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S E R M O N X V I .

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THE WAR AND THE PATRIOT'S DUTY.

"WHEREFORE I have not sinned against thee, but thou doest me wrong to war against me; the Lord the Judge be judge this day between the children of Israel and the children of Ammon."—JUDGES 11: 27.

At that period in the history of Israel called "the time of the judges," and at a point in that period of great distraction and confusion in national affairs, no judge at the head of the administration—the princes discordant among themselves, every man doing that which was right in his own eyes, and the whole nation corrupting itself with idolatry—the king of the Ammonites moved a great army into the pleasant and fruitful vales of Gilead, with intent to subject all that fertile region east of the river to his own sway. It is well for the children of Israel in Gilead that they succeed in making Jephthah their captain, and commit the con-

SERMON XVIII.

BY REV. ROBERT R. BOOTH,

PASTOR OF THE MERCER-STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, PREACHED, NEW-YORK,
MAY 12, 1861.

THE NATION'S CRISIS AND THE CHRISTIAN'S DUTY.

"FEAR not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them."—
2 KINGS 6 : 16.

THERE is no quality of character so admirable and impressive as that which is calmly confident in the midst of adverse circumstances. That is the highest courage, the proof of the most complete manhood, which can stand firm on solid principle, and meet the storm of opposition or the thrilling peril of the hour, reposing on the strength of God and the majesty of eternal truth.

A signal illustration of this trait of character, and of the basis upon which it is sustained, is presented in the text. In that far-off age of Israel's ancient history, we witness the fortitude and moral strength which flow from a calm confidence in God, in the character and conduct of Elisha, the prophet, who was exiled and hunted from city to city for his unwavering faithfulness to the God of his fathers, who sent him to be a messenger of rebuke and warning to Israel.

One of the incidents of his manifold trials is contained in the narrative of the text. The prophet had been accused to the king of Syria of communicating to his enemy, the king of Israel, the plans and movements of the Syrian armies.

Inquiry of his dwelling-place had been made, and it was found that he was in Dothan. "Thither, therefore, the king sent horses and chariots and a great host, and they came by night, and compassed the city about. And when the servant of the man of God was risen early and gone forth, behold! an host compassed the city, both with chariots and horses. And his servant said unto him, Alas! my master, how shall we do?" The prophet's answer was the text, a reply sublime in its confidence of faith, and in its firm repose on God: "Fear not; for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." And then Elisha prayed, and the forces of God, sent for the prophet's protection, were revealed to the young man. On every side around him he saw the grand display: "the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." Against such allies the hosts of Syria

could not contend. By their presence and by the power of prayer the might of the enemy was broken, and a complete deliverance accomplished for the servant of God.

Now, my brethren, we may regard the situation of Elisha amid these startling perils, and his calm faith in the higher power that was engaged for his defense, as a distinct illustration of a great truth which is engraven on the history of the world. That word of cheer which Elisha spoke to his trembling companion, is a clear prophecy of that which has since been realized in the experience of God's people amid all conflicts and reverses, and which shall be true unto the issue of the last battle in the great day of God. The substance of the truth herein presented may be set forth in the proposition, that

IN ALL THE MORAL ANTAGONISMS OF THE WORLD, THE REAL STRENGTH AND THE ULTIMATE SUCCESS IS ON THE SIDE OF THOSE WHO ARE ALLIED WITH GOD.

The fundamental thought in this proposition is, that this world, and human society as existing in it, is the scene of ceaseless moral conflict. The truth of this position can not be intelligently questioned. On every side, in every age, there is clear evidence, that the agencies of good and evil are actively at work, each intent on its own end or purpose. The moral government of God is proceeding to its sublime and triumphant issues, only through protracted and desperate conflicts.

A recognition of this truth may be traced as an article of belief in the popular creed of almost all nations. The ancient Parsees, or fire-worshippers, believed in the existence of two independent deities, whom they represented by the elements of light and darkness; the former the author of good, and the latter the source of evil. These divinities were self-existent, eternal, and incessantly active. Thus they accounted for the presence of good and evil in the moral system. Most Pagan nations, it is well known, had in like manner their good and evil deities, who are always developing their opposing natures in the moral conflicts of the world.

