

L. H. Thurston

THE CALAMITY OF PITTSBURGH.

A SERMON,

DELIVERED IN THE

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

ALLEGHENY CITY,

APRIL 24, 1845;

BEING THE DAY APPOINTED BY THE MAYOR OF SAID CITY,
AS A SEASON OF FASTING, HUMILIATION AND PRAYER,
IN CONSEQUENCE OF THE APPALLING CONFLAGRATION OF
A LARGE PORTION OF PITTSBURGH, ON THE
TENTH OF THAT MONTH.

BY

REV. E. P. SWIFT, D. D.,

PASTOR OF SAID CHURCH.

ALLEGHENY:

KENNEDY & BROTHER, FEDERAL STREET.

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CORRESPONDENCE.

REV. DR. SWIFT:

Dear Sir: The undersigned have been appointed a Committee on behalf of a considerable number of the members of your congregation, to solicit from you, for publication, a copy of the Discourse delivered by you on Thursday morning last, on the occasion of the Fast, in reference to the late conflagration. Its adaptation to the occasion, and to the promotion of just views and feelings in the community in regard to that fearful calamity, has induced a common conviction among those who heard it, that it ought to go to the public. You will oblige us, therefore, by furnishing us with a copy, at the earliest convenient season. Very respectfully, your obedient servants,

ALEX. SEMPLE,
WM. M. COOPER, } *Committee.*
JOHN IRWIN, JR.

APRIL 26th, 1845.

ALLEGHENY, April 28th, 1845.

My Respected Friends: I thank you and the other members of the congregation, for the favorable sentiments which you have kindly expressed of the suitableness of the Discourse on Fast-Day to the objects of that appointment. It was prepared in some haste, and without any thought of a further use of it. There are reasons in my own mind why I should not wish it to go before the public; aware as I am that occasional Discourses of this kind are often subjected to censure, both for what they contain and what they are supposed improperly to omit; and in even an impartial review of public morals and religion, the writer is liable to a misapprehension of the sentiments he would express. I feel, however, that considerations of the highest moment to our common welfare as a community require us all to endeavor to turn the late appalling visitation of God, to our own advantage and his glory: and as you entertain the hope that the publication of the Sermon may contribute its mite to this desirable end, I feel constrained to submit it to your disposal: and beg you to accept, for yourselves and others of our congregation, the affectionate acknowledgments of your Pastor,

E. P. SWIFT.

Messrs. Irwin, Semple and Cooper.

SERMON.

"Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee; lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited."—JER. 6:8.

WE have been suddenly called, my brethren, to look at scenes of ruin and desolation in our neighboring city, and are now invited to enter the house of God and converse with him, amidst the overwhelming attestations of his just displeasure. We are called from the customary pursuits of this day, to clothe ourselves in sack-cloth, to humble ourselves under his holy correction, and implore of him the removal of the tokens of his righteous anger. Such a crisis in human things it is always difficult to meet; and full of responsibility and danger is the position in which we, as a community, stand under a chastisement which has filled the whole land with astonishment and dismay.

It is a remark, which the history of christian as well as pagan nations strikingly verifies, that mankind are extremely apt to overlook the hand of God in the calamities which they suffer; and hence it is often requisite to the great moral ends of God, that they should be repeated or prolonged, in order properly to arrest the public attention, and suitably humble and reform the public mind and manners. The Israelitish people furnish, at various periods in their history, many exemplifications of this truth; and our text refers to one of those occasions in which "the God of their fathers," having portrayed before them an impending chastisement, earnestly appeals to them to be "*corrected* and reformed" by it. The king of Babylon, with his generals and armies, was anxious to invade and desolate the kingdom and destroy Jerusalem, and a just and righteous Providence would favor his intentions, if the measures now taken to promote their reformation and amendment failed.

We are thus taught that the calamities inflicted upon a people, from whom *the soul*—that is, the favor and good will, and Provi-

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dential blessings of God, *has not departed*, are intended as the expressions of his just displeasure; and the means of such an amendment as may make it compatible with his righteous attributes to continue and increase the blessings of outward and social prosperity. When we experience these tokens of the anger of an offended heaven upon our public and social welfare, it therefore becomes us,

I. *Humbly to inquire into the probable causes of the divine displeasure.*

II. *Investigate the correction and reform which they are designed to effect.*

III. *Apply to our minds, with devout humility and trust in God, the motives to correction and amendment offered us by our heavenly Father, "lest my soul depart from thee," or be loosed and severed from thee.*

1. With those impressions of terror and dismay with which these cities were filled a few days ago, fresh in your thoughts, I need say but little to convince you that this duty is appropriate to our condition. Our cities have long been mercifully exempt from those local visitations of pestilence, and other adversities which others have experienced; and the history of few American cities can offer a longer-continued or brighter record of the divine care and beneficence. But is there not *now* in our history a memorable page to be written? Are there not *here* the proofs that God has a controversy with us? Do we not stand *to-day* signalized among the cities of this nation for the greatness of that calamity, whose character and design we are now to examine. The *visible facts*—the *physical outlines* every eye can now trace in yonder desolation, but of the absolute intentions of heaven, or the moral results to be produced, or the remoter consequences upon our social and commercial prosperity, we know but little.

