

DEATH
of
PRESIDENT LINCOLN

A SERMON

Delivered in the *First Presbyterian Church*, Newark, N. J., *Sunday Morning*, April 16, 1865, by the *Pastor*

JONATHAN F. STEARNS, D.D.

CHAMPLAIN
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1919

DEATH *of*
PRESIDENT LINCOLN

Jonathan French Stearns

1865

To Judge Daniel Fish
with the sincere regards
of Hugh McHale

April 13, 1920.

This *Sermon* has been composed from the *Original Manuscript* in the *Collection of* the late *Charles Woodberry McLellan*, and printed in the *Month of July, 1919* at the *Moorsfield Press* in an edition of *Fifty Copies*, of which this is *No. 12.*

Foreword

JONATHAN FRENCH STEARNS was born at Bedford, Mass., on September 4th, 1808. His preparatory studies were pursued at Phillips Academy, Andover; he was graduated with high honors by Harvard College in 1830; he studied Theology at Andover Academy, and was licensed to preach by the Woburn Congregational Association of Massachusetts in 1834; the following year he was ordained and installed Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Newburyport, Mass., from which he was called to the Pastorate of the First Church of Newark, N. J., and was installed December 13th, 1849. In 1883, because of continued ill-health, he was made Pastor Emeritus, which relation he sustained to the First Church until his death, which occurred at New Brunswick, N. J., on November 11th, 1889. DR. STEARNS was a member of the Board of Directors of Union Theological Seminary; and a Trustee of the College of New Jersey.

It is with the most tender memories that this Sermon on the Death of President Lincoln is printed, to accomplish the oft-repeated desire of my father, Charles Woodberry McLellan, that it be given a permanent form, as a

slight expression of his affectionate regard for Dr. Stearns and for his family,

The manuscript was presented to him by the Honorable Seargent Prentiss Stearns, who found it among his father's papers.

On the brown cover into which the manuscript is sewn Dr. Stearns had written:

April 16 1865 A M

Death of President Lincoln.

Assassinated Apr 14 Died Apr 15 1865 at 7:22 ocl A M

On the first page of the manuscript is written in pencil the selection of the hymns for the service:

90 Psalm Our God our help

68 Select God moves in a mysterious way.

358 Select Wait [O my Soul.]

The following notes, on note-paper, were laid in between the leaves of the manuscript:

Lincoln's Death

How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud.
Lam. 2:1

The elders of the d. of Z. sit upon the ground & keep silence they have girded themselves with sackcloth the virgins of Jerusalem hang down their heads to the ground.

What thing shall I liken unto thee O daughter of Zion for thy breach is great like the sea who can heal thee.

Abner 2 *Sam. 3:31.*

The Lord's voice crieth unto the city and the man of wisdom shall see thy name Hear the rod & who hath appointed it. *Micah 6:9.*

Put not your trust in princes. *Psa. 146:3.*

It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes.

The Lord hath chastened me sore but he hath not delivered me over unto death. Open unto me the gates of righteousness I will go in unto them and I will praise the Lord.

Give unto the Lord ye kindreds of the people. Give unto the

Lord glory & strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name. Fear before him all the earth. Let the heavens rejoice & let the earth be glad and let men say among the nations that the Lord reigneth.

Job 14 Man that is born

Ps. 90 Lord thou hast been our dwelling place

Ps. 103:15 As for man his days &c.

Ps. 39 Lord make me to know mine end

Ecc. 12 Or ever the silver cord

John 11:25 Jesus saith unto her I am the resurrection

Now is Christ risen

With malice towards none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphans, to do all that may achieve a just and lasting peace among ourselves & with all nations.

This being the first production of the Moorsfield Press I will say here that until 1788, when the present name was given to this village, the little settlement was called Moorsfield on River Chazy, after Judge Pliny Moore, the first settler, at whose Homestead the Press is located.

The kindly advice of Mr. Winfred Porter Truesdell in the typography of this brochure, and his assistance and encouragement, are gratefully acknowledged.

HUGH McLELLAN

Champlain, N. Y., July 12, 1919.