That great truth which is thus included in the popular beliefs of mankind at large is abundantly manifested in the practical events of life. On every page of history, in the grand and solemn progress of the Church, in the long and weary struggles of Liberty with Oppression, in the revolt of men against the restraints of wholesome laws—yea, in the social life of every community, and of almost every family, there is a constant vision of this field of strife, in which battle is joined between the good and evil.

The elements of this antagonism are presented in the text by the words, "they that are with us," and "they that are with them."

The fact herein suggested is a reality for us in our generation, as much as for any that have gone before us; the responsibilities

of this great conflict, in its broad moral and religious aspects, are upon us, and thus we need, for our encouragement and consolation, to understand the nature of the antagonism, and to discern the certain prospects of the issue.

But the significance of this truth is increased immensely, in our apprehension, by the magnitude of the crisis to which this nation has been brought, by the mysterious providence of God.

One of the boldest and most striking developments of this great antagonism which the world has ever witnessed, is right upon us. By agencies and occurrences apparently beyond the control of the great mass of the people of the land, we are brought face to face with the most stern and awful aspect of moral conflict—that in which armies are gathered to the standard of the right or are arrayed against it—and WAR, with all its wild accompaniments, with all its sacrifice of treasure, tears, and blood, is the immediate result. When one considers the peculiar import of this nation's life, and the tendency of our institutions hitherto, this result seems the more mysterious, shall I not say the more appalling?

For we have dwelt so long and so securely beneath the free institutions which our fathers founded; it has been so much our custom to settle our disputes by the decision of the majority; our conflicts have been so harmoniously adjusted by the tribunal of public opinion and established law; our armor has been so wisely and benignantly composed of argument and appeal to reason, that now, when at last we are brought face to face with the appeal to arms and martial prowess—it is not strange that Christian and reflecting minds are startled by the unusual summons, and shudder even while they prepare for the stern and awful struggle. It is important, therefore, in the highest and most Christian sense, to recognize the great element of moral conflict which runs through human history and is expressed every where in the word of God, as we survey this great antagonism which now shakes our land and moves the world.

Permit me, then, to speak to you of the SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS CRISIS IN ITS OBVIOUS NATIONAL AND MORAL ASPECTS; to present the CHRISTIAN DUTY OF THE HOUR, and THE STRONG GROUNDS WHICH SUSTAIN US IN SAYING: "Fear not, for they that be with us are more than they that be with them."

I call your attention to this subject, deeming it no departure from the legitimate and Christian service of the sanctuary. For this is a reality that presses directly upon every one of us. It takes hold of our dearest ties and fairest prospects. It enters into business circles, hindering all the movements of trade and finance; into domestic life, torturing the hearts of those who have sent sons and brothers to the field of strife; into our secret thoughts, disturbing our composure and almost shaking the foundations of our religious trust. It behooves us to understand this reality, and to

have faith in God concerning it, or its present and coming terrors will either drive our minds to madness or turn our hearts to stone.

1st. We speak of the moral significance of this great conflict, and the magnitude of the crisis which is upon us. Several points will here suggest themselves.

Most obviously, in this conflict, the UNION is at stake, and its integrity depends upon the issue. A compact and solid nation was constructed, by the wisdom of our fathers, out of the various elements of civil life which combined in the war of independence no mere confederacy, no former league of diverse tribes, but a strong nation, occupying territory that must be united in political union, speaking one language, choosing one form of government, establishing an identity of interests. It was intended to be perpetual; it was accepted with that understanding; it was ratified by the most solemn oath and covenant, and thus introduced to its own place among the nations of the earth. Under this Union we have been the happiest and most favored people in the world. It has secured us peace among ourselves, and a strength which made us respected by every foreign power. It has given us prosperity without a parallel, so that the area of our territory has been extended by honest purchase and by healthful emigration, and the sails of our commerce have whitened every sea. It has given us position and prestige throughout the world; beneath our honored ensign the traveler has been as safe as when dwelling in his own habitation, the merchantman has pursued his traffic without disturbance, and our institutions have commanded respect and honor in cabinets and courts beyond the seas. It is this Union, with its dear blessings of peace, prosperity, and power, which is at stake in this tremendous crisis.

But, further, the conflict now upon us might be settled peaceably, if this were all. Were it merely a question of the nation's boundaries and the relations of its people, it might be practicable for the conflicting sections to part in peace; the great North saying to the South, as Abram said to Lot when a strife sprang up between their herdmen: "Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, for we are brethren."

But not only is the Union put in peril, but the very idea and fact and force of government, as a divine institution, are imperiled in this struggle. Let the principles concerning government, which have been advanced in justification of this rebellion, be generally sustained and applied, and there is no form of law existing that could survive a year. Anarchy is the immediate and dire result. And this is so upon whatever ground it is attempted to justify the assault upon the Government. If on the ground of SECESSION as a right, then clearly it is false in fact, for no such right is conferred by the letter of the Constitution; and false in philosophy or in principle, for the right to secede from one established govern-

ment at will involves the right to sunder the ties of every government, and to take refuge in individual and universal license. But if, on the other hand, this attempt be justified under the plea of the RIGHT OF REVOLUTION, the defense is just as weak; for revolution, with the woes and horrors of civil war, can righteously be the result only when all proper constitutional modes of seeking the redress of wrongs have failed. It is worthy of notice that the word of God does not recognize the right of revolution in any cause. Its principle, as expressed in the 13th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, is that of entire and hearty and perpetual loyalty to an established government; but it has generally been conceded by writers upon civil ethics that this mode of redressing grievances may be attempted when three conditions coëxist: (1.) When the people's wrong and grievance have become visibly and manifestly unbearable; (2.) When there exists a reasonable prospect of securing speedy deliverance; and (3.) When the evils connected with the abuses complained of are clearly less than those involved in desperate conflict. These three conditions must be certain to justify a revolution. They were so clear in the great struggle for constitutional liberty in England in the 17th century, and so clear in our own revolution of the 18th century, that no one could gainsay them. But it is the height of misrepresentation and folly to affirm that under our benignant Government, administered according to the Constitution, with modes of redress prescribed and open to the use of all, revolution is a righteous appeal as a refuge against anticipated evils and wrongs that, in the nature of the case, could never be inflicted. It is therefore manifest that, in meeting this appeal to violence by the force conferred by God upon the established government, by resisting it to the last expense of treasure and of men, there is only the discharge of solemn obligation, and a resolve to continue in the exercise of that right for which government is ordained of God and approved by man. In a government which recognizes the liberty of the subject under law, there is no event so dreadful as the dishonor of the law, and no tendency so perilous as the tendency towards anarchy and license. Next to the authority of God over the heart and conscience, the majesty of constitutional law is the most sovereign, the most glorious thing upon the earth. The men who struggle in such a cause are patriots in the highest sense—the men who die for it are martyrs, and they who contend against it make war upon the best interests of humanity and the awful decree of God.

But, further, it is to be understood that in this struggle our own peculiar mode of government is equally imperiled. The interests of free institutions are at stake at this time of conflict. This crisis has a significance in this republic such as would be involved in the destinies of no other land. It was a new event in the world's history when our system of government was first estab-

lished. Men had for ages been the tools of despots, the many had been governed in the interest of the few, the world had groaned under the tyranny of courts and kings. But our fathers found their Magna Charta in the people's heart. The government they founded was in a wonderful accordance with the pattern of civil institutions which God showed to Moses in the mount. It was the wonder of the world. Such universal liberty under the supremest law—such equity combined with power—such harmonious consent amid diverse opinions; nothing like it had been ever seen. It was not strange that the thoughts of oppressed nations turned to it with a benediction for its influence and its example. It was not strange that the great tide of emigration rolled across the broad Atlantic, and poured itself upon our shores. It was not strange that the renown of this unparalleled achievement was an impulse to all men who struggled to be free. And now, after all this, we hear the verdict of opinion from the representative of European journalism, who is seeking to portray the aspect of affairs among us: " 'The great Republic is gone.' The glory has departed from it. Its existence has not attained the limit of one century. The dream of enthusiasts, the fair illusion of the people, is a manifest and entire failure." Not so, thank God! but it is at stake. The great Republic, with all its precious freight of history, example, influence, and aid for struggling nations, is the prize for which the might of battle is enlisted. Oh! if it is worth a struggle to sustain the rights of man—to hold open wide the doors of refuge for the weary and oppressed—to stand forth in glorious example of free government before the admiring world, then it is imperative on us to be true to the traditions of our history, and meet this conflict in the strength of truth, of justice, and eternal right.

The last position in this view of the magnitude of this crisis is reached when we consider that this is a contest for the world and for all future ages. There are races and nations whose internal conflicts, or whose destruction from the earth, would have but little relation to the great hopes of the world. In their seclusion and littleness they may rise and fall, affecting by their various fortunes only their own territorial connections. But this can never be the case with this Republic. Its origin was so peculiar, its position is so central, its political institutions are so benignant, its religious privileges are so preëminent, that its decline and fall must send a thrill and shudder through every useful human institution, and the ruins of its glory must bar the path of progress for centuries to come. Especially let it be remembered that it is as the exponents of a fresh Christian civilization that this nation has acted on the world. A leavening influence has gone from it into the darkest regions, and the Gospel of the Son of God has moved on in its glorious course under the peculiar impulse which

came from the Christian missions of this land. It is no exaggeration to affirm that, all things considered, the world's best interests and highest hopes depend more on the future of America than on any other earthly influence. These interests are being settled, in a large degree, by the results of this conflict, for our institutions and our nation's life. If Napoleon could say to his soldiers, as they fought beneath the Egyptian pyramids, "Soldiers, from those summits forty centuries look down upon you," with more emphasis and more truth can we say: "Unto this field of strife, to which the might of a continent is marshaled, all living nations and all coming ages are looking." If we fail in this struggle—if the Government is broken and crushed—if barbarism and anarchy usurp the dominion—if treason and disloyalty succeed in their dreadful designs, the shock of our fall will be to the world what the fall of the sons of the morning was to the thrones and dominions of heaven—a result to be deplored through all coming ages, a beginning of woes which no tongue can describe and no thought can fathom. Well may men sing in solemn cadence:

"We are living, we are dwelling in a grand and awful time."

We turn from this view of the crisis to consider—

2d. The Christian duty of the hour. To this point especially should the servant of God direct his speech, that all thoughts may be impelled towards it, to be aroused, not to angry passion, but to a calm and holy purpose which conscience may commend and God may visibly and gloriously bless. The inquiry, What are the duties of the hour? may be summed up in these points:

Firm loyalty to the Government is the first and most urgent obligation. No good citizen, no Christian man can be neutral in such an hour. We are to prove by our individual and united action, that this people can be as true to their constitutional rulers as other nations are to an anointed king. We are to prove that hosts of freemen, rallying at the call of government, can sustain it and defend it better than it can be defended by a standing army. We are to prove ourselves worthy of our institutions, of our lineage, of our sacred cause, by making sacrifice with cheerfulness, by rendering due reverence to those whom God has placed in stations of authority, by remaining true to the great interests which are at stake, amid all risks of life or treasure, through all disasters and opposition unto the end. Again—

Another of the duties of the hour is, that we take especial pains to purge our hearts from the spirit of bitterness and wicked wrath while engaged in this most righteous struggle. Loyalty is not revenge. True courage does not revel in excesses and wanton violence. A holy cause should be sustained in righteous resolution. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord." I beseech you, brethren, frown upon and denounce every where the

utterance of those among us who would sully the honor of this cause by their malignant wrath, and would excite measures of aggression scarcely less reprehensible than the outrages which have provoked them. Let pity go hand in hand with strength in all this conflict, and the majesty of our power be only equaled by the magnanimity of our gentleness. It would be for our lasting glory, as a nation, if in this strife we might overcome our antagonists even as Christ overcomes his enemies, subduing them utterly unto himself by the might of his arm, but taking them, when once subdued and penitent, into his very heart, restoring them unto the place from which they fell, and giving them the names of sons and daughters.

This conflict should be undertaken in the strength of God, and under his constant benediction. There need be no hesitation in our minds concerning the attitude of God in this field of strife. I speak with reverence, and yet with firm conviction, when I say that every attribute of God, and every movement of his hand in human history, points clearly towards the integrity and justice of our cause. If it were "conquest" that was intended, or "military subjugation," or the withholding of any right from our mistaken countrymen, we might well have our misgivings; but in a struggle for the maintenance of established government—in an attempt to arrest the destructive tendencies of the hour, and to enthrone the majesty of law in every State and in every heart, there can be no doubt. The Lord of hosts is with us, and "if God be for us, who can be against us?" He is the great bulwark of our defense. In calm confidence in the certainty of his providence, in constant reliance on the power of prayer, and in the faithful discharge of every duty without fear of consequences, we shall be guided by the strength of God, and brought to a wise and happy deliverance from our troubles.

3d. I pass, finally, to an allusion merely to the firm grounds of confidence which stand out visibly before us. "Fear not, for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." That was a noble scene in Roman history, when, by the order of the Senate, the ground on which the Carthaginian army was encamped, right before the city-gate, was sold at auction, bringing readily the price at which it had always been valued. Never to despair of the Republic was a fundamental principle in that Roman state, and that unshaken confidence was a perpetual source of triumph. Far more may this be our possession.

For in this conflict the honest conscience of mankind is with us—the profoundest judgment of the world favors the maintenance of equal law; the binding obligations of oaths of allegiance; the right of the majority to rule; the preservation of a nation's natural boundaries and essential life; and the inherent and eternal obligation of a government to defend its being against wanton

and unprovoked destruction. The honest conscience of the world is with us on these points.

The progress of the world, the spirit of the age we live in, is with us too. The tendencies of the times are not towards narrow institutions, restricted intercourse, and lofty walls of demarkation. It is the nineteenth century of the acceptable year of the Lord, which the Saviour proclaimed in far Judea, bringing liberty to the oppressed, fraternity unto the warring nations, and the establishment of all human institutions on a broad and sacred basis. The blessed consummation is yet far away, but the world is moving towards it, and its progress will not permit this nation of the vanguard to take up a retreat towards the shades of anarchy or military despotism.

The providence of God is with us also, and it is our privilege and joy to note it. Why this uprising of the wrath of man has been permitted, it is not needful to inquire. God's hand is in it, and in it for a purpose of mercy we may be sure. But that his providence is working for us mightily, the events of every day bear witness. It is his hand that has drawn the lines in this great struggle, so that the right and wrong are put in boldest conflict. It is his hand that has interposed once and again to thwart the counsels of wicked men. It is his hand that has touched the hearts of these rising millions, dissolving in a moment their former ties and thralldom to the call of parties, and drawing them around one honored standard which floats above the land the emblem of "the Union, the Constitution, and the Laws." Let us discern his providence in this. Let us "thank God and take courage," for he is the Lord of hosts. He may not grant us immediate deliverance. He may try our faith and patience by reverses, but one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day; and it is a joy to feel that his great plan advances surely, that the day is hastening when they shall not hurt nor destroy in all his holy mountain.

It may come to pass that by his adjustment of this nation's strife, by the triumph of the right, and the deliverance of the state, it may appear that he was hastening his work upon the earth, and through our toil and strife, preparing for the consummation of his earthly plan—for he shall work, and none shall hinder; his word shall shake the nations, and his truth shall be proclaimed until all hearts shall love it, and

"The dwellers in the vales and on the rocks
Shout to each other; and the mountain-tops
From distant mountains catch the flying joy;
'Till nation after nation taught the strain,
Earth rolls the rapturous hosanna round."

NEW-YORK, May 13, 1861.

REV. AND DEAR SIR:

We find a general and earnest desire prevailing with the members of your congregation, that the Discourse delivered by you yesterday morning should be published without delay.

Fully participating in this desire, we respectfully request that you will furnish us the manuscript, that we may have it published in pamphlet form for gratuitous distribution, believing that the dissemination of its evangelical and patriotic sentiments will be highly useful in the unhappy crisis in which our country is involved.

With affection and respect, your friends,

SAMUEL R. BETTS,
JAS. BOORMAN,
DAVID CODWINE,
MARSHALL S. BIDWELL,
THOMAS BOND,
M. M. VAIL,

JOHN W. QUINCY,
THOMAS DENNY,
CHARLES A. DAVISON,
WM. M. BLISS,
JOHN P. CROSBY,
GEO. W. CLARKE.

To the Rev. R. R. BOOTH,
Pastor of the Mercer-Street Presbyterian Church.

NEW-YORK, May 14, 1861.

HON. SAMUEL R. BETTS, JAMES BOORMAN, and others:

GENTLEMEN: In accordance with your request, a copy of the Sermon is herewith placed at your disposal. It was not prepared for publication, and, I fear, may not be altogether adapted to be put into print. I am glad, however, to be able to contribute, in any manner, to the support of patriotic and loyal feeling in this great crisis.

Very respectfully yours,

ROBERT R. BOOTH.