirit of Truth be our teacher, our salvation from error.

As to the *fact* that wrong, in this world, often triumphs, there can be no doubt. Whether the appeal be made to history, sacred or profane, or to our own experience and observation, the result is equally unquestionable. What remarkable prominence, even, is given to this fact in Holy Writ. In the very Garden of Eden Satan triumphs, although by cunning,

¹ Daniel iv. 35.

² Psalm lxxiii. 2, 3, 11, 12.

not by force. This seems like a victory over God himself—a victory won by the very personification of wrong over infinite right. Of the first two fallen men born into our world, Cain, the wicked, slays Abel, the righteous. The only man, perfect in holiness, that ever lived—Jesus Christ—died a martyr, by wicked hands, upon the cross. To speak of nations, the feeble Israelites, though under Jehovah's special protection, were again and again a helpless prey to their powerful neighbors, the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Romans. But these great Scripture examples lose, partially, their force, from the idea that they were exceptional; that with a peculiar design God permitted them. Yet the exception lay, really, not so much in the events, as in the revelation of the divine reasons. In most cases we know the events alone, while the particular reasons are hidden: here we know both.

But we need not confine ourselves to Bible instances. The secular history of the world abounds in examples of wrong triumphing over right. What have been the exploits of earth's mighty conquerors, in all ages and around the whole circuit of the globe, but a succession of crimes against weak humanity; crimes scarcely disguised under the glittering names of glory? Yet I will not search the world over for illustrations. Our own short history affords several, which are striking enough for my purpose, and may well be remembered, if, perhaps, to be repented of, in this day of Jehovah's visitation for sin. Wrong has triumphed surely, many a time, in the extermination, or driving back into the wilderness, of the poor Indian possessors of the soil which we tread. To their simple minds, how often our forefathers made the Christian name synonymous with treachery and violence and bloodguiltiness! And not by garnishing the sepulchres of the past, but by opening new ones for fresh victims, have we of the present generation become witnesses against ourselves, that we are the children of those who thus wronged the helpless, robbed the needy, and murdered the innocent. Then the four millions of Africans, whose condition offers just now the most distressing, critical problem which could well distract the counsels of our storm-tossed na-

tion—these four millions upbraid us with the wrong done to to their forefathers, at least, in stealing them away from their far-off country and homes, to reduce them to hopeless bondage.

In the face of such Scripture teachings and such facts, the most we can say is, that it is the original law of our world, that right should triumph over wrong; a law still operative, excepting as man's sin, and Jehovah's curse on account of sin, have interfered. A righteous sovereign could, indeed, establish no other law. It is, *first*, in part, a *natural*, as distinguished from a moral law, although founded in man's moral and rational nature. Some natural laws are laws of matter, but this of spirit. Before the fall, God's laws were all harmonious, and all inviolate: now, in our ruined world, they often conflict with one another, are frequently broken. This is the case with even the laws of matter. There was no drought in Paradise, nor hurtful moisture; the bright sun seems to have carried up from the earth by day, just what the plenteous dew restored to it by night. And both agencies were wholly and constantly beneficial. But now, alternately, the scorching heat, and drenching showers, or sweeping overflow, disappoint the toils of the husbandman. Nay, so many are the disturbances which sin has brought into a system once perfect, "that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together."¹ And the laws of spirit have suffered even greater derangement than those of matter; but both still operate beneficially to a certain extent; their power for good is constantly experienced.

There is another natural law, partly of matter and partly of spirit, which often comes into conflict with the law of right—I mean the law of might. That might shall prevail is as much a law of God as that right shall. But originally might and right were brothers, always in harmony, always on the same side. Might constantly maintained right. This union, however, which in a perfect state was indissoluble, the Fall destroyed. Now might and right are often foes, waging against each other an implacable war. As Cain wickedly struck down his brother Abel, so might very often wickedly strikes down

¹ Romans viii. 22.

right. But this is no ground of accusation against God: it is the simple and righteous consequence of man's sin.

There is, nevertheless, a remaining tendency in our world to the triumph of right. Before even an earthly tribunal, and with superior power arrayed against you, you may often hope to prevail. Where their own passions and imagined interests do not prevent, men, for the most part, are certainly inclined to favor a righteous cause. Moreover, naturally, even the wicked, under stress of conscience, shrink from wronging their neighbors. And again, the consciousness of right undoubtedly nerves the arm, while the consciousness of a guilty purpose unnerves. Many a time a powerful aggressor has hesitated, under the conviction of his sin, until the crisis has passed, and success has become impossible.

Secondly, the law under consideration is not only natural, but also, in part, *moral*. In other words, it is man's duty always to favor right, and never to permit might to triumph over it. But remembering that men are fallen and sinful, we may easily assure ourselves that this duty will not always be performed. The world, as we have seen, is full of examples of its violation; and that the law in question should be violated, that its constant breach should be permitted, is no more wonderful, than that men should be allowed to break every other moral law of God by which they are bound.

This leads to the remark, *thirdly*, that the law of right which Jehovah originally established for our race, corresponds exactly to a *principle* of his own holy nature, requiring him, in his government, to maintain the rights of his loyal subjects. Every such principle must remain forever unchanged; but changeable creatures may stand, at different times, in very different relations to divine justice; and all the seeming disturbances of the operation of this principle ever witnessed in our world, have been due, not to God's misrule, but to man's sin. The law of the land unchangeably protects life, but ceases to protect you when, becoming a malefactor, you make a murderous assault upon your neighbor, who may then take away your life, in self-defence, with impunity. If you suffer

grievous wrong from your fellows, yet you deserve it, as a dispensation of God, to punish your sin against him. And although, as in Job's case, suffering wrongfully inflicted may not be immediately intended for either chastisement or retribution, yet it never exceeds our iniquity. This fact evidently absolves the Most High from all necessity, in his own nature, of righting, by special interposition, every wrong committed by man against his fellow. Hence God is not unrighteous in employing those evil doers, whom he has not made, but only permitted to be, sinful, to punish other evil doers, or to chastise and purify his people, and illustrate their Christian graces.

We are to remember, too, that the whole of God's administration is not developed in this world. The administrators of human laws, sometimes from necessity, sometimes from policy, delay punishment and the restoration of right. The Most High, also, though under no necessity, unless that founded in his own infinite perfections, postpones often the full recompense of justice. Until the issues of eternity, as well as time, are apparent, we can hardly judge at all of his dealings.

It is evident, therefore, that full as the earth may be of oppression and every species of wrong, we have no reason to complain of the divine administration, much less to doubt either Jehovah's existence or his providence. But for his own glory he does frequently interpose, sometimes miraculously, oftener hiding his power under the apparent operation of natural laws, to give a righteous triumph. He does this often without requiring the performance of any condition on the part of those whom he delivers. But he has been pleased, also, more or less definitely, to promise such deliverances, however really undeserved, or unnecessary to vindicate the divine justice, upon certain conditions—commonly in answer to rightly offered prayer, accompanied by turning away from sin. Such is the promise, and such the condition, of national deliverance, implied in our text. It is perfectly evident, then, that we cannot trust in the bare righteousness of our cause, but that we may trust in the fulfilment of God's promise, if we perform the appointed conditions.