Death of President Lincoln

2 SAMUEL, 1 : 19 *The beauty of Israel is slain
upon thy high places: how are the mighty fallen!*

DEATH is in all cases a fearful messenger. Yet, in its ordinary course, how few pause to regard it!

It may come into a family and take away the strongest or the loveliest. It may appear in a neighborhood and remove here an aged grandsire, there an infant, here a youth in his bloom and there a man in the maturity of his powers and influence. And to that neighborhood or family the event will be full of solemnity. But the world at large will go on its old ways. Every day we read lists of those recently departed. Every name signalizes the extinction of some fond hopes, the sundering of some close ties, the breaking of some affectionate hearts. But we pass on. We hear of lives lost suddenly in fearful ways, of bodies crushed or lacerated, of blackened limbs strewed fearfully round a burning hulk, of hundreds and thousands of brave men falling in heaps on the bloody battlefield. But it is only a picture—a tale told. We turn presently to other topics, to the price-current, to the specula-

tions of politics, to some light song or oft-repeated witticism, and, in a few moments, the whole impression is obliterated.

But there are cases in which the mortal stroke, although it may fall on but a single victim, touches a more far-reaching chord, and awakens a more intense and abiding sensation. There are cases wherein the angel of death seems to take his station on the loftiest eminence, and from the very pinnacle of a nation's greatness and confidence, blow a trumpet-blast in the ears of an astonished world.

Such a case, no doubt, is that uppermost in all our thoughts at the present moment. If I may judge at all of your feelings by my own, the astounding news which reached us yesterday morning has scarcely left sufficient calmness or freedom of mind to reflect on any other topic; and I cannot persuade myself to discourse here, even upon the inspiring and instructive themes that would ordinarily claim our attention this morning, to the exclusion of a lesson of God's holy providence which is, to every citizen of this great Republic and every sojourner in the land, the lesson of the hour. God has taken away, suddenly, and by a most awful stroke, the Nation's trusted head. He hath "covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in His anger, and cast down from heaven to earth the beauty of Israel."

I do not believe there is a man here, in whose heart there is a particle of true love to his country, who does not feel that we have met with a most oppressive calamity. Whatever differences of opinion may exist on

political questions, they can and will have no influence in the estimate of an event so full of impressive lessons and so fraught with impenetrable consequences. The nation bows together today as common mourners, and can only say, in the spirit of resignation and trust in the wisdom of the Infinite: "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because Thou didst it."

This is no time, nor is it necessary, for me to review the thrilling events of the last four years. Fresh in the memory of all are the impressions of that most solemn and afflictive Sabbath morning, when, in deep humiliation and apprehension, we met here to prostrate ourselves before God and seek His guidance in the first scenes of an unknown national tragedy. We had been for more than three-quarters of a century, a most prosperous and happy nation. We had grown great and powerful beyond all the precedents of history. We had enjoyed freedom under the guardianship of good laws as no people on earth had enjoyed before us. We had promised ourselves, with a confidence not altogether without reason, a national career which should be full of blessings, not to ourselves only and our posterity, but to oppressed and longing millions in all parts of the earth. But suddenly, how had all our hopes been darkened! In the very springtime of the Nation's youth seeds of mischief had been secretly deposited. They had been growing in silence while we slept, and many among us even flattered themselves that the noxious tares would ripen into the choicest of wheat. But they had ripened, as we ought to have anticipated,

in accordance with their own inherent nature. Out of slavery had come treason and rebellion; and out of rebellion, fierce, blood-thirsty, defiant war. The fearful opening had been made at Sumter, and the flag of our country, beautiful always, but now more than ever before through the new affections that have clustered round it, had been insulted, torn, blackened and shot through with hostile missiles. Traitor hands had prevailed. Traitor voices had shouted in exultation over the disgrace of the country that nurtured them. The Ship of State was out on a tempestuous sea and God alone could tell what was to be its destiny.