It is sufficient to say, that amidst the active and stirring pursuits of a pleasant mid-day, the hand of calamity fell upon the heart of the city with such remarkable suddenness and severity, that in the compass of two or three hours, it threatened to hurl the whole city down to the lowest depths of depression—leaving it wholly depopulated—an entire mass of ruins, covered with the thousands of a needy, hungry, shelterless, and almost clotheless sufferers. In

mercy to us all, however, the mighty flame marked out for itself a pathway, broad and fearful indeed, taking in its rapid course long ranges of costly dwellings and warehouses, levelling blocks and edifices with almost inconceivable rapidity, and depopulating streets, in which for thirty and forty, and fifty years, hundreds of families had dwelt in security. So impetuous and resistless was its march from block to block, that it drove their inmates in crowds before it, leaving almost every thing behind them, enveloping a few of the less apprehensive in the flame which consumed their dwellings; and so intense was its fury that goods and furniture deposited in the streets were there seized upon by the destructive element and destroyed. Thus, as the day declined, it had already traversed the distance of more than a mile of compact buildings—laid twenty squares, covering sixty acres in ruins—laying utterly waste some of our finest edifices, and consuming, by computation, from ten to twelve millions of property, and a proportionate share of the improvements of half a century. Thus, from mid-day till the setting sun, there was accomplished a *change*, such as probably no city ever before beheld in so brief a compass, exhibiting in the silence of death and the desolations of a desert, long streets and blocks, where at noon eleven or twelve hundred families had lived secure, and thousands of goods had been safely stored. When the evening star arose the brilliant fires and ceaseless sounds of its many factories were quenched and silent, and the shades of night commingled with the fluttering, dying fires of a thousand homes, while houseless mothers, wives and children, pale and trembling, were seeking to find each other, and a shelter in the darkness of the night.

For a time, indeed, this dreadful conflagration seemed likely to claim, in addition to these dwellings and their valuable contents, a great and an appalling destruction of life, and every one who beheld it in its power and majesty consuming the sinews of mercantile strength—lofty and reputedly fire-proof edifices, and even the iron safes of its merchants, as flaxen threads, must be a witness that nothing but the mercy of God could have saved the rest, or left a door of escape to the hundreds who might have perished in the flames. Yes, and had the winds of heaven received such a commission to guide and accelerate its course, it might have rushed forward through

these bridges to our shores, and employed the evening hours of that eventful day, in sweeping all these houses and sanctuaries from the face of the earth. Thus, brethren, as if to impress upon us for our common benefit, and that of all other communities and cities, and in the most distinct and audible manner, the greatness and sovereignty of God, and the weakness and helplessness of man, this sublime and awful devastation came upon us when all our energies were awake, and the many thousands of our people were soon brought together ready to combine their wisdom and their strength to save the dwellings and the persons of each other. But how did astonished crowds stand with anxious hearts, and gaze upon the rolling sheet of flame, and learn afresh at every rush of the consuming element, that God, in his adorable Providence, was addressing us in accents of terrible earnestness and reality, intended for our special profit, and the moral instruction of this whole nation, unto whom we were made a spectacle of his glorious majesty.

Let us then feel that "we are as nothing before him," and proceed with an humble and teachable disposition, to look at this visitation, and see if we can discover those sins appertaining to us as a community, which it may be intended to reprove and correct.

1. We must recognize God as the great *invisible, efficient agent* in this calamity, and feel that the hand of his displeasure is upon us. Of this great and awful Being, without whose notice not a sparrow dies or a hair of our head falls to the ground, if we speak at all in the explanations of his chastisements, our "words" may well "be few" and "well-ordered" before him. There is no doubt but the special acts of his adorable Providence are often grounded upon reasons and ends which are inaccessible to us, and that at times for no reasons visible or discoverable by men, he intends one place or community to be, in the calamities which they suffer, the common instrument of instruction and reproof to many others. His knowledge also confines not only the past, present and future, but also the contingent, or what would be if his own dispensations were different from what they are actually made to be. In the boundlessness of his understanding and knowledge, and the perfection of his great kingdom, we discover the reasons why he does not travel oftentimes in what would appear to men to be the most direct and

comprehensive way to reach his ends, and why an administration which often comprehends many ends in the issues of one event, and as often many events in the production of one end, should appear mysterious and incomprehensible to finite minds. Thus, it may often be, in his general visitation, that the most afflicted are not the most guilty; and the most wicked generally and absolutely speaking, may not be the most particularly criminal. This will appear plain, when we look at communities in their outward relations to divine Providence, and the comparative light and blessings which they enjoy. We thus see why the Jews were at times more obnoxious to the judgments of God than other nations, when they were less socially licentious and depraved. Besides, a nation or community may be so far destitute of the elements of divine truth, that it may be incapable of a fit application of the lessons of providential calamity, while to another this may be one of the most useful means of instruction. Beyond all considerations of this kind, there is still another of very great importance. If there are certain principles of religion, which are most needful to be believed and felt for the personal welfare and salvation of man as an individual, there are others, connected with the common affairs and pursuits of life, and the secular interests of society, which are equally needful to the prosperity and welfare of communities. Here the great vital principle of religion is the *entire dependence of man* for all his earthly success *upon the constant care and aid, and protection and blessing of Divine Providence*, as a feeling in his mind, which habitually guides and influences his life. This principle—this doctrine, is in its practical effect, in the daily pursuits of life, most comprehensive and salutary. *Strict honesty and manly integrity* in all business transactions; *moderation* in the desires and pursuits of gain; a noble, unselfish *spirit of good will* to others; *a virtuous exertion* to meet and realize all the kind intentions of Providence towards us, and a filial remembrance of its kindnesses, and a *daily gratitude to God* for them are among its fruits. “In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.” “A man’s heart deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps.” “Except the Lord build the house they labor in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.” “Every good gift and every per-

