

GOD'S JUDGMENTS, AND THANKSGIVING SERMONS.

A

DISCOURSE,

BY THE

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DISCOURSE.

Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth ; and I will pardon it.

And though they say the Lord liveth, surely they swear falsely.

O Lord, are not thine eyes upon the truth ? thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved ; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction ; they have made their faces harder than a rock ; they have refused to return.

Therefore I said surely these are poor ; they are foolish : for they have not known the way of the Lord, nor the judgment of their God.

I will get me unto the great men, and will speak unto them ; for they have known the way of the Lord, and the judgment of their God : but these have altogether broken the yoke, and burst the bonds.

Wherefore a lion out of the forest shall slay them, and a wolf of the evening shall spoil them, a leopard shall watch over their cities ; every one that goeth out thence shall be torn in pieces : because their transgressions are many, and their backslidings are increased.—JEREMIAH 5 : 1—6.

THE proclamation of the present truth, notwithstanding its almost universal neglect, constitutes a very important portion of the faithful watchman's duty.

He is required to consider attentively the course of divine providence, to recognize those principles of eternal rectitude that underlie it all, and to apply those principles to the condition, and, as they arise, the developments of the age or the nation in which he lives.

A task of such difficulty in itself, as to require the exercise of the greatest prudence, caution, and wisdom, that must necessarily bring him in contact with the opinions and prejudices of men, expose him to their opposition, sometimes to hatred, and, as often heretofore in the progress of the church, persecution.

The command of God, however, is imperative : “ Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people

their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins." In the second chapter of Ezekiel we have the commission under which we act, the divine mandates which we are to execute, the character of those to whom we are sent, and, in the reluctance of the prophet, the feeling which the performance of a work so ungracious, and apparently so useless, must induce.

The roll which was given him was written within and without with mourning, lamentation, and wo.

In the third chapter he proceeds to inform us that he went, in bitterness, in the heat of his spirit, but with the hand of the Lord strong upon him. For seven days he sat astonished at what he saw and heard among those to whom he was commissioned ; at the close of this period the word of the Lord came to him again in the most authoritative manner : "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel : therefore, hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die, and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity ; *but his blood will I require at thine hand.*

We were called upon during the past week to celebrate our annual thanksgiving under circumstances of a very peculiar character. It came to us, not as before, with a countenance radiant with the smiles of peace, plenty, and prosperity, but sad with commercial ruin and financial disaster—ominously pointing to the gory front of civil war upon our western border, and to an approaching winter upon whose nearing footsteps hideous forms of want and suffering attend.

In our country, suddenly, without any premonitory signs, at least none that men regarded, but unexpectedly, like a clap of thunder from a clear sky, a fearful financial storm has burst sweeping before it the accumulated wealth of years, confounding the wisdom of the wisest statesmen and political economists, inducing a condition of things that no mortal could foresee, and for which all seem equally unable to account—its force unspent and its fury unabated, it has reached other shores, carrying everything before it in its tireless and resistless march. This cry of distress from the west has been met by a wail of deeper anguish from the distant east, where, in the most important

dependency of a sister nation, a vast population are heaving like the billows in a storm, in a wide-spread and ruinous revolt. In the midst of scenes like these, we were called upon to observe a day of thanksgiving, "Wonders in the heavens above, and signs in the earth beneath, blood and fire and vapor of smoke." "The sea and its waves roaring;" the deep of financial ruin calling unto the deep of heathen revolt—"all faces gathering blackness," and "men's hearts failing them for fear and for looking after those things which are yet coming upon the earth." Under such circumstances, with a feeling pervading all christian minds that we would be more appropriately employed in fasting and humiliation before God, we expected a recognition of the hand that was thus laid in judgment upon us. I appeal to every christian heart to say if such a recognition were not necessary to meet the conditions of the case, even while thanking God for his abundant mercies still vouchsafed in the midst of these great and sore adversities.

Was it too much to expect that the watchmen upon the walls of Zion would recognize the displeasure of God in our calamities, and from his goodness derive an argument enforcing the great duty of national repentance?

Thus far they might have gone, although failing to arise to a full conception of the grandeur of the divine government, that stupendous system whose awful wheels resting upon earth, are lost in the depths of "o'er canopied gloom," the entire administration of which is the legitimate subject of gratitude and thankfulness to God, even when manifested in the way of signal judgment. "Let Mount Zion rejoice, let the daughters of Judah be glad because of thy judgments." "Zion heard and *was* glad, the daughters of Judah rejoiced because of thy judgments, O Lord."

We have perused the greater number of the discourses delivered upon that occasion, which have appeared in the public prints, with a feeling of very great disappointment in general, and, in some particular instances, of very deep regret. We were not prepared for so universal a failure to recognize the hand of the Lord in our present condition, far less to find the very opposite position assumed, and such an idea met with a sarcastic sneer, and pronounced "preposterous profanity." "Verily,

there is a God that judgeth in the earth ;” but we have found no recognition of his power in these discourses.

With their authors we have no quarrel—certainly seek none—many of them are justly esteemed as great men, distinguished for their talents, their acquirements, their noble magnanimity of character, and for their genuine piety. They are the representative men of the several denominations with which they are connected, and doubtless fair exponents of the religious sentiments of the nation.

For this reason, we have the more regretted the general tone of their discourses, and have felt it a duty to call attention to them in this public manner. They appear to indicate a state of feeling in the religious world, in which there is very little sense of the presence, power, and authority of Jehovah as the moral Governor of the Universe.

That there should be in the masses no appreciation of the overruling providence and pervading presence of Jehovah, and consequently no recognition of his hand in the calamities that oppress and the misfortunes that afflict us, is only what the whole history of the race and the whole of experience teaches us to expect. The multitudes throng the broad way ; they know not nor will understand ; they walk on in darkness ; their great characteristic is *ungodliness*, and their condition without hope and without God in the world. That the rulers should manifest an utter indifference with regard to the whole matter, is no ground of astonishment ; for, however much the warring and jarring empires of earth have differed among themselves upon other subjects, they have all agreed in *this*—an utter refusal to recognize or submit to the authority of Him who has “upon his vesture and upon his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.”

They have ever said, like their great type, the haughty tyrant of Egypt, “Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice ?” They continue to refuse allegiance to the exalted and enthroned Mediator ; they take counsel together against the Lord and his anointed. We are not surprised that, intent as the great mass of them are upon their mad schemes of personal and national aggrandizements, that they should refuse to recognize the strokes of the iron rod in the hand of Him against whose

government they are in open rebellion. Our astonishment is reserved, and all required for those, the professed, and, we sincerely hope, the true followers of the Lamb, who, nevertheless, refuse to recognize Him in these inflictions of his wrath.

We are told, however, that this was a day of thanksgiving, and therefore no other topic was admissible. *I deny it.* With a feeling pervading every mind that there was something in our circumstances strangely incongruous with the occasion, with such a pressure on the heart of this great community, that a distinguished man, in a neighboring city, devoted a whole discourse to an investigation of the cause that enables us to preserve our natural buoyancy of spirits. It certainly required a sublimity of impudence, of which it is difficult to form a conception, to stand before an intelligent audience without so much as an attempt to dispose of the facts that pressed themselves with peculiar urgency upon the consideration of all. There is more, however, than a simple ignoring of this severe chastisement. In one instance, to which we have already alluded, it was pronounced "preposterous profanity" to speak of our present condition as a judgment of God. We hope this was not the echo of the sentiment of any great proportion of the religious community. Had it not come from one who stands high in the estimation of the church, and who has the ear of the nation, we should not have thought it worthy of notice. The religious journals have not sanctioned it; in most of them we have seen at least a faint recognition; and in some of the more independent ones the full avowal that our condition is one of judgment. Yet, thus far we have heard it from no pulpit, save from that noble and fearless one in the Church of the Puritans, on Union Square.

On Dr. Cheever the mantle of the old prophets seems to have fallen, and in him their spirit is revived: when hearing or reading his burning words and thoughts, we are ready to ask, as the Jews of John, "Art thou Elias?" Long may he live to snatch those bolts from heaven that make tyrants tremble on their thrones.

If this fearful financial disaster that has overtaken us is not a judgment, pray what would constitute one? We have, in common with many of the greatest and best in the land, thus

interpreted it; and we stand here, to arraign the men who deny it, on the authority of this book, before the bar of God on the charge of insulting his government.

The judgments of God are those punishments which he inflicts upon nations for their sins, whether for warning, for correction, or destruction. Do we not require the first? have we not deserved the second? do we not merit the third? The first-born dead in every house, from the first-born of the captive in the dungeon to the first-born of Pharoah upon the throne, was not the first of Egypt's plagues, not the first of that series of JUDGMENTS which culminated in this fearful infliction, and ended in the destruction of the monarch and his army by the waters of the sea.

No! Amid many grounds of thankfulness to God this is no inconsiderable one, that he has not exhausted the vials of his wrath—that we have not been compelled to drink to the dregs that cup of bitterness which he commends to the lips of guilty nations. These are the first great drops that precede the approaching storm—a few of the coals of juniper which he scatters before he utterly consumes. He looks through the pillar of cloud to trouble us now; if we rush madly on, he will look through the pillar of fire to waste and devour.

What must we term this condition of things? When our benevolent societies are actively engaged and putting forth every effort to drive the gaunt form of famine from the homes of thousands around us; when, from every household in which an altar to the everliving and true God is erected, morning and evening goes up the prayer to Him who provides for the birds of the air, who gives to the young lions their prey when they roar, and feeds the ravens when they cry, that he would have mercy upon the famishing poor in this inclement season that approaches.

Is there not upon the whole community a painful apprehension that, notwithstanding all the efforts which can be made, many must suffer from actual destitution? Is not the tramp of hungry men already heard in our streets, and their cry for BREAD ringing in our ears?

To talk about abundant harvests to those who have nothing to purchase, is the cruelest mockery; the want of means and of

the opportunity to procure them, is as inexorable as the decree of fate that prevented Tantalus from drinking the water that rose to his chin, or eating the fruits that hung from the boughs *almost* within his grasp.

But I must appeal to the reverend gentleman himself from whose lips these inconsiderate words have fallen. Is that no judgment whose voice (to use his own eloquent language) is heard in the "cry of those who but yesterday knew not a want; in the cry of the strong man and the famishing child; of the young girl, tempted by hunger, to a life of shame; the cry of woman, when her hour has come, with no comfort or cordial near her wretched bed?" With such scenes around us, and the whole nation consciously tottering upon the brink of ruin, what else shall we say but that God has visited us in very sore displeasure?

Suppose all this admitted—what then? Why, then, God's hand is recognized; then we are prepared to search and see wherein this great wickedness lieth, we have the basis for a sincere and speedy repentance—the only mode of appeasing His anger in the present, and averting dire calamities from our country in the future. This is what God requires of individuals, of churches, and of nations, who have forfeited his favor and incurred his displeasure.

But, while there has been a failure as to the true character of this chastisement, there has been a more manifest one in attempting to assign the cause for which it has been sent. For, while there has been such an almost universal reluctance to give it its true name, there has been a very general recognition that there was something wrong, and that things were not in their normal state, or, at least, in their usually prosperous condition. It is called a *panic*, and a *crisis*, and vague terms are employed about gloom and difficulty and embarrassment, but from what source we are not informed.

Whether it be from man or God, the work of chance—a kind of fortuitous concurrence of circumstances, or the necessary result of determined causes, whether it is a mere fatherly chastisement, or an incoherent event without any definite relation to God or his government, we are left to conjecture.

As to the cause, however, we have theories in abundance.

Female extravagance—the credit system—fast living—railroads—the tariff, and especially the *banks*—have all come in, and, perhaps, all deservedly, for their share of influence in bringing about the result. The nation has undoubtedly been indulging in a wild dance of extravagant folly, unconscious of the gulf that was yawning beneath—*Quem Deus vult perdere prius dementat*. Nations as well as individuals are sometimes given over in awful visitation to blindness of mind; they become more reckless as they approach the verge of national ruin, as the laugh of the maniac is loudest and wildest when he leaps from the giddy height upon the ruin beneath. The mistake does not consist in tracing the effect to these causes, but in resting upon them. “Is there evil in the city and the LORD hath not done it?” Great national calamities are to be traced to great national sins. God has announced the law of his government: “For the nation and kingdom that will not serve me shall perish.” Yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted. Nor can a nation more than an individual violate God’s law and expect to escape with impunity. If they sow the wind, they must reap the storm; if they plant the vine of Sodom, they must eat grapes of gall and clusters that are bitter. If they will not cease from their crimes, God will not lay aside his thunderbolts. Justice, although, according to the conception of the ancients, *lame*, never fails to overtake the guilty—her hand can only be stayed by repentance. In our own nation, we find causes far more than adequate to the production of all the disasters that we witness; the wonder is, not that the punishment is so severe, but that it is not far more fearful. The truth is, and it may as well be told, this nation, like the youthful criminals in our streets, has early attained maturity in crime—why not confess it and repent before God? What is the proper course for an individual who realizes that he has incurred God’s displeasure? Is it not to seek out his sin, confess it, repent, and pray to God for that forgiveness which He alone can confer. I have yet to learn that there is any other course provided in God’s word for *nations*.

But, unfortunately, of all nations, perhaps, we are the most sensitive to any mention of our faults, and therefore so very reluctant to acknowledge them either to man or God. It is a

maxim in the British government that "the king can do no wrong," because I believe he has a convenient method of handing over his sins to the parliament. "We, the people," claim the sovereignty in this land, and apply to ourselves the same maxim. A kind of demoniacal infatuation has taken possession of us, and we persuade ourselves that, in our national capacity, at least, we have attained a state of sinless perfection! We do not require even a parliament upon whose shoulders we might lay the burden of our national iniquities. Measured by our opportunities and professions, weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, and viewed in the light of the blessings that a merciful God has bestowed, we will be found among the most guilty nations upon the face of the earth, indeed, it would not be difficult to prove, *the very guiltiest*. Point me, who can, to any civilized or professedly christian nation, to whose charge such a sin as American slavery can be laid, or one at all comparable to it. Men may deny, denounce, deride—say just what they may—but there it is, the foul "damning spot" upon our national escutcheon, that "won't out"—that makes us the by-word and the reproach of nations, while the pitiful eagerness with which our divines stand ready to apologize for and defend it, fills the hearts of christians all over the world with grief and shame, and the mouth of infidelity with an argument to which we have no reply but a *blush*.

Dr. Baird—and we respect him personally as well as publicly, as highly as we can any one who in any shape undertakes to apologize for slavery—seemed to think that he had frightened the whole religious world, or at least the British portion of it, by threatening to introduce the subject of the "opium trade," should any mention be made at the Evangelical Alliance of American slavery. The old gentleman seemed to forget that *that* particular branch of commerce was not under the special protection of any religious denomination. That all the pulpits in the "three kingdoms" would be open to him or any one else to denounce it as vehemently as they chose, and that had its introduction into the discussions of the Alliance been at all proper, not a mouth would have been opened by way of apology or defense. We were sorry to see such a silly threat, and did we not entertain for Dr. Baird such feelings of genuine respect,

would be tempted to commend him to the celebrated prayer of Robert Burns—it would save him from such a blunder in the future. God grant that the day may soon dawn when these defenders of a system so foul and abominable may see themselves in the light in which other christians view them. How fearfully absurd for us to talk about the sin of Britain in withholding the Bible from the schools established in India, while we are silent as the grave with regard to the four millions of *slaves* on whose necks this nation has the iron heel of its power, and from whom it withholds the words of everlasting life.

Nor is slavery by any means the only sin with which, as a nation, we are chargeable. Our constitution of government, and its administration, are, to all intents and purposes, atheistic, ignoring the existence of God and every institution that he has established among men. This constitution was formed at a period when this country and Europe were both overrun by the principles of French infidelity, by men who were notoriously sceptical, and by whom all recognition of God was purposely excluded from this “remarkable document.” This no one can deny who has any acquaintance with the history of this period. Read the life of Dr. Dwight, and you will learn that the work which he and his noble compeers performed, and for which they deserve, and will receive, the lasting gratitude of christians, was the extirpation, to a very great extent, of its fatal and pernicious influence from the land; a work, however, which, unfortunately, they never accomplished in the *State*, as to its constitution or administration, and which remains to this day, in both respects, as thoroughly infidel as it was at its organization. But very recently, as you are doubtless all aware, our minister to France presented his credentials upon the Sabbath, a compliment perhaps to the cold-blooded usurper who rules that infidel nation, but an insult to the religious sentiment of the country which he represented. Can it be denied that this nation acquired the greater portion of her territory by means the most unwarrantable and unjustifiable? The wars with the Winnebagoes in the north and the Seminoles in the south, are yet fresh in our memory, while the revelations of the “Indian Aid Society” recently organized in this city, but too clearly

show that there is no material alteration in the general course of her policy to that unhappy race.

Toward weaker and neighboring nations, her conduct has been overbearing, unjust, and oppressive. Who is unmindful of the late disgraceful war with Mexico? or, who is ignorant that these filibustering expeditions, which have done so much to render our very *name* odious, are fitted out, and pass from our shores under the very eye, and with the connivance of the officers of the government—the President not excepted?

What shall we say of the existence of idolatry in its worst forms in California, and in this city, under the operation of our spurious ideas of universal toleration, or of the manner in which she has fostered that foul band of miscreants on our western border, who now defy our arms and affront our power?

These are all the legitimate offspring of that *proton pseudos* with which this nation commenced its career, the determination to separate religion from all connection with the constitution and administration of the government. When she declared her independence, she uttered great truths upon the rights and equality of man; but as soon as that boon was secured, she gave the lie to her professions by riveting more tightly the fetters upon the unhappy bondsmen in her power. "A golden-mouthed declaimer" has pronounced the declaration of independence glittering and sounding generalities, and the policy and practice of this nation show that in her mouth it was, and is, nothing else. Yes, something worse, glittering and-sounding falsehoods.

Thus must it ever be with nations who refuse allegiance to God and his Christ, who will not accept of his law as their rule, and his Son as their *Ruler*. Who will not acknowledge Him to whom every knee should bow and every tongue confess, and who, consequently, have no standard of rectitude by which their national policy may be guided.

Now, what is our present position? Like Israel of old, "cursed with a curse," and, for the same reason, we have "robbed God even this whole nation." Open rebellion in Utah—civil war imminent from the Kansas imbroglio—every-

where financial ruin and distress—gloomy forebodings of still more disasters upon every mind, like the toppling rock of Tantalus ready to fall at any moment, or the drawn sword of Damocles suspended by a single hair—the streams of national wealth dried up like waters in the desert, and the nation reeling upon the brink of a general bankruptcy.

Men may talk about our recuperative energies, our vast resources, our indomitable spirit and perseverance, or laugh at the idea of calling this a state of judgment, and pipe to the syren song of peace and prosperity, but all this will not remove the incubus which just now rests with such crushing power upon the national heart. We may close our chamber doors, draw the blinds, fasten the shutters, pull down our night-caps comfortably over our ears, but all this will not still the storm that is raging without.

The stale commonplaces about our *glorious* constitution, our *free* institutions, our *inviolable* Union, our *vast* material, wealth, etc., seem sadly out of place just now. “*Wild laughter in the throat of death.*”

Let us take God’s plan : “ Turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting and with weeping and with mourning, and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil, who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him, even a meat-offering and a drink-offering unto the Lord your God. Let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet ; let the priests, the *ministers* of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, spare thy people, O Lord, give not thine heritage to reproach. Behold, the hire of the laborers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth ; and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton ; ye have nourished your hearts as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just, and he doth not resist you.”

“ Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto

thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquility."

"Loose the bonds of wickedness ; undo the heavy burdens ; let the oppressed go free ; break *every* yoke."

This is God's remedy for such calamities as now afflict our nation. We propose it, with a high degree of confidence in its efficacy—with little hope of its adoption. We hear already that this is altogether *impracticable*. So it has proved to be in the history of the nations in the past, and we fear will be in the history of the nations for many years in the future. But let them remember that, while justice and repentance have been impracticable upon their parts, in the government of God—righteous, but awful—their utter destruction and annihilation have proved perfectly *practicable*. Let professed christians, ministers, and churches, who incorporate with such corrupt, God-dishonoring, and God-despising organizations, who flatter and fawn upon ungodly rulers, and who are ready to apologize for any iniquity, however enormous, provided the nation does it, remember that this is the law of God's government, that those who partake of their sins shall receive of their plagues.

We have spoken plainly, and with a full knowledge of all the prejudice and opposition that such language is calculated to excite, but not the less confidently as to its truth. It is a small matter to be judged of man's judgment. We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ. If our principles are not adapted to this age we can afford to wait. The kingdoms of this world *will* become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, for the Lord hath spoken it.

Though the nations forget God, he does not forget them ; but when they least expect it, arises from his place, arrays himself in the garments of vengeance, and makes them feel the awful power of his vindictive wrath. Thus will he continue to tread them in his anger, to trample them in his fury, to break them as a potter's vessel, until they submit, recognize the authority of his Son, and give the glory to his name that is due.

There must be a fearful conflict between the church and the world-powers before Zion can appear in her glory and her

beauty ; and the sooner the trumpet is blown and the battle begun, the better for her and the world. On whose standard victory will perch is not uncertain.

The Lord God in the midst of her is mighty ; he will hasten it in his time.

Be wise now, therefore, O ye kings ; be instructed ye judges of the earth. Kiss the Son lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him. Amen and amen.