At that time the people at large knew but little of the character and qualifications of the man whom God's providence had placed at their head. He was a man unknown to fame, almost untried in statesmanship; inexperienced in administration. There was nothing dazzling or imposing about him; nothing either in his person, or his plain, homely manners and speech, to give promise either of great counsels or great achievements. He had undertaken a task of most appalling magnitude. As a prominent foreign General said at the time, there was not a monarch in Europe who would have accepted the responsibility thus suddenly thrust on the plain, self-instructed lawyer of the West. It was easy to put in circulation all manner of reports and ludicrous anecdotes to his disadvantage. Some said he had no plan or policy; some that he had no influence, but was a mere tool in the hands of his advisers; some that he was but a trifler in the midst of a nation's

agony, and had no conception of the earnest and most momentous crisis that was upon us. But there was one point in which the great national heart never wavered in its estimation of his character—the people always believed him to be thoroughly honest. It was no mere party watch-word. It was the expression of a deep, steady, popular conviction. They believed he had entered upon his great task with a settled and undivided determination to do his duty according to the best of his knowledge and ability; and whatever deficiencies might be found in his qualifications, or whatever mistakes he might make, he meant well, and would be party, knowingly, to no schemes against the interest of his country. This conviction served often to sustain the public faith, in emergencies which would otherwise have been almost sure to shake it. And it has done much to create and sustain a sound, healthful moral sentiment, whose influence in public affairs will, we trust, be of lasting benefit. Indeed, as it seems to me, there is scarcely a sublimer spectacle in history, than the confidence and affection with which, in all parts of the loyal States, the popular heart has reposed, year after year, in the simple virtues of that simple-minded, unpretending man.

This is not the time or the place to attempt an analysis of his character. History, no doubt, will do it justice, and give him a high place on its rolls. Suffice it to say, he has more than fulfilled the expectations which the popular instincts entertained concerning him at the beginning. No man ever held his great office

and performed it's functions with greater integrity of purpose and greater singleness of aim. He seems to have had but one object from the first, and that was to discharge his duty in the circumstances that should surround him. And here, let me remark, is a secret of wonderful power in all difficult enterprises. If a man sees what is the object to be aimed at; sees it clearly and steadily and sees nothing else, half his task is already executed. We see men perform wonderful feats of legerdemain. How do they accomplish them? Why, simply by seeing exactly what they intend to do, and doing just *that*, and that only. "A double minded man," says St. James, "is unstable in all his ways." But the words of our Lord instruct us: "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light."

The true greatness of our lamented President was not of a kind to strike at once common observers. It's very simplicity veiled it. But, as time passed, and the exigencies of the people, always disposed to hold public men to a strict account, put his capacity as well as integrity to severe tests, the great qualities of his character came out often where they were not looked for, and challenged the admiration of the world. The candor of this hour of mourning will, I am sure, acknowledge that whatever errors any may think they find in his measures, few under all the conditions could have performed his great task better, or more wisely. That he has made some mistakes need not be denied. Who have made fewer? That he had faults is, of course, to be admitted. Whose have more manifestly

and invariably leaned to virtue's side? It is said he was too lenient to traitors. Alas, the foul deed which has stricken sorrow into his family and covered the Nation with mourning, shows how little was their gratitude! He has been accused of wavering when he ought to have been decided. But, if slow in making up an opinion, who can say he was not firm and persevering in maintaining and executing it? It is worthy of remark that among all his most important measures, scarcely one has been taken back, and scarcely one left unsupported by the settled judgment of the country. He grew steadily, every year, in the estimation of the world; and at the moment of his removal probably no man, here or elsewhere, stood higher in the admiration of all true philanthropists, or had more of the hearty affection and confidence of all classes of his loyal fellow-citizens. Truly "there is a Prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel."

And what a stunning fall! The hearts of the people all over the land, are smitten through as by the keenest personal sorrow. That kind old man who, stern as his task was, kept ever a heart tender as a woman's; that unpretending, unaspiring spirit, who said, no doubt out of the very depth of his consciousness, that it was no pleasure to him to exalt over anybody; who would have thought malignity could seek his life's blood! It is to us as though a father had been foully murdered in the presence of his children. It comes, too, to darken in our hearts, so many proud hopes! comes in the very hour of the Nation's exultant gratitude! comes

when all the resources of wise statesmanship and prudent firmness seem peculiarly requisite to heal the wounds, and restore the strength of the broken and bleeding body politic!