fect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights; and ye ought to say, If the Lord will we shall live and do this or that." The practical impression of these, and like divine maxims, carried out in the common pursuits of active life, are to the commercial soundness and entire welfare of a community what the helm is to a vessel or a safety-valve to an engine; and it may be expected that among a christian people especially, God will guard against its subversion with peculiar jealousy. Now there is not only a predisposition in all men to forget this dependence, but if I am not mistaken, there is in the very course of things in great *manufacturing towns* and *cities* a very peculiar tendency to this error. The reason is obvious. No human calculations as to the future results of the application of capital and industry are apparently more certain and uniform. Take for example one of our great iron establishments, and let but a few data be given, and the experienced manufacturer can tell with singular precision, the result of the investment of thousands of dollars, and the labor of hundreds of workmen, months and even years to come. So the individual operator foresees his daily or nightly toils, and wages regular as the daily sun. Hence there is no reference to the varieties of wind and weather, so unceasingly important to all the calculations of the farmer and the shipper; but here a peculiar uniformity comes forward to impress itself upon all collateral branches of business, and lead society to feel that if Providence simply holds the reins of its general daily administration as they now are, and leaves all the rest to their own wisdom and forethought, they need nothing more. I would not be understood to affirm that we as a community have, above others, lost a proper sense of our *constant dependence* upon the good Providence of God; or that christian men among us, bought with a Saviour's blood, sanctified by a Saviour's spirit, and for years past long prospered by a Saviour's Providence, have come more than *other christian men*, to embark in and follow large manufacturing and commercial transactions, without feeling their need of prayer and faith, and a devout consultation with heaven, as to their weighty and responsible pursuits; nor would I say that these influences in addition to those which the people of other places experience have made us criminal in the sight of God above others, but I would ask, are we

not *verily guilty* in this matter? We may all see the social evils and moral delinquencies which must arise from such an error, to say nothing of its offensiveness and dishonor to him, "in whom we live and move and have our being;" and now when the Most High has spoken to us in the deep-toned accents of his displeasure, must we not all confess that the admonition is just and needful? Do we not perceive how a people so circumstanced may have incurred a more than common criminality in this respect, and why they should be chosen as the medium through which heaven re-proclaims the lesson of man's dependence upon him whose kingdom ruleth over all? In a land of expanded enterprize, and rising cities and forming character, what sin could tend in its consequences so effectually to blast the secular prosperity of a *christian people*, and leave their energies to grow unchastened and untrained, as that to which I refer; and without the merciful and impressive checks of Providence, what is to become of us as a nation? And now when the Almighty has, in as it were the geographical centre of this great and favored Republic, uttered his voice, and by the momentary suspension of his essential protection as our glorious Preserver, has left so large a part of the adjoining city in ruins, shall we not "ascribe righteousness to his throne," humbly confess our forgetfulness of him, and under a deep conviction that all our excellency and wisdom and strength are nothing without him, implore of him grace, that we as a people may hereafter be made an example of sanctified correction and chastened prosperity.

2. We proceed to examine the *Instrument*—the *visible agent* employed for our chastisement, as it may aid us in our present investigation. The *agencies of Providence*, whether for our present happiness or correction, are many and various; and these agents or second causes, when used to afflict us, it is often proper and necessary particularly to consider, not only because it is a general rule of Providence that these are intended clearly to reveal his hand, but because frequently they are designed to exhibit to man the grounds of his displeasure in the form of the calamity itself. This is stated on various occasions; as when God by the prophet announced the desolations of Israel, (Ezek. 7:27,) he said "I will do unto them after their way, and according to their deserts will I judge

them, and they shall know that I am the Lord." That is, they shall recognize my hand in the fact that the calamity harmonizes with the nature of the offence.

Of all the physical agents of Providence, the elements of nature perhaps most distinctly reveal his hand, because being far removed above the power of man, and under his immediate control, every important deviation from their established course indicates a change in his administration, and often strikingly unfolds the greatness of his power. They are not only the essentials of our organic existence; but even their desolating inundations and fearful earthquakes and sweeping tornadoes have not destroyed the hopes and lives of men, without imparting to the surface of the earth new richness and strength of soil, brought from its deep recesses, to bring forth food for the support of animal life. *Fire* is one of the most mighty of these agents, and most clearly reveals the hand of God. There are gaseous substances continually forming in the great laboratory of nature, and cases of spontaneous combustion at times occur in ways to show us how insecure every thing we possess would be if Providence did not constantly preserve its wise and exact chemical adjustments. How dependent upon this must we be when the very essential heat of our bodies arises from the combustion which is going on in the circulating blood; and when the gasses which generate in the very bowels of the earth, and explode so as to shake oceans and continents to their very centre, might become in an hour the instruments of the extinction of our race. If the winds and clouds and waters are safe only "in the hollow of his hand," and are his messengers when they invade our property and life, not less so is the desolating conflagration.

Fire has been the appalling agent whose devastations we deplore; and it is worthy of our special consideration, that in these cities more than in any other spot on earth it has been the agent of our prosperity, our wealth and industry. It has made our great manufacturing interests what they are, and has earned for us with unceasing action day and night the great amount of resources which we have lost, as well as what remain. It has been the common and far-known remark, that when the God of nature stored these numerous hills with inexhaustible supplies of that food best suited to

the nature of this element, he placed this locality in the midst of unparalleled advantages for manufacturing wealth and gain; because fire, in its physical application as a motive power, could live and work safer and stronger and cheaper, than anywhere else. Hence our mineral advantages and extended manufacturing interests, have become the pride and boast and idolatry of our own people and the citizens of our commonwealth. They have made us a moral, industrious and thrifty, but it is to be feared a worldly, self-dependent and God-forgetting people. We have looked upon these great fountains of industry, wealth and trade in the most useful and essential articles of agricultural and mechanical consumption; and we have looked upon the triumphant application of *heat* and *fire* in their mighty and ceaseless action, working out for us the riches and the gains of trade in almost every form of physical industry, and we have felt as a community too much disposition to glory in these things; and to think that neither objects of common enterprize and improvement, nor religion itself should divert us from the purposes of worldly care and emolument. The undying sounds of potent machinery—the exact rules of daily manual occupation, and the great concentration of trade and business, have awakened continually our mental energies to think and labor “for the life that now is,” and put far away from us the “life which is to come.”

And now, in an unpropitious hour, this the long-active and singularly obedient servant of our convenience and prosperity has broken the bonds of subjection, and risen up in arms against us, and in the fury of its course threatened to mingle the very ashes of our bodies with those of our wealth and our homes. It rose up against us, as if bidden *from on high*, just when Providence had prepared all combustible objects by a long and unparalleled drought, to reveal their weakness and exposure; and just as the sweeping winds were ready, by peculiar preparation, to become the chariots on which it might ride in the awful majesty of desolation, from block to block and from street to street, high above our heads, and swifter than our speed.

But how surprisingly in its origin we can mark the hand of God. I suppose no stranger unacquainted with the peculiar character of

the *fire* and *heat* generated and fed by coal, like ours, as they differ from the blaze and sparks and cinders of irregular wood consumption, has ever come into these cities, and walked out in the shade of evening to behold the bright glare of many furnaces in the heart of the city, and the high and intense flame steaming up from its tall chimneys without a feeling of great insecurity. He has been ready to say, if these are not quenched the whole city must, before morning, be laid in ashes. Yet what is his surprise to learn that no such calamity has ever rushed forth even upon the common wooden buildings near them from these great repositories of heat. And how are we ourselves struck with the fact that the flame which has laid the city in ashes is traceable to a kindling so common and natural, that it might just as well have been the cause of a like desolation in one of the tropical cities, where fire is seldom seen even in the private houses, as here. What is the meaning of this? That here amidst an unparalleled crowd of manufactories, where there is a fire and a steam engine as it were for every street, the great mart and manufactory of steam engines and iron ships for the whole continent, not a factory has singed us, not an engine has exploded, not a stroke has come upon us from these sources whence the people of other places would have expected our calamity.

Brethren, I would not pretend to be the interpreter of Providence in such a case; but I may ask you, does it not suggest a distinction between the proper use and a sinful reliance upon our physical advantages? Does not its language seem to be? For these appliances of the Creator's elements to the various forms of industry; to these factories and engines and steam boats, which construct and convey away the product of your arts and toils with a speed which, a short time back, would have seemed miraculous; there is in heaven no controversy with man? No: it has in these latter times in a sort given the mastery of these great agents to him, that in their wonderful application the God of Nature may seem to work beside the industry of men, and His goodness put on new forms of benignity, to awaken a warmer gratitude and a livelier piety? Invention and improvement in the arts of life are the result of many providential circumstances in the progress of society; and

the periods of their achievement of great results in the increase of wealth and the abridgement of human labor are periods of high and increased obligation. Fire producing heat applied to water has in all ages of time been endowed with the power of developing the impulsive force of steam, and yet there have been centuries when the secret gift of its application to a hundred men would have enabled them to subdue the world. God reserved it for a period far distant on the track of long centuries of rude and weary toil, when science and research and history should have multiplied the proofs of his religion and his providence; and when great moral events were to be ushered in. If the use of the locomotive power of steam, leading on its trains containing hundreds of dependent passengers, and carrying them with terrific rapidity, has demanded that our guides and drivers can no longer be intemperate, unsteady and reckless men, is not the moral inference most natural that the people and times and places enjoying these great facilities are required by the God of nature and providence proportionably to revere and honor him. Now the question is, Have not these local gifts and advantages led us, as cities and a people, away from him who gave them? Here have we stood most highly favored among others for great resources—great enterprize; but have we stood as usefully and honorably distinguished for the lustre of christian example? But further: it is to be considered that a very large proportion of the people of these cities are the servants of God by a sacramental separation from the world, and we hope by internal sanctification. They sin therefore against holy relations, the aids and preventions of the Holy Spirit; against precious promises on God's part, and covenant engagements on their part; when they thus devote their ardent affections to the world, and thus permit the interests of truth and righteousness to decline.