III. I speak of a HAPPY TRIUMPH. By this I mean, not a triumph the most speedy possible, or the most exactly according to the notions and desires of those who pray; but such a triumph as Jehovah knows will result to them in truest blessing. He may prolong the conflict to chastise the people for their sins; but "whom the Lord loveth he correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth."¹ He may delay the victory to make it more complete, more overwhelming; to involve in the issue, and settle happily and finally, great differences threatening, otherwise, endlessly prolonged embarrassment and strife. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."² Praying and persevering in prayer, we must leave our petitions before the Most High; must labor and wait patiently for the result. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God."³

We often long for particular blessings, for which we are yet all unready, and wonder why they are not quickly bestowed. At length, perhaps, while we are brooding over disappointment, the truth flashes upon us; had success come, it had been almost vain, for we were wholly unprepared to follow it up to the happiest issue. So we address ourselves at once to the work of preparation. Thus it may be with nations as well as individuals. When God sends us victory, may we be ready in the State, in the Church, and in all hearts, by his good providence and grace, to profit to the utmost by this great mercy.

Here we may pause awhile for the following reflections.

1. It is cause for great thankfulness, in such a crisis as the present, that we are a Christian people. Apart from our unspeakable interest as individuals in the gospel of Christ, in its offers of salvation, and in its precious promises to believers, the same gospel confers upon us, as a nation, immeasurable

¹ Prov. iii. 12.

² Isaiah lv. 8, 9.

³ Psalm xlii. 11.

advantages. But these we forfeit by forgetfulness of our Christian character and obligations.

2. We should be no less thankful, that we are prosecuting a righteous war; that, in divine providence, the justice of our cause has been so clearly manifested. The treachery and violence of unnatural enemies, and a forbearance on our part well nigh ruinous, with all the suffering they have produced, have at least resulted in more conclusive proof, that from this conflict, however mournful, we could not righteously have shrunk back. Yet, with all the confidence we feel in such conclusions, we should "rejoice with trembling." So liable are we to err, and so boldly do our enemies likewise assert their right, that we should ever humbly pray for heavenly light and guidance; for willingness to see and abandon every false way; for deliverance from sin and its consequences. This we should do the rather, because the passions enkindled in even a righteous war are very apt to drive men into an unrighteous prosecution of their cause. May we, as a Christian people, only add strength to the demonstration of the possible lawfulness of a resort to arms, by showing that love to enemies is not inconsistent with vigorously struggling for their overthrow. And may we never carry the conflict beyond righteous bounds, that we rest not under the condemnation of the heathen, employed by Jehovah to chastise Israel of old, of whom he said, "I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction."¹

3. Mere victory or defeat does not demonstrate, in any case, on which side the right lies. To assure ourselves that our cause is just is not our sole duty. To make war unjustly is a great sin, but so is forgetfulness, in a righteous war, of our dependence upon God and responsibility to him. The failure to acknowledge that dependence and seek his favour, must endanger, and sometimes will ruin, even a righteous cause; else, for such a cause praying would be useless.

4. While struggling painfully against wrong, we should be more forcibly impressed with the importance of all righteousness, in private and public, in dealing with individuals and

¹ Zech. i. 15.

with the nation, and in view of our duties to God as well as man. What multitudes bitterly complain of the unnatural, enormous sin of rebellion against the best of human governments, who are themselves still, as they have ever been, rebels against a God infinite in goodness and mercy, the author of all their enjoyments, and the giver of his only and well beloved Son, to be the Saviour of lost men. May all such rebels speedily repent of their sin, lay down their weapons, submit to Jesus, honour his flag—that banner over us which is love¹—swear to him eternal allegiance.

¹ Song of Sol. ii. 4.

SERMON II.

National Prayer.

WE are a Christian people, but so are our enemies, if, indeed, we may, in any sense, call them a people, which strictly they are not. And this characteristic, like a profession of religion, is only a curse, if we do not really honour Christ, whose name we bear. The sorest judgments which have ever fallen upon wicked men, have fallen upon those, who, professing to know God, in works have denied him.² Again, our cause is just; but that, as we have clearly seen, is not enough to secure a happy triumph. How then are we to acknowledge Jehovah, and obtain his favour? How are we to assure ourselves, that he will “maintain our right?”

IV. I come then to speak of PROPER, UNITED PRAYER, as the condition of our national welfare, at all times indeed, but especially in time of war. *First*, prayer to be effectual must be *proper*—offered in the right manner and with right accompaniments. Solomon’s only allusion, in the text, to the manner of praying, is in the expression—“and they pray unto thee toward this city which thou hast chosen,” that is Jerusalem, “and the house which I have built for thy name.” That is quite enough, however, to teach us, that to prevail with God, we must conform, in our prayers, to his requirements, whether ritual or spiritual. It is natural and most proper, evidently, to turn toward any person whom we address. When, therefore, to the Israelites, journeying out of Egypt to the Land of Pro-

² Titus i. 16.

mise, Jehovah revealed himself in a cloud of glory, moving before them, and resting over the tabernacle after that was built, they doubtless, in their prayers, more or less constantly, looked towards that cloud, and hence towards the tabernacle. Afterwards, in both this edifice and the temple, the cloud of glory—the Shekinah as the Jews called it—rested over the Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy Place, and ordinarily, therefore, was not visible to the worshipper; but, on account of it and other divine appearances, each edifice was considered the peculiar earthly residence of Jehovah—the place of his special manifestation—towards which worshippers probably continued to turn their faces. But the first authoritative direction so to pray, which we find upon record, is implied, if nothing more, in this prayer of Solomon's. That it was subsequently obeyed by devout Jews is evident from the case of Daniel, who, when an exile in Babylon, was accustomed to retire to his chamber three times a day, and with his windows open toward Jerusalem, kneel, and pray, and give thanks before his God.¹ Thus the Holy City, as the chief seat of appointed worship, the place chosen of God, was to be kept constantly in mind.

This mode of praying was, moreover, doubtless intended to be suggestive of an idea still very important and influential in the worship of God's people—the idea of concert in prayer. The thought that all Israel, in their daily devotions, were looking, from every place of their dwelling or sojourn, either in Palestine or foreign lands, in the same direction, was, especially to a people highly imaginative like the Hebrews, and accustomed to full ritual services, a powerful incitement to earnestness.

But now, to turn in any particular direction for prayer, as both the divine requirement and the reason for it have long ago ceased, would be a mere superstition; unless, from natural impulse alone, we looked towards the material heavens, as symbolical of God's abode; though our Saviour represents true penitence, in the publican's case, as not lifting up so much as the eyes unto heaven.² Yet the form referred to by Solo-

¹ Daniel vi. 10.

² Luke xviii. 13.

mon may well stand, with us, as the representative of all present divine rules for the manner and accompaniments of prayer. Thus we must be, like Daniel, *systematic*, giving to this duty times and places as exactly determined and faithfully adhered to as possible. Without a system, and pertinacious adherence to it, we accomplish comparatively little in any kind of effort. Again, as *fixedly* as a Jew could look towards the temple, are we to keep in mind at once human insignificance and unworthiness, and divine glory; the emptiness and need of the creature and sinner, and the fulness and bounty of the Creator and Saviour; the ground of supplication, and the ground of hope, thanksgiving, and praise. Next, we are to be very *earnest* in prayer. The intercession answered in Peter's miraculous release from prison, is described, in our version, as "without ceasing;"¹ but the word means, literally, *intense* or *fervent*. So the Apostle James tells us—"the effectual, fervent prayer"—or, more exactly, the *energetic prayer*, "of a righteous man availeth much."² According to many Scripture examples, we are to be very *particular* and *persevering* in prayer, telling the Most High of our precise sins and wants, well as he may already know them, and holding fast to our plea until it is answered. Finally, we must pray *penitently*: nothing can be more important. We must truly mourn over our past and present iniquities, and resolutely turn away from them all. When Jehovah tells us, that the prayer³ and sacrifice⁴ of the wicked are an abomination, he evidently means the hypocritical services of those who wilfully persist in sin. These requirements all belong to the most spiritual system of worship.

There is another, which is scarcely less spiritual in its proper design and effects; although it wears much more of a ceremonial appearance; chiefly because the actual relations and mutual influence of body and soul are too much overlooked. I speak of *fasting*, which is no less clearly a New Testament, than an Old Testament, ordinance, and which, transferred into

¹ Acts xii. 5.

³ Prov. xxviii. 9.

² James v. 16.

⁴ Prov. xv. 8.

the Christian, from the Jewish Church, has lost nothing of its importance. The superstitious abuse of fasting has led some to doubt its obligation upon Christians; and a spirit of self-indulgence has prepared others readily to discard it as useless; but it is imperatively recommended to us by both nature and revelation.

Secondly, the prayer of a nation, to be properly and in the highest degree effectual, must be *united* prayer—in other words, it must be substantially the prayer of the whole people.

It is a law of the material world, that union is strength. The combined power of two or more can accomplish what to one, even with the same outlay of force, would be utterly impossible. How necessary in war to “mass” men together for a mighty onset. But the same law governs the whole realm of humanity, if not the whole universe. It seems to be intimated in Scripture, that both angels and devils are more effective in union; for they are represented as aggregated into hosts; and an unclean spirit, as taking to himself seven other spirits, to gain a more complete mastery over his poor victim.¹ It is certain that in our world—not only material, but also intellectual and moral—we deal with our fellow men far more effectively by united effort. We are, at present, however, most concerned with the undoubted truth, that God has been pleased to bring prayer also—our dealing with himself—within the operation of this same familiar law; so as to give force, even in worship, to our social feelings, and to our ordinary impressions and impulses. We love to act together; and when any one has a task to perform, which exceeds his single strength, at once, as a matter of course, he summons one or more companions to his assistance. Now Jehovah, for our ease, and readiness, and pleasure in prayer—that we may pray as we do everything else, according to our most familiar principles—even he says, “The ordinary law of nature, that union is strength, I have established also in my kingdom of grace. When you have any great thing to pray for, call in your companions to help you wrestle with God.” Jesus told his disciples, “If two of you

¹ Matthew xii. 45.

shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”¹ On this well established principle, understood in all ages by God’s people, Esther, in her extremity, sent word to Mordecai, “Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish.”² Even the heathen monarch of Nineveh, before mentioned, recognized this principle, when, threatened with dire judgment, he not only “arose from his throne, and laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes;” but also proclaimed throughout Nineveh a decree, that all his subjects likewise should together and most strictly fast, covered with sackcloth, and crying mightily to God.³

So far as this principle is a condition of Jehovah’s own providential dealings, it is founded simply in his condescension, and wise, merciful economy; for a great multitude have no more real power to move him than a few; but, as a condition of our worship, it is founded in man’s very nature; for we know well, that earnestness and fervency in prayer are the natural result of union: other things being equal, the greater the number assembled together, or in concert, to call upon God, the warmer is their devotion, the more elevated are their affections. Though in each separate heart the flame but now burned feebly, bring heart to heart, pile up the wood upon God’s altar, and it will burst out into a blaze, burning like the bush at Horeb, yet not consumed. And to the full extent of this law, the Most High has been pleased to extend the conditions of his answer to prayer; not only has he ordained that two or three shall pray more efficaciously than one, but also, that the greater the number joined in supplication, the more prevailingly they shall plead with him. Upon worshippers in union, or in concert, therefore, his Spirit of grace and suppli-

¹ Matthew xviii. 19, 20.

² Esther iv. 15, 16.

³ Jonah iii. 6, 7, 8.

cation is most abundantly poured out: the glowing warmth of a multitude praying together is not due to the operation of natural laws alone, but to the direct and special influences also of the Holy Ghost.

In our text Solomon obviously intends the supplications of an army, moving forward to battle, united in earnest prayer, as in military organization, and representing the whole people in their devotions as well as in their warfare. This demonstrates, undoubtedly, the superior power of a praying army. Prevailing with God first, they will certainly and easily prevail afterwards over their enemies. But Solomon did not mean to teach that, in such a case, the army alone should pray, or would be heard. Obviously those left at home had equal reason for earnest supplication with those who took the field; and I have already called your attention to the fact, that looking towards Jerusalem and the temple, was an emblem of concert in prayer with all the rest of Israel calling upon Jehovah. But it should not be forgotten that, in those times, very often, all the able-bodied men of the nation, liable to military service, went forth together. So it is now in extreme cases, but not so frequently as then. Of course, the larger the proportion of the people that go out to battle, the more important their prayers. And, on the other hand, the larger the proportion of those that stay at home in time of war, the more important their prayers. But to unite the earnest supplications of all, at home or in the field, or of as many of them as possible, is the proper object of Christian endeavour.

But when can a nation be said to engage unitedly, or as a nation, in prayer? It is obvious, that the whole people, literally, cannot in any way be brought to pray, fast, or humble themselves before the Lord. There can be no doubt, that all proper national religious observances depend very much for their acceptance and prevalence with God,⁽¹⁾ upon the proportion of the people who worship sincerely and spiritually, and⁽²⁾ upon the proportion of the rest, who, with outward respect, participate in Christian worship. Every individual may therefore well feel, that his formal, and much more his

hearty, participation is of real importance to his country. But prayer can be truly, and in a strict sense, national, only when commanded or recommended by state authority, which, for all practical purposes, is vested in the officers of government alone. The nation, as such, can act only under their direction. In this country, according to the law of usage, and the nature of our civil institutions, the recommendation of the legislative or executive power is necessary to make any religious observance national. And as a token of respect to Jehovah, honouring him in the eyes of the world, an appointment by public authority is of very great moment, and specially effectual, as both reason and Scripture teach us, in securing his favour. Nothing else, humanly speaking, will fully supply the lack of this. But such appointment failing, the more generally the people can be united in concerted exercises of public worship, the nearer will the observance approach to nationality, and the more likely will it be to prevail with God. The measurable dependence of even Christians upon state action for obtaining public blessings, is clearly a just concomitant of their duty and spiritual power to evangelize people and rulers together, so that the state shall never be lacking in deference to the requirements of the gospel.

You will possibly ask, is the promise implied in the text absolute? Will it be fulfilled in every case, beyond all peradventure; or is there doubt, greater or less, as to the result, because it still must remain dependent upon the mystery of God's good pleasure? To our fallen race every divine promise is made in Christ—is both given and fulfilled through him and for his sake. And we are told, that “all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him amen”¹—a strong expression of the certainty of their full accomplishment. The only reason for doubt is found in those to whom his promises are made? Will they perform the conditions on which alone they can plead these promises? In such a case as that before us, it is evidently very difficult, if not impossible, for any one to decide, whether the conditions have been fulfilled. An individual,

¹ 2 Corinth. i. 20.

perhaps always if truly devoted, can tell whether he has himself complied with the conditions of divine acceptance. He may be clearly sensible of those exercises of faith and repentance, which, as divinely given, are a pledge of further divine mercy. But whether rulers and people have paid that sufficient deference to the Supreme Ruler, which satisfies the terms of his offer, is evidently a question much more difficult. We can at best, perhaps, in such a case, arrive only at probabilities, although as to our own individual interests we might have certainties. But God is not a hard master: he is "gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil."¹ And observe, carefully,—the promise is absolute; our doubt, whether its terms have been complied with, is due wholly to our own imperfection, our own lack of discernment. Besides, such doubt is no reason for hesitating, or for slackening effort, which, in ordinary cases, is not to cease, not to be relaxed until it prevails; and every right effort we make for our country, or in any other behalf, will be richly rewarded in our own experience at least.

V. The proper, united prayer, then, of this nation—the nation as distinguished from all those who are in a state of rebellion against it—I verily believe is OUR PRESENT GRAND NECESSITY. Do not imagine that I would therefore recommend the cessation of all other efforts for the country—enlisting, drafting, training, providing the material of war—anything belonging to the natural means of prosecuting the conflict with vigour. "It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God,"² our blessed Saviour replied, when Satan proposed that he should cast himself down from a pinnacle of the temple, and trust to the promise of his heavenly Father for safety. As a rule, right prayer and right effort always go together.

A physician was called upon in a case almost desperate, requiring a cool head, great nerve, and energetic, decisive treatment; but his courage failed, he gave the patient up as lost, and retired into an adjoining room—he was a very good man—

¹ Jonah iv. 2.

² Matt. iii. 7.

to pray for her. Meanwhile another physician arrived. "Where is Dr. ——?" he called out. "Oh, he has gone into the next room to pray!" "Pray!—tell him to come here this moment and help me; he can work and pray too." He came, and, with his assistance, the other saved the woman's life.¹ We are commanded, all of us, to "pray without ceasing;"² but we never can do that rightly, without knowing how to pray and work at the same time. There is no need that life's proper business should ever be hurtfully interrupted for prayer. To be sure, the Christian must have some time in his closet, wholly given to devotion; some time for family, social, and public worship; but no proper business denies him that; and, for the rest, he need not forsake his work to pray. Prayer without work—that is, without striving for the accomplishment of what we implore God to do for us—is idle: neither God nor man tolerates such prayer. I would hardly ask one to join me in supplication for the country, who had no energy, or no heart, to do anything else for the country: he would be of as little help in prayer as in other effort. There are, however, exceptions to this rule. Some men, of very feeble bodies and minds, without nerve or capacity for business, may become, by God's grace, powerful at his mercy-seat, prevailing with him, because their lack of energy is an unfortunate, not a sinful, weakness. Perhaps, indeed, we should regard the pious physician referred to, as really saving the patient's life by prayer, although wanting in professional capacity: his petition would seem to have been answered.

But this is a world, ordinarily, of means, not of miracle; and at least where means are applicable, we are authorized only to ask God's blessing upon their proper and faithful employment. It is a mockery for me neither to plough nor sow, yet pray vehemently for a harvest. And though godless men, in malice, or for impious mirth's sake, may ask, why prayer, if so powerful, will not do without other effort, the common sense of mankind, all the rather when religiously instructed, condemns supplication without careful endeavour, as

¹ *Health.* By John Brown, M. D.

² 1 Thess. v. 17.

founded in a superstitious enthusiasm. Nothing, in fact, makes effort so vigorous, as vigorous, fervent prayer. And I believe, too, that the more vigorously and unitedly the people prosecute this war against rebellion, the better our ground of hope for union and earnestness in supplication to God.

Is it not evident, that as yet there has been no proper, penitent, prayerful, religious humiliation of the people, such as our national crisis demands? After our first great battle, fought wilfully upon the Christian Sabbath, and resulting in shameful defeat, the President proclaimed a day of fasting; and he has since called upon the whole nation, once, to render thanks to God for signal victories; not, however, upon a day specially given for the purpose, but, on a certain Sabbath, in connection with ordinary worship. These appointments were observed more generally, heartily and solemnly, than any made by the civil magistrate, the observance of which I have ever witnessed. Yet, after all, considering the Christian character of the people, the critical state of our affairs, and the incalculable magnitude of the interests involved, surely coldness and indifference and languor of heart were the prevailing characteristics of our services. And heavily as this war has since pressed upon the nation's energies; gloomy as the anticipations of many patriotic hearts have often been; doubtfully as increased numbers, from time to time, have talked of the issue; slowly and painfully as months have again and again worn away, without any sensible progress towards complete victory; dreadful as the work of slaughter has been upon one, and another, and another field of bloody strife; fearfully as our brave soldiers have suffered, and our legions been wasted by disease and wounds; widespread as have been the bereavements and other calamities of war over the whole land; government and people alike groaning under a load of anxiety and fear; we have not again, as a nation, bethought ourselves of having recourse to the God of nations and of battles, unitedly and perseveringly to implore him to maintain our cause. Even Christians have not called out generally and earnestly for repeated national humiliation and prayer. The President has not been strongly peti-

tioned for the appointment of any further public observances. It is as though all had settled down under the conviction, that, as a nation, we have prayed enough; or as if despair of being heard overwhelmed us; or as if, in the din of warfare, the excitement of marching hosts, and flying rumours, and fearful outcries, the tumults and agonies of earth, we had forgotten the mercy of heaven, the promises of God, the only sure ground of a people's hope, the salvation which belongeth to Jehovah. Even our enemies—rebels, criminals most atrocious as, in conviction deeply sincere, we call them, or their leaders at least—even they have prayed and fasted, unitedly, and by public appointment, more than we. We have well nigh given up, I fear, the war and the country to the three normal estates of the government, executive, legislative and judicial, together with that “fourth estate,” as it has been often called, a power of tremendous efficiency either for good or evil—the newspaper press. I do not hesitate to utter my profound and very painful conviction, that, practically, the nation trusts more, this day, in the newspaper than in the Bible; more in the editor and publisher than in the Lord of Hosts. I have heard it related of one of our commanders in the present war, lately deceased, that upon the battle-field he literally cursed his own men on, and cursed the enemy off: all that heard him trembled at his profanity—the constant, infernal stream of blasphemy pouring from his lips. One would think it the impression of many, that our government is to be urged forward, and the rebel government beaten back, by the reproaches, accusations and threats, if not the curses, of newspaper editors; claiming to be better skilled in state policy, than any of our rulers; in military affairs, than our greatest captains; in the management of all the momentous interests at stake, than the whole body of our public authorities and servants; and loudly clamoring, each, for the adoption of his own advice, his own scheme, as the sole hope of national salvation.