But God has lessons to teach us in this bitter and dispiriting bereavement. We must look for them; we must learn them; we must be prepared to put them in practice.

One of these is, if I am not mistaken, that we should cherish deeply in our hearts an abhorrence of rebellion. The people were perhaps beginning to abate too much their sense of it's heinousness. The prospect of peace and re-union seemed so attractive that many were almost ready, in the ardor of their enthusiasm, not only to forgive, but to forget the foul crime by which the Nation's life had been put in jeopardy. I know forgiveness is a heavenly virtue, but not to the disparagement of law; not to the neglect or violation of the holy sanctity of justice. *God's* mercy does not set aside justice; neither should man's, when man, as God's minister, wields the sword of justice for a nation's safety. Look over the land and see what foul deeds rebellion has been doing. See the beautiful South trampled down and laid waste by the ravages of war. See the graves, hardly green, of hundreds of thousands of our bravest and noblest sons. Go into hundreds of thousands of homes and hear the sorrowful story of brothers, sons, husbands and fathers gone out in arms to the bloody field at the call of their Country, never to return. Remember all the painful, trembling anguish of the last

four years, while our Country, dear to us as the apple of our eye, has been the scene of domestic traitors, and the taunt and byword of foreign foes. And what has done all this? Why, it is rebellion: causeless, shameless, reckless, defiant rebellion—rebellion against one of the best of governments, and in the service of one of the most infamous of causes. And should we not hate it? Does not every sacred principle of justice and humanity require us to hate it? I know there are thousands, perhaps millions, in the Southern States guiltless of the dreadful crime except through ignorance. I would not say a word against *them*. But that does not make the crime *itself* any the less hateful. Indeed the fact that many otherwise well-disposed minds have been so cruelly deluded, adds a fearful aggravation to the crime of those who deluded them. And what appalling lengths is it prepared to go! We have heard of the cruel fate of our poor prisoners. We have heard of the incendiary's torch applied to hotels filled with unsuspecting guests. We have heard, all along, of plots of assassination, though we could hardly credit the suspicion. But the reality stares us now full in the face. See that venerable old Statesman gashed with a murderous wound, in the presence of his attendants on the bed of sickness. See the sacred form of the Chief Magistrate of the Nation, the representative of it's majesty, smitten down in a public assembly, and now lifeless in his blood. I care not who was the immediate instrument of the deed; or what the motive. It was the spirit of rebellion: fierce,

cunning, most unscrupulous rebellion, that gave force and direction to that deadly weapon. I would not counsel revenge. Nay, let every vindictive feeling be kept down in every bosom. But let the resolve be firm—firmer than ever, now that the blood of our beloved Chieftain has been poured out as a libation upon it, that, in the name of justice and the strength of Heaven, rebellion in this land must and shall be utterly put down.

But we must not dwell exclusively on what are, after all, but secondary causes. The main lesson of this hour is, what indeed is the lesson of God's holy providence in all afflictive and all joyful experiences, that of our dependence upon Him. He is the great King. He rules among the nations as well as in every private circle. He "putteth up one and pulleth down another." He orders all the events of our *lives*, and He appoints both the time and the manner of every man's *death*. Wicked men can do nothing except as He permits them; nor can they go, in their wicked designs, a hair's breadth beyond the mark to which His wisdom has limited them. It is a truth we are too apt, all of us, to forget, however firmly we may profess to hold it. But His startling providences come to awaken our attention and revivify our failing faith. They teach us that, as we can do nothing for our own protection unless He favors our endeavors; so even the powers of darkness, however powerfully and craftily they may combine, can do nothing against us except under the permission of His sovereignty. How little any of us

anticipated amidst the rejoicings of last week, what we now are experiencing! How little could we have done to prevent it by any foresight we were able to exercise! It is not man's doing, after all. It is that of the all-wise, infinite and beneficent Sovereign. The voice that comes to us in the report of yesterday is no other than this: "Be still and know that I am God."