Brethren, has not this been for some time past our sad reality? Worldly enterprize has opened before us. New achievements of steam power have been discovered and applied, and all arts and business have been moved by its energy. If there ever was a people, since the sect of the Parsees, who in this spiritual sense might be called the votaries, the worshippers of *fire*, truly we are the people. Who of us (surely the speaker is not one) but has

felt a sentiment of pride and of worldly pleasure as to our local importance and productive strength, when the intelligent stranger, after taking the circuit of our mechanical operation has expressed his astonishment at the resources which he has seen and the results he has witnessed.

Ah, my brethren, great and valuable and inventive as they are, can the goodness of God permit us, transient sojourners here—immortal men—to convert them into the occasions of our greater neglect of the kingdom of heaven, and the decline of that common gratitude which we owe to him? Let us then acknowledge to each other, and humbly confess to him this day, the error of our ways. Let the form of our calamity solemnly admonish us on this point. Is it not so, that the spirit of religion, for more than two years past, as a general thing, has been declining in this community; and the strength of our reviving business and trade has taken a silent hold of our hearts? Not in the forms of vice and dishonesty, as it might among a less industrious and sober and thinking people: but in a shape very little less offensive to our God, and almost equally fatal to the interests of his cause. He has indeed often employed fire as the instrument of correction to slumbering towns and cities; but where was there a people who might so clearly read the lesson of reproof and humility in the nature of their calamity?

3. Let us now look at *ourselves* as a *community* of the moral subjects of God, stricken and humbled under his chastising hand, and see what causes of his displeasure there may be in our common and individual transgressions. It is doubtless true that the best and holiest communities upon earth, at any period, fall so unspeakably below the just standard of their duty to God, that they truly deserve the heaviest of those chastisements which he ever inflicts; and it is not therefore necessary to suppose the existence of any uncommon amount or specific forms and acts of sin in a chastised community, in order to account for or justify the visitation. Yet, if we rest in this general principle, the particular and local ends of Providence will be lost to us, and his voice be substantially unheard. He no doubt calls us as individuals and a people to humble self-examination. In comparison with the population of other cities and of most communities, we are indeed, perhaps correctly, regarded by

ourselves and by others as an industrious, moral, religious and Sabbath-keeping people. Our vices are not prominent, our excitements are not insubordinate, our morals are staid, our churches are numerous and our industry is proverbial. Instances of foul and deadly crime, the acts of fraud and injustice, and the haunts of gambling, riot and dissipation may not have been wanting; but surely they have been less common than in most of the cities of the globe. No form of vice or individual delinquency has stamped itself upon our character; and in few cities upon this continent is the Sabbath better observed. But let us not, my brethren, from thence conclude that we are of course less reprehensible than others. The light and knowledge and blessings which men enjoy, often make their sins more productive of harm, and more criminal in the sight of God than those of a more licentious people, among whom the will of God is less known. A community which contains much that is good, commonly has much also that is evil, and evil which is rendered worse from the proximity. That much of false and dangerous principle, and of wickedness and crime exists among us, is apparent from the records of our prisons and courts, and from the profaneness and insensibility, the thefts and dispositions to plunder, which were manifest amidst the scenes of desolation and suffering which we have witnessed, and from that general disposition in the community to overlook the hand of God, which has extensively appeared already. Besides, when we take an estimate even of our comparative sinfulness, we are not to seek a parallel in the moral condition of devils, or of savages, or the debased and untaught population of the cities of some other lands, or even of those at home, where Providence may have done far less for the moral improvement of society. It better becomes us to look for the measure of our obligations in the absolute claims of God's goodness upon a most highly favored people; and we should look into the state and history of our hearts and individual lives, as well as at our general morals, that we may discover how much more obnoxious to the divine displeasure we may be than those for whom he has done far less, and intrusted with no such freedom and religious knowledge as we enjoy. Surely it is not necessary that our wealth should have been spent in luxury and vanity, our time in dissipation, our even-

ings in theatres, drinking and card-playing, in order to show that God has been but too little feared and loved and worshipped by us. Our habits and pursuits may make us an industrious and moral, without being a truly devout and religious people: and if so, we may be sure that we practise in our thoughts those vices which others practise in their lives. The pride of life, plans of enterprize, wealth and the ambition of earthly interests, may carry us as far away from the proper pursuits of immortal men, as more ostensibly vicious practices; and that there is a great amount of sin, both of omission and commission in these cities, in our churches, in our families and in our own hearts, seems now to be ascertained by the express voice of God's Providence. Doubtless he has been greatly displeased with our unthankfulness for his mercies, our abuse of his goodness, our hardness of heart and love of the world? Our lukewarmness in resisting iniquity, and in promoting the welfare of our fellow men, and our vain thoughts and calculations, our week day negligences and profitless Sabbaths, and cold and languid devotions—*these* varied and oft-repeated delinquencies, with many others, have well nigh proved the utter destruction of our cities and our houses? Do you not see it in yonder desert of extended squares and forsaken streets, where the immense fragments of wasted goods and the smoking ruins of a thousand dwellings meet your eye? Where are now the traces of a general gladness? Where is the busy scene of occupation to hundreds of cheerful families? Why do some of our proudest edifices and our large, replenished blocks of warehouses exist no more but in the sadness of the public recollection? With these scenes before our eyes, destined to form a memorable epoch in our local history, shall we longer doubt that we have sinned and offended God? Shall we not feel that if we are not stopped in our downward course and turned to him, our transgressions will blast all our prospects, and turn away all the good which he thought to do unto us? He has permitted the unconquerable element to speak to us for him, and if we are callous and insensible—if we overlook the sins which he reproves, and the appropriate duties to which he calls us, are there not other voices through which he may address us? The sources of our calamities are in ourselves, and what if their occurrence and their severity

afford no evidence of a particular and extraordinary delinquency, shall we therefore suppose that there is not a particular call upon us to retrace our wanderings, and return to the paths of righteousness?

4. It remains for us to turn our anxious thoughts to the *scene of desolation itself*—the particular *locality*—as in a sort the seat and centre of the active commercial business of these cities that may here inquire whether there have been delinquencies inviting the displeasure of the *Most High*. We here feel a confidence in saying it has *not been* the seat of monied monopolies—the haunt of dissipation and the abode of dishonesty and unrighteousness, at least beyond what is common in the most upright cities of our land. Its occupants, in general, have been possessed of as large a share of virtue and integrity and piety as distinguishes other commercial centres; but here probably even our comparative commendation should stop: for doubtless there are important respects in which we need, in common with the commercial cities of our country, and of this western land, especially the salutary admonitions of divine Providence. Perhaps our morals and religion, through this whole country, in no one respect so far come short before God, as in a proper reverence for and *observance of the christian Sabbath*. It is affecting to think how few of that large stock of goods which those warehouses contained would (if a kind and merciful God had saved them) ever have reached either an eastern or western destination, without being made the instruments of the desecration of His own hallowed day: and I may add how few of those which he has preserved in other depositories will not take the same course? A gentleman informed me, a few days ago, that at the opening of this season, for the first time as to this place, for several years, there had been the advertisement in the public papers of two regular lines of boats to start from our wharves on the Sabbath: and is it not for the most part a fact, that the river navigation scarcely knows a Sabbath.

Now, my brethren, all this is wrong—utterly wrong: and Providence will not fail to frown upon it, if practised in such a christian community as ours. All good and virtuous men, whether christians or not, must be sensible that the christian Sabbath is the palladium

of our liberties, in being the safe-guard of our morals; and that had it not been for this, we should never have possessed these ten millions to lose? If the God of our fathers, and the Benefactor of our country and our community, intends to build us up and bless us, he will never permit the Sabbath to fall *here*. As well might we expect that an earthly father would allow his thoughtless children to set fire to the bed on which they had laid down for their nightly slumbers. No: if we are to prosper, and long survive as a free and happy people, this institution must remain unimpaired as an imperishable monument of our wisdom and the sources of our strength, and if it shall cost other portions of our country other millions, also, to learn that heaven cannot and will not give us up to its desecration, the invaluable lesson will be cheaply bought.

As I turn my thoughts again to that desolate part of our common home, the reflection is consoling that for the most part in these later years it has been the abode of an orderly and virtuous population. Yet having resided more than twenty years ago in that section of the city, I can now walk over one or two places amidst its silence and its ruins, where at that period there were scenes of lewdness and dissipation such as few cities surpass, and where the mid-night sounds of profanity and licentiousness and fighting it was often terrible to hear. Probably the unhappy, miserable participants of these short-lived and loathsome pleasures are long since numbered with the dead: better buildings and a different population have succeeded, and now the purifying fire has traversed the spot itself. I refer to this topic for the purpose of suggesting the hope, that if a favorable Providence enables our fellow citizens to realize the rise from these ashes of new ranges of better edifices, and more commodious dwelling places, their foundations may be laid in the purpose that to licentiousness and intemperance and gaming and like purposes, no part of their occupancy shall be given. There is *one further remark* suggested by a recurrence to the loss and ravages of this conflagration. How many of those dwellings and warehouses which have now ceased to adorn our sister city may we reasonably suppose had as it were inscribed upon them, in its scriptural application, the great principle of holiness unto the Lord, as though to say, the rules and maxims and gains and objects of

trade and business here pursued are guided and pursued by lessons borrowed from the cross? How large an amount of that ten millions, estimated to have been lost would, if God in the hour of danger had stretched forth his finger to quench the spark enkindled to destroy, have been consecrated to him? *That is*, to the promotion of his interests and the objects of charity, kindness, benevolence and religion? I think I may answer this question, from my knowledge of the character of many of the losers, by saying as large a proportion perhaps as any other, ten millions in these cities or in this state. But if this would be comparatively considerable, is it not absolutely small, as the proof of christian consecration, and a testimony that there are many among us, who love their gains and hard-earned resources less than they love Christ, and the moral welfare of their fellow men.

Brethren, such dispensations as that which we have witnessed, are doubtless intended to speak alike and in one voice, to all christian men throughout our land. Whether we possess much or little, whatever be our secular occupations, doubtless there is here a great defect in the application of the principle, "Ye are not your own." The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof; and men, and especially redeemed men, are the tenants and the stewards of his beneficence. He shows us that he can "give" and he can "take away." Who, brethren, has not seen and deplored the extent to which this principle of christian obligation and christian consecration is lost sight of amidst the vigor and enterprize of this christian nation? Who of us should not feel called in this respect also to examine our hearts and humble ourselves before the Lord?

We have thus endeavored, my brethren, to develope as to our common and local delinquencies, what to the feeble and erring apprehension of man may be among the causes of the divine controversy with us, and have consequently reduced what remains to be said to a brief compass.

II. The text teaches us, secondly, That *instruction or correction*, as the word properly intends, is the merciful intention of our heavenly Father in this and every similar calamity. We are apprized of the nature of this duty by many scriptural examples. In its visible exhibition, by communities we have striking illustrations in

both ancient and modern history. *Israel*, in the times of the judges and the kings, and *Nineveh* and the Jews in the days of Esther, afford us instances of the suitable and approved application of divine corrections. "Be instructed, O Jerusalem," &c.

1. And first, Jerusalem must *awake* individually and collectively *to feel* that *God* has a *controversy with her*, and she must justify his ways, and subscribe to the sentence of her own condemnation. We must be sensible that, as a community, we are called individually and in our secular interests as a people, to stand before the tribunal of Providence, and give an account of our doings. And now when we have "fallen," as it were, "into the hands of the living God," and he in anger hides his face, we must humble ourselves before him—faithfully discover and penitently confess our sins, and offer unto him through Jesus Christ, the sincere tribute of our contrition and repentance.

It becomes us all to consider well "*from whence we have fallen, and repent and do our first works.*" Let us individually take a careful view of our own hearts and lives—the sins which have sold us away unto the judgments of God; and the ingratitude which has brought forth fire from the Almighty. Let us consider the corruption of our nature, the sinfulness of our vain thoughts and secret affections and unguarded words and actions. Let us recall our unfaithfulness to God, to the closet and the sanctuary in holy things, the great decay of personal and family and social religion, and let us be sensible that except we repent and return unto the Lord and obtain his forgiveness and his blessing through Christ, our prospects are blasted—utterly smitten down. Yet he is gracious and full of compassion. And we should therefore,

2. Be instructed to put our *trust in Him alone*. There is no refuge for a stricken people but in him; and has he not taught us that we cannot make "man our trust," or "fine gold our confidence." If as an humbled and reformed community, convinced that we are "but dust and ashes before him," we obey the voice of his judgments and are instructed by his warnings, then indeed his anger will be turned away from us. Then will Providence glorify itself in our more abundant prosperity, and the foundations of our social

welfare and temporal growth and advancement be laid deeper and firmer than ever.

3. We should be instructed to renew the pursuits of our stations on *improved* and *better principles*. Our merchants and manufacturers and mechanics—that large and respectable body of our citizens—should also review and rectify whatever may be wrong in the rules and maxims and usages of business. Great manufacturing and mechanic cities give employment to many of all ages and descriptions, who are dependent for subsistence upon their daily labors; and thousands of these, both male and female, are youth, from whose parental roof and its watchful protection they are removed. Others are mere children, whose infantile toils help to support the decrepid years of helpless widows? How essential to the great principles of eternal justice is the adjustment of a proper scale of remuneration for the labors of the dependent, and a fit allowance of time for rest and thought and mental cultivation? and I may add, the adjustment of rules and provisions adopted to protect the morals and the minds of these youth and children, in which their future years as well as the community at large, are so deeply concerned? In these branches of occupation, as well as in its mercantile operations, *this spot* may be the focus of a widely extended influence; and a healthful tone of moral integrity and justice and benevolence in the transactions of business here would be felt and copied in hundreds of towns and villages. And now, when the chastening hand of God is upon us, let us be corrected before him in whatever is amiss in these social duties and relations. Let our cities arise from the dust and from the ruins of an unparalleled calamity, to be an example to all others not only of internal order and virtue and religion, but of honor and integrity and public benevolence. Then will the eye of that mighty Providence look down upon them with parental tenderness as the “corrected” children of his care, and their coming history record the loving kindness of the Lord.

III. The great motive offered in the text, “*Lest my soul depart from thee, lest I make thee desolate*,” should now be brought to bear upon our minds. This language is solemn and impressive, and yet it is eminently *parental*. It recalls the peace and tranquility and

local prosperity and public mercies which we have enjoyed for many years, and reminds us of the gratitude which we owe to God for having so long shielded our prosperity and our homes; and it seems to say to us, if you hear his call and obey his voice and give glory unto his name, his uplifted rod shall give place to the returning triumphs of his goodness. The vindication of his glory will be effected, and reformation, repentance and the abandonment of sin will prepare new avenues for the dispensation of his blessings. The houseless, the destitute and impoverished, by this calamity, may especially be reminded of the merciful and sympathizing character of that oft-forgotten Father, who invites his children by their very distresses to put their trust in him.

But the language of the text is not less terrible to those who remain unmoved and uninstructed by the calamities which God inflicts upon them. Incurable and obstinate indeed must be a people, who disregard the Most High when his chastening hand is laid heavily upon them. Our hearts must not remain untouched—our sins unforsaken and our duties unfulfilled in such a visitation as this. No. Providence speaks in fearful accents—the elements of heaven seem to have taken up the quarrel of his injured goodness, and who can tell us when they will lay it down? May they not *even now* be entering as it were into covenant, that as their fires have long driven the wheels of our industry, and their waters sailed our trade and commerce, and their pure and bracing currents of salubrious air have banished the gathering contagion, and shed the blessings of unrivalled healthfulness upon us, so they are now about to exact from us the neglected tribute of our humility and gratitude? One of them has visited us with the suddenness and terror of a flash from the Almighty, and others may be waiting to mark the issue. We have seen how impotent is man to save our property and our homes when the conflagration is commissioned to destroy; but is he less helpless when the dark clouds of innundation sail the heavens, or the unseen breath of contagion and death enters our streets and dwellings? Shall we slumber unstricken with dismay, when the mighty elements of earth and heaven, clad in the robes of the destroyer, have come forth to admonish us? Shall we cry *peace, peace*, and thus make it worse than in vain that God has addressed us in

the roar of the conflagration? Instead of reaping for ourselves and our cities and our children the invaluable fruits of a salutary chastisement, shall we proceed in the darkness of adversity, to dig the grave of our surviving hopes and prospects? Truly, my brethren, if such a confession is admissible in such a case, I wonder at my own stupidity and the apparent apathy which I seem to see in the countenances of the people of these cities: censurable it would appear, as the sleep of the disciples in the garden of Gethsemane. Are we unbelievers in the doctrine of a particular Providence, and the moral ends of a public calamity? Or do we not comprehend the measure of a visitation, whose extent and moral effects upon us will be matters of inquiry when our race on earth is run. Let us be animated with a determination to dismiss all improper indifference, and by the grace of God arrest all the consequences of a profitless and an abused correction.

Let us be encouraged in this by the implied assurance of the returning favor and augmented blessings of God to a penitent and corrected people, which the text contains. Let us hope that we already behold the pledge of coming good in that noble and generous sympathy with us in our calamity, which has been so extensively awakened in the faithful breasts of our fellow citizens in almost all the towns and cities of our country; so honorable to our national character, and so happily adapted to convert even our misfortunes into the instruments of the blended union of hearts and principles. Let us hope that we see the hand of God in that elasticity, resolution and redoubled energy in the character of our citizens, by which they seem fitted to rise above the waves of the tempest and nobly breast the current of adversity. How true is it that a people possessed of this, united with a *proper chastened trust in God*, are a community who convert their misfortunes into the elements of their greatness? Above all, let us be impelled by all that is inviting in the character and promises of God and in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; and by every consideration of the necessity of our repentance and reformation to even our temporal welfare, to return unto the Lord. Let our hearts be animated with a fixed determination, by the grace of God, to use this visitation for the correction and improvement of our own hearts, and all our conduct; and let it

also enlist us afresh in every just measure to promote the public morals, to discountenance vice and the desecration of the Sabbath, and cultivate a tone of moral and religious feeling adapted to the occasion.

You, my friends, who have been called to *share* in the *pecuniary losses* of this conflagration, will, I trust, in this trial of your faith and submission to the divine will, endeavor to feel that "all is right," and as it should be, which your Father does. There *are blessings* more precious than those which you have lost; and you will, I would fondly hope, be led and enabled to date your first determinate choice of them, or the fresh and renewed return of your heart to them, from this period, at which the vanity and uncertainty of all earthly possessions has been so strikingly illustrated. Amidst all the anxious and conflicting thoughts which may arise in your minds, endeavor to come with a calm and trustful reliance upon that Providence, whose way is hid from mortals, and pour out the effusions of an engaged, humble and believing heart in the services of this day.

And you, who have experienced *an exemption* from the loss of property or home, I would remind of the danger in which we often are, of taking no suitable interest in, and experiencing no proper humiliation under, those public chastisements which do not touch the sources of our own tranquility and happiness. How improper in the sight of a benevolent God would be an indifference founded upon considerations so selfish, in a case where we should all feel as *one* in the sins which may have invited it, and in the griefs which accompany it. To us belongs, therefore, the two-fold duty of humiliation and repentance under the mighty hand of God, and of grateful thanksgiving for his merciful preservation, blending with them our warmest sympathies with our fellow citizens in the trials which they may have experienced.

Those who have *promptly and laboriously co-operated* in every measure of aid and sympathy and relief which the occasion has invited will accept, as it were through us, the thanks of those mothers and children whom they have so kindly relieved. It must, I am sure, have drawn from many a heart the deepest emotion of grateful sensibility to behold our *generous ladies* hastening in every direc-

tion, with clothing and provisions, and copies of the Holy Scriptures, to re-supply and to soothe those who had lost their houses and their all by the consuming flame. For these things and for the kind exertions which some were seen to make, in the midst of the confusion, to protect and rescue the goods and furniture brought from the falling habitations, they have won a tribute which it will be delightful to remember.

But on such a day as this, let it not be supposed that in the discharge of these offices of kindness, your entire duty has been fulfilled. You have, I trust, in the midst of these generous engagements, put to your hearts the question, has not my own forgetfulness of God and worldly spirit and neglect of duty, contributed its part to produce those sorrows which I endeavor to assuage, and create those wants which I am called to relieve? Ah, my hearers, let us all remember whence such visitations come, and reflect that while doing these things, and *now* while in the very act of humiliation, our unrepented sins and hard, unconvicted hearts may be kindling other fires, and laying the foundation for other chastisements. Even now the solemn declaration may be applicable to us, *nevertheless for all these things his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.* To the all-seeing eye of God, there may be beneath the clear and peaceful lustre of these serene and brilliant skies, a dark cloud—a sable pall of gloom—of unappeased displeasure still suspended over us? Shall our ingratitude and unsoftened insensibility even now shut up “his tender mercies, who is good and ready to forgive.”

May he who “worketh in us to will and to do,” aid us and shed the effusions of his Spirit upon us in the solemnities of this day. May he who can alone rightly sustain the courage and resolution of man, in the hour of adversity, and by the orderings of his gracious Providence, restore the losses and revive the prosperities of an afflicted community, look down propitiously upon us, and realize to us the good of “those whom the Lord correcteth.”