If we will not, of our own accord, humble ourselves and repent, fast and mightily pray, forsake all else as our ultimate dependence for success, and cry unitedly to the Most High

God; should our cause, righteous as it is, not be utterly ruined; the best we can well hope for it is, that we shall be brought, mercifully, to such an extreme of peril and alarm, so near to the verge of destruction, that we shall at last be driven to despair of man, put our trust in Jehovah alone, and as a people return to him and ceaselessly implore delivering mercy.

We have sometimes exultingly imagined—"If we rout the enemy in this one great battle, just at hand, he will be virtually conquered." Yet, after repeated victories, the final triumph seems no nearer. By the same species of vain reckoning, we have estimated, too much, apparently, our need of prayer and of divine help. Was it not thought that one fast-day, one hour of thanksgiving, would be enough for a struggle so trifling as that in which we are engaged—so soon to be brought to an end? Would it not suffice once to cry out—"Lord! Lord!" But such, surely, is not the teaching of God's word. There we are exhorted to importunity, perseverance, undying earnestness, in prayer. We are not to cease imploring until we receive the blessing, or some absolute assurance of it; and then only that thanksgiving may take the place of supplication. A nation's unceasing prayer, to be sure, cannot be the same thing, in frequency of appointment and service, as an individual's; but a yearly fast is certainly not due measure for such years of national hazard and alarm as we are now painfully wearing through. It would sometimes almost seem as if our woes and dangers had touched the hearts of many Christians in other lands more than they have touched our own. I have seen it repeatedly stated in letters from Americans in Great Britain, that the mention of our country, in public supplication, had struck them as more frequent and earnest there than here. And a distinguished English prelate has lately addressed an order to all the clergy of his diocese, to make special entreaty to God for the restoration of our peace.

I have shown the importance, and deplored the neglect, of public and national humiliation and prayer; but scarcely less important, and perhaps full as much neglected, is the duty of private, individual supplication for the country. No one of us

can rightfully expect the people generally to be aroused to a practical sense of their dependence upon Jehovah, who does not, in the closet, faithfully plead with him to bless and save the nation, and pour out upon it the Spirit of prayer. But have we not herein, most of us, been seriously delinquent? What a burden of responsibility has been laid upon each individual, by the declaration, that the energetic prayer of one righteous man availeth much! Let me suggest the inquiry, to be pursued by each of you in the heart's retirement—How much do you pray daily for your country? Some days do you forget it altogether? For the most part, do you put up just a passing petition for it in private, perhaps also in family, worship? You might pray for it a great deal more than that, and yet come far, far short of the evident importance of the subject, and your own clearest duty. But not to speak further of past neglects, although they ought to be remembered and sincerely repented of—such repentance alone can be the commencement of a better life; let me ask, how much time are you now willing to give to importunate, wrestling prayer for the nation? I doubt whether, on your own soul's account, you can afford to take this time from your present, accustomed devotions. With most persons, I believe, the question should be, how much additional time can I bestow upon my distracted, suffering, bleeding country, threatened with speedy destruction—my poor country, which has so provoked God by its sins, that if we do not soon reach the ear of our great Intercessor, and prevail with him to stand between the guilty nation and its righteous Judge—to sprinkle with his blood the throne of Justice and wrath—we must be destroyed? In asking yourself this question, I beg you to consider, how little you have yet done, perhaps, for your country; though, indeed, those that have otherwise done most, are the very ones likely to pray most. You are not among the thousands who are fighting for her—exposing dear life itself for her salvation. You cannot point to wounds received, or say you have shed blood, in her defence. Oh, if you should give to importunate prayer in her behalf every moment to be possibly wrung from toil and rest, what would

you be giving in comparison with the thousands who already have laid down their lives? If all who do not enter the army felt the same degree of responsibility as those, who, from sincere patriotic motives, have enlisted, and if they expressed this feeling in daily, wrestling supplication, what might not such a praying multitude, around the throne of our Lord of Hosts, achieve for their country? Oh, we should meditate on these things, until our hearts burn within us; until, while embattled hosts linger, and the cause of liberty, and humanity, and religion hangs trembling in the balance, we pour out day and night our tears and entreaties before the infinite mercy-seat.

About this duty, too, we should talk with others, particularly and first of all with fellow-Christians, stirring them up to think, and feel, and pray more, and more earnestly. Like Alpine travellers, in danger of that drowsiness which steals over the body with the intense cold, tempting to fatal repose, we should strive constantly to keep each other awake, to arouse all from that indifference, that stupidity, into which multitudes seem to be settling down; and which in closet, in family circle, and in worshipping congregation, may be as dangerous to our country, as carelessness, and sloth, and inaction upon the very battlefield.

With a few additional reflections I leave this part of my subject.

1. How solemn the responsibility of public magistrates, as alone able properly to unite the whole nation in the attitude of humble penitence before Jehovah, in thanksgiving or supplication, in any religious observances! Their neglect may well be the country's irretrievable ruin. Shall God's mercy to them and to us prove that our present rulers have, indeed, "come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"¹

2. How fearfully now loom up before our eyes the ungodliness of magistrates or people, and the delinquency of Christians and the church. To the sin of the latter, not to any defect in the gospel, must we attribute prevailing corruptions and

¹ Esther iv. 14.

iniquities, which so weaken our power whether with God or our fellow men. The church's faithfulness would long ago have brought the whole nation, as a nation, under the controlling authority of the religion of Christ. Rebellion then would have been impossible, or, if attempted, would have fallen, like the walls of Jericho, before the trumpet blast of the Lord's host.

3. If prayer be so important to secure national as well as individual interests, how can a good citizen be a prayerless man? Are you called to fight for your country?—perhaps your first thought is—"I am not ready to die." So you must refuse the demands of patriotism, or put your very immortal soul at risk. What a sad alternative! Do you choose to go forth to battle in spite of the soul's danger? But now, upon the very field of conflict, remember, "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong."¹ Nay, God will not always crown right with victory. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights,"² who bids us ask, that we may receive.³ And however multiplied have been the blessings unasked for which he has lavished upon us, we surely have no right to hope for any favour for which we will not ask. Will fighting for your country avail anything, unless you also pray for your country? Alas, what is a Christless, prayerless man or woman! What shall I say of husband or wife, father or mother, son or daughter, citizen or soldier, commander or ruler, who is the enemy of God by wicked works, and spends his whole life in a rebellion against heaven, which outlaws him from the effectual service of both God and man!

To friends and family, to the community, the nation, to all mankind, to the church of Jêsus Christ, how unspeakable the importance of that faith, which prays without ceasing, never faints, and prevails with Jehovah!

¹ Eccles. ix. 11.

² James i. 17.

³ Matt. vii. 7, 8.

SERMON III.

The Union Prayer-Meeting.

I HAVE attempted to illustrate great principles, and to exhort generally to the fulfilment, at this crisis in our public affairs, of national and individual duty. A great practical question yet remains.

VI. I would speak, then, of THE MODE OF UNITING a Christian people in proper religious observances. How are those who feel the high importance of earnest, national repentance, humiliation and prayer, to secure and make ready this offering for the Most High? In any circumstances the question might be a serious one. With both nation and church so corrupt, and consequently so wanting in a devotional spirit, as ours are, it becomes a question unspeakably perplexing and difficult. What each of us can contribute to its solution is, therefore, all the more important. Lately the task of recruiting and strengthening the army seemed formidable; but I am persuaded, that we engage in an effort much more doubtful, at least, as to its result, when we endeavour to bring our army and this whole people to engage in earnest, humble, penitent prayer even for our own salvation.

Christians are "the salt of the earth."¹ Out of Zion goes forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.² That is, the people of God and the church of God are to be, instrumentally, the salvation of men, whether individuals or nations. In our own case, fasting, humiliation and prayer are to begin

¹ Matt. v. 13.

² Isaiah ii. 3.

with Christians ; they are to set the example ; by both example and precept they are to instruct people and rulers, urging them to the performance of duty ; they are to prevail with God for their country, by first prevailing with him to pour out a spirit of grace and of supplication upon our civil magistrates, our army and navy, and the inhabitants of the land in general. Thus sinners are saved, not without their own prayers, but by praying for them, till they begin to pray for themselves. There is this material difference, however, between the case of individuals, needing eternal, and the case of nations, needing simply temporal, salvation. While an individual can hardly be saved by the prayers of others only, a nation, as we have seen,¹ may, perhaps, be delivered by the supplications of a portion, even a small portion comparatively, of its whole number ; especially when that portion, though faithful, cannot, for some reason, unite the people generally in prayer. Thus when Mordecai and the Jews in Shushan, with Esther and her maidens, fasted, the occasion pressing, so that there was not time to engage any more in this service, not only Esther herself, but the whole people also, were saved from Haman's cruelty. Christians then may wrestle with God for their country, with the hope of prevailing by themselves alone, if they cannot secure proper national humiliation ; yet hardly without faithful effort to engage as many as possible in seeking the Lord. Effectual prayer and willing obedience are intimately related to one another ; and when God commands us, expressly or impliedly, not only to pray ourselves, but also to stir up a spirit of supplication in others, our prayers alone will be comparatively powerless, so long as we neglect the rest of the command.

To speak more definitely, the state is to be moved by the church ; and the effort to move the church must begin with individual Christians. This is the general idea of such movements ; but of course I am not to lay down rules for divine providence, which sometimes operates in ways quite different from ours, even though ours be determined according to common providential dealings. Yet extraordinary blessings themselves

¹ See p. 8.

are usually the reward of exertion directed by ordinary principles. Individual Christians may, at times, influence the state directly, or the church and state contemporaneously, and are bound to exert thus whatever special influence God has put within their power. But the common, normal process is that of reaching the state through the church. Further, to secure any object like the one before us, individual or associated Christians are to strive at once, as before intimated, with God and man: with God for both the ultimate favour—the happy triumph,—and the intermediate preparative blessing—the gift of a penitent, prayerful spirit to the people, uniting them in proper supplication:—with man, to stir up in him the flame of earnest devotion, and engage all to exert their influence for the attainment of the end proposed. As the ordinary result of such endeavours, the number interested in the effort, and giving it strength, will constantly increase; the work, if faithfully prosecuted, will be ever advancing. It will extend naturally from individuals to congregations, from the latter to larger sections of the church, so to the church in general, and finally to the nation.

We know, however, that religious influences of any kind extend much less rapidly and effectually in such a country as ours, because sectarianism presents a barrier to their passage from one denomination to another. Not only are these denominations without any common external bond of union, but unhappy jealousies and bickerings, also, between them, increase greatly the distance of their separation, and the difficulty of uniting them in any Christian effort or observance. How is a church so divided and broken, to be reduced to any sort of unity, even in prayer for the salvation of our common country?

Perhaps it will assist us, in prosecuting this inquiry, to consider what it is which we are to call the church in these United States. Of course I speak of the *visible church*, which must be the object immediately in view, as we strive to exert an influence by outward means. However they may disagree on other points, evangelical Christians will generally admit, that this church embraces at least all the evangelical denomina-

tions of the country. But are these denominations, as such, or rather the individuals composing them, as individuals, the proper elements of the church in question? Of the United States we ask, familiarly, are they a simple confederacy, or a consolidated nation? My inquiry in regard to the church is very similar; but it is, perhaps, worthy of remark, that while the intimacy of the union entered into by our states is the ground of asserting a national consolidation, the very looseness of existing ties between our several religious denominations, affords, possibly, the strongest reason for regarding the church-general, which embraces them, as formed, not of these denominations federatively, but of the members of all of them collectively. The difference seems to depend upon the fact, that the unity of the church, in its several portions, as well as in the whole, is a prior, inherent necessity; if not united in one way, it must be in another—if not in the former, in the latter; while the unity of what we call the nation is not such a necessity; and the proof of its existence, therefore, must involve the demonstration of the mode of its existence.

It is scarcely possible to regard the visible church in this country, as composed of denominations, or even of the congregations belonging to them, without a stretch of fancy perhaps unwarrantable. Wherever there is a union, there must be a bond; and a visible bond, if the union is visible, as that of a visible church must always be. The profession of the same fundamental faith might, possibly, be regarded as an outward bond between all evangelical communions, if it did not seem necessary to take the whole of a profession together; and if some of the denominations which profess this fundamental faith did not, directly or indirectly, refuse to be connected with others thereby—did not profess, virtually, to hold no church communion with others. At any rate it is evident, that there is more intimate fellowship, a closer bond, between evangelical Christians, individually, by mutual acknowledgment as well as Christian profession, than between some evangelical denominations. And what is just now still more to my purpose, God seems to have honoured, specially, the fellowship of Christians,

rather than of denominations, in this country, for carrying forward what may be called the work in common of his church-general. Almost all the unions formed for the prosecution of this work, have been unions, properly, of individuals, not churches, of different names. As an illustration of this, and also a return to our main subject, I propose to show, that God, in his gracious providence, within a few years past, seems to have given a very significant answer to the great question before us—how the church is to be united in prayer.

It has often, perhaps, been noticed, as an evidence of divine favour to the church, that it is not unfrequently prepared for seasons of sore trial and deep affliction, by previous revival and spiritual prosperity. A very remarkable work of God's Spirit began, in this country, in the fall of 1857. It may be said to have continued more than two years, reaching its height in 1858. This revival was almost confined to the Northern, and what are now called the Border States; and, in the latter, its power was sensibly less than in the former. South of Virginia, Kentucky and Missouri, it did not, properly speaking, extend at all. Was not the great Head of the Church hereby strengthening his people, to bear the very calamities which have now fallen upon us? The peculiar lesson which this work of divine grace taught, as all know, was the lesson of *Christian Union*. Among the earliest agencies of revival was the "Business Men's Noonday Prayer-meeting," in the city of New York. At first it was a weekly appointment, but soon began, as it has ever since continued, to be held daily. It was a *union* meeting, from which sectarian differences were to be excluded—a union of individuals, not of churches or denominations; and it was the type of very many others established in different parts of the land. The great object of all these meetings was prayer for the conversion of souls, sometimes the conversion of the world being distinctively the blessing implored. But it is worthy of notice, that, with the originator of the movement in New York, the relief of business-men seems to have been the immediate idea. It was a season of overwhelming business embarrassment and financial disorder. A prominent man, who at-

tended the meeting, said one day, in substance—"Prayer never was so great a blessing to me as it is at this time! When one sees his property taken from him every day by those who might pay him, if they were willing to make sacrifices, and by some who seem designedly to take advantage of the times to defraud him; and when he himself is liable to the keenest reproaches for non-payment of money which he cannot collect and cannot create; the temptation is tremendous to forget Christian charity, and be as hard and unmerciful as any body. If I could not get some half hours every day, to pray myself into a right state of mind, I should certainly either break down or turn rascal."¹

The lesson of Christian union to which I have referred—what was it? It embraced, *first*, the *importance* of such union. Seldom had Christians appeared so powerful in prayer and every effort, as they became when thus united, not only an earnest multitude, but that made up of various denominations. Seldom had Christian worship inspired the worldly and profane with such reverence, as many of them now manifested, beholding how the followers of Christ really loved one another; how fervent they were in devotion, and how prevalent with the Almighty seemed to be their petitions. Seldom had the sinful barriers of sect appeared so great as an evil, so little as necessary obstacles to the fellowship of believers. God was evidently drawing the various parts of his visible church in this land nearer together—to feel that they were parts—nothing more—of a grand whole, in the unnecessary divisions of which were shame and weakness, but in its unity, true strength and glory—especially the Saviour's glory. He was preparing his people—was he not?—to discern readily, when occasion required, that in such union lay the best hope of engaging the nation in that humble, penitent prayer, which must be, perhaps, the condition of its deliverance. In short, was it not, especially, for just the very crisis now filling us with anxiety, distress and fear, that God was teaching this lesson?

And, *secondly*, it embraced the best *principles* and *means* of

¹ Narratives of Remarkable Conversions, &c. By W. C. Conant, pp. 357, 8.

Christian union. As to the former, the effort was not to be, at least primarily, if at all, to draw denominations, but to draw individual Christians, together. Thus, obviously, all barriers, founded in church organization and ordinances inseparable from it, were avoided; difficulties became much fewer and less serious. As only fundamental doctrines, generally received, were to be held forth in all union efforts, so the simplest, most important exercises alone of worship were to be introduced—prayer, praise and gospel exhortation. Every question of distinctive creed, clerical orders, sacraments, or church government was excluded. Seldom have any principles been found, in application, more easy, acceptable, or productive of blessing than these. The grand *means* was the *Union Prayer-meeting*. With this were sometimes connected Young Men's Christian Associations, previously existing or newly formed, not as necessary adjuncts, yet without violence, or endangering the principles involved; and certainly they have proved instrumentalities of great good.

But of union prayer-meetings it concerns us now to think. Can I be wrong in believing, that these have been divinely ordained, and providentially made familiar to us all, in great mercy, as the very means to be successfully employed, in the present crisis, to unite the whole nation in prayer for the triumph of a righteous cause? Humanly speaking, what other possible means could, in so short a time, and so effectually, arouse the people to a sense of their past neglect, and comparative prayerlessness, to penitence and earnest wrestling at the mercy seat? To be as plain and practical as the importance of this subject demands, let me suggest the very mode of operation, by which, with God's blessing, the object might be accomplished.

Already there are daily union prayer-meetings in several of our larger cities: perhaps some of those established in smaller places are also yet continued. *First*, let each meeting of this kind now in being, expressly make prayer for the country its grand, specific object, and labour to extend the movement all over the land.

Secondly, let similar union meetings be established in every city, town and village of our loyal states; nay, if it might be, of states disloyal also: we are not unwilling that our enemies too should betake themselves to earnest prayer.¹

Thirdly, let a daily union meeting be formed in every regiment of the brave defenders of our country: doubtless, in every one, there are some praying men to be found.

Fourthly, in each state, let all of these meetings be in correspondence with the one held in the largest city or the capital of the state, and the latter in correspondence with either the meeting in Washington, or the parent meeting of all still continued in the city of New York. In each military department, in like manner, the soldiers' unions might be in correspondence with some one of their number, determined, perhaps, by military rules of precedence; and that, again, with the chief meeting in New York, Philadelphia or Washington.

Fifthly, let all these unions bend their efforts, with both heaven and earth, especially towards bringing our rulers, and through them, the whole people, to a proper acknowledgment of their dependence upon God, and to becoming self-humiliation, repentance and prayer.

And, *first*, there could not, just now, be proposed to us, as a people, an object of prayer so worthy of this general and daily effort, as the deliverance of the nation itself. If the relief of business men, in a season of great commercial embarrassment, was the proper object of the first union meeting of the kind proposed, much rather may the salvation of our country engage, far more widely, united, unceasing supplication. Of course other objects need not be wholly excluded, because this is made prominent and chief. Christians universally recognize the conversion of the world as the grand blessing to be ever

¹ In establishing union prayer-meetings, it would be well to consider God's providence, and take as a model-meeting one that he seems to have prospered and blest. The Monitor, by common consent, is to be the model of most of our iron-clad men-of-war. Shall the children of this world forever be wiser than the children of light? If a daily meeting in any place should be judged impossible, let it be tri-weekly, semi-weekly, or weekly, but the oftener the better. Probably out of the larger cities, the evening would be a more convenient time than the noon-day.

implored. But what can well have a more important influence upon the world's conversion, than the momentous issues of this very civil war in which we are engaged, involving so deeply, as it must, the welfare of the church in these United States, and the cause of civil and religious liberty all the earth round. God's particular providences towards the world should, certainly, always give special direction, and thus special interest and earnestness, to our petitions for the spread of the gospel. When he makes anything prominent and influential, in relation to his own kingdom, it should become prominent and influential in our prayers. If we ought, constantly, to pray most for those persons nearest and dearest, because, by the very ties wherewith we are bound to them, God has intended to make them a special care and burden; then, obviously, and upon the same principle, our country has peculiar claims to our remembrance of her interests before the Most High; and when anxiety and fear for her welfare are providentially quickened, doubtless it is to quicken, in her behalf, a spirit of grace and supplication. I need only add, that our text evidently implies, that, as in Israel, so among us, in time of war, it should be our first prayer, that Jehovah would maintain our righteous cause.

Secondly, what could attract so great a concourse of earnest worshippers, as the announcement of daily, united prayer, the land over, for our national salvation? Would not unheard of multitudes come together, thronging each place of Christian assembly? Would not a deeper interest mark the proceedings, than even the earlier days of union prayer-meeting enthusiasm ever witnessed? How would the flame of devotion be enkindled, by the knowledge that so many thousands, so widely scattered, were in concert pleading for mercy! One great reason for despondency and faintness in prayer, especially when any grand, momentous, national, or world-wide interest is involved, is the idea, the painful apprehension, that very few others are praying; that coldness, indifference and neglect generally prevail. Partly, the consciousness of our own sin, partly, the evident indifference of multitudes around us, and,

partly, the weakness of a faith ever yearning, in this world of sense, for the support of sight, produces such faint-heartedness. To the ancient prophet's devotion, in sad times of apostasy, when he imagined, that of all true worshippers and prophets of Jehovah he alone remained, what an encouragement it was to be told from God's own mouth—"Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed to Baal."¹

Yet, we should not be discouraged, if far less interest be excited in this movement than we may anticipate. Proverbially, from very small beginnings the greatest and most important results often proceed. The first meeting in New York was attended by only three persons; the second, by only six; the third, by twenty; but it finally increased, until three large rooms in the same edifice were crowded; and then various other places, to be crowded likewise, were thrown open to the overflowing multitudes. Besides, the Almighty can save by a few as well as by many. And the faithful, though unsuccessful, effort of a few to unite the nation in prayer, may yet, in his mercy, save the nation.

Thirdly, such united supplication, of Christians alone, if instituted over the whole land, would be almost national. And could no humiliation before God more strictly so be secured, we might well indulge a confident hope that this would prevail. Then what influence could be brought to bear upon the nation at large, whether through divine mercy, or human sympathy, promising to promote, more effectually than this, popular agreement in prayer, whether with or without magisterial appointment?

Fourthly, I have suggested that these union meetings should be in correspondence; by which, however, I did not intend any complicated machinery of co-operation. The whole object would be attained, perhaps, if each particular union were known and registered by the one with which it was in correspondence. Then, for the encouragement of all, the whole extent of the movement could be measured. Then an occasional

¹ I Kings xix. 18.

circular might be readily addressed and forwarded, to consult all about a particular observance, or unite all in some desirable endeavour. And, finally, whatever requests were to be presented to our civil rulers, and, by petition or otherwise, urged upon them, could probably be made general and effective, through these associated bodies of Christian worshippers, more easily than in any other way.

After electing their rulers, the only expedient by which the people can exert any direct influence over them, during the term of office which the election secures, is by petition—a mode of influence, perhaps, now-a-days too much neglected. What if it were desirable to urge upon the President of the United States, by this method, the appointment of a day of national fasting and humiliation; how could the measure be so successfully brought before the people; how so readily carried out all over the land; how could petitions be so well distributed and signatures everywhere obtained; as through these affiliated prayer meetings? Indirectly, but effectually, they would bring into co-operation, in every proper union effort, all the various congregations throughout the country, whose members joined in the general movement. In fact, whether this plan might not, more happily than any other possible, realize the idea of a united visible church in the United States, is an interesting question, which, however, cannot here be discussed.

Finally, might not the plan proposed be very effective for promoting prayer in the army? While I have laid such stress upon national prayer, I feel deeply that there is particular need for encouraging and fostering, among the marshalled defenders of our country, far more of a devotional spirit, both as a means of increasing their natural efficiency, and a ground of hope for prevalence with God. No army is so effective as a praying army. Says a great English historian—"that which chiefly distinguished the army of Cromwell from other armies was the austere morality, and the fear of God, which pervaded all ranks. It is acknowledged by the most zealous Royalists, that in that singular camp no oath was heard, no drunken-

ness or gambling was seen, and that, during the long dominion of the soldiery, the property of the peaceful citizen and the honour of woman were held sacred.”¹ This army of Cromwell was the wonder and terror of all Europe, where it was known. Adds the same historian, “from the time when” it “was remodelled to the time when it was disbanded, it never found, either in the British Isles or on the Continent, an enemy who could stand its onset.” These “warriors, often surrounded by difficulties, sometimes contending against three-fold odds, not only never failed to conquer, but never failed to destroy and break in pieces whatever force was opposed to them. They at length came to regard the day of battle as a day of certain triumph.”²

To whom, moreover, shall we look for earnest, prevailing prayer, so confidently as to those, if they can be brought to pray at all, who are perilling their lives for the salvation of their country? You may depend upon it, the praying soldier, ready the next hour to pour out his blood upon the battle-field, does not pray like common men. To illustrate this, take a seemingly well-authenticated anecdote of General Warren, who fell at Bunker’s Hill. When he retired, the night before the battle, he directed a young man, his servant, to call him very early, as he intended to join the army in the entrenchments. On being awakened at two o’clock, after a few words of gloomy foreboding of the issue of the day’s struggle, he read a portion of Scripture, and then kneeled in prayer. The young man said he never heard such a prayer: it seemed like Jacob’s wrestling with God at Peniel. He prayed for himself—that God would preserve him, or make him a willing sacrifice upon his country’s altar. He prayed for his family—that they might submit with serene trust to the divine will, if it should doom them to sorrow. He prayed above all for his country—that God would guide it through storm and gloom and defeat, to ultimate victory and freedom. The minutes rolled on, but still the prayer continued; occasionally the voice was hushed, as if from exhaustion, but the body was bowed in worship, and

¹ Macaulay’s *England*, i. 36, (Butler & Co.’s Ed. Philada.)

² *Ibid.*

soon the earnest pleading commenced anew. The servant listened in wonder, which gradually passed into the deepest awe. He seemed to be in the very presence of God, and dared not move, or breathe loudly, lest the wonderful solemnity should be profanely broken. At length the prayer was ended: General Warren rose from his knees. There was no anxiety brooding on his face: all was serene peace and joyful trust in God. The young man, looking at his watch, found that the prayer had occupied two full hours.¹ It was the pious soldier's preparation for heaven; and how much, think you, had such wrestling prayer to do with the triumph of our forefathers in their almost hopeless revolutionary contest with Great Britain.

Let me mention, also, the prevailing prayers of another godly man, a brave defender likewise of our country—Commodore McDonough. On that Sabbath morning, upon which the battle of Lake Champlain was fought, in our last war with England, Commodore Downie, the British commander, was sailing down upon the little American squadron, lying in the bay of Plattsburg. He sent a man to the masthead, to see what they were doing on board McDonough's flag-ship. "Ho! aloft," Downie called out—"What are they doing on that ship?" "Aye, aye, sir," answered the look-out—"they are gathered about the mainmast, and seem to be at prayer." "Ah!" said Commodore Downie, "that looks well for them, but bad for us." It was bad for poor Downie; for the very first shot from the American ship was a chain-shot, which cut him in two. McDonough gained a signal victory.²

In conclusion let me remark—whatever we do should be done quickly. Upon each moment now are life and death indeed hanging. "Union in Prayer for the sake of the Union"—let that henceforth be every Christian patriot's watchword.

¹ New York Observer, 1862, p. 212.

² Presbyterian. I have been told, however, that a tradition prevails at Plattsburg, that Commodore Downie fell dead at the first broadside, without any apparent wound.