Let us commit the cause of our beloved Country, no less than the personal and social affairs of our daily life, into the care of God's providence. How marvelously has He wrought for us, in all the fearful vicissitudes of this war, from the beginning hitherto! This day, which marks the completion of four years of conflict, marks also that of four years of signal national mercies. However sceptical men's minds and hearts may have been in times past, thousands of them have been constrained to own, as they looked on and saw the events which were taking place in the midst of us, that God's hand was working visibly here in a way not to be mistaken. He has not carried out *our* plans. He has not followed our short-sighted notions. But there is a moral aim as manifest in this war as though it were written on the skies, and to the accomplishment of the great design thus displayed, all our reverses and disappointments, as well as our successes, have been made to contribute. It does not seem to include our destruction as a nation, though who can say our sins do not richly deserve it. But it includes our purification. It includes the removal of those fearful evils that have hitherto impeded our progress. It includes

our chastisement and the humbling of our vainglorious pride. It includes, through the instrumentality of these and the like experiences, our final exaltation to a higher platform of true glory and beneficence. Let us learn to permit the all-wise God to conduct the affairs of this Nation just as He pleases. We have a work to do, all of us. There is not one among us, however small or obscure, who does not owe his country a debt of service, at this critical period. These mournful tidings that have come to us, summon us to a new self-consecration. The faithful and heroic Chief-tain who has gone as our head, and so nobly kept up his courage and cheerfulness, has fallen a sacrifice to his devoted patriotism. Let his example stimulate every young man and every old man to tread in the same footsteps, though it should be to the same consequences. But let us trust, after our best has been performed, not to ourselves, but to the Almighty Arm. It cannot be denied that there is a very dark and foreboding aspect in the event that has come upon us. The Nation has changed her rulers all of a sudden. The power and direction has passed, as in a moment, into hands untried. The ship has been blown off, as it were, into the open sea, when she was just entering the harbor and preparing to throw out her anchor. But on that sea, stormy as it may be, God rules. Take Him, mariners, for your Pilot, and never doubt all will be well. Perhaps just this change, at just this moment, was what was most needed for our highest national safety. Pray for your new rulers, brethren. Seek

earnestly and constantly to God for His wisdom to control and direct them.

"God alone is great," said an eminent French preacher. And the whole assembly, electrified by the words, and moved by some supernatural power, rose to their feet responsive to the impressive announcement. It was an old truth, and they had all heard it from their childhood; but at that moment there was lying before them a visible monument of man's vanity and God's irresistible sovereignty. The preacher did but give a voice to what their eyes saw and their hearts were pre-disposed to feel. It is the lesson which God's holy providence is teaching you and me, my friends, on this mournful occasion. This mourning drapery which covers all our sacred things, and meets our eye this morning whichever way we turn; that consternation and that tender grief depicted in the countenances of all we meet; this throbbing and sinking depression of our own hearts—all speak to us with that impressive lesson: "God alone is great." We are apt to *lean* upon our great and good men, our generals, our statesmen, our wise patriots, our far-seeing counsellors. But the voice of God's holy providence says to us today, "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?" "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish." O, it is not well with us, brethren and friends; it never can be, unless we have God on our side. The nation that will

not serve Him shall perish. The individual soul that will not acknowledge His sovereignty; submit to His will; obey His commands; repent of all sin committed against Him, and be reconciled with Him in the only way in which He permits sinners to be reconciled, must abide under His displeasure whether in trouble or prosperity, and in the world to come meet a fearful reckoning before Him.

Let us all hear, then, His invitation of mercy. *Our* death may not be as sudden and fearful in its manner, as that which has summoned him whom we mourn today—without a moment's warning. But how sudden it may be none of us can tell. "Prepare to meet thy God!" sounds out in every circumstance of this providence. And wisdom answers, "Come now, and let us return unto the Lord: for He hath torn, and He will heal us; He hath smitten, and He will bind us up." This day of rebuke will not be all sadness if it thus disposes us. "Vain is the help of man;" that is sure; but our help cometh from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. O, ye travellers to eternity; in all your fears; in all your discouragements; in all your sorrows, "trust ye in the Lord forever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength."