

OUR MARTYR PRESIDENT,
ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

VOICES FROM THE PULPIT
OF
NEW YORK AND BROOKLYN.

ORATION
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HON. GEO. BANCROFT.

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SERMON XIV.

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“And by it, he being dead yet speaketh.”—HEBREWS xi. 4.

THE chapter from which our text is taken contains a record of the achievements of faith in the days of the patriarchs—a record designed to stimulate us in these far-off ages of the Christian Church.

“By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and by it he being dead yet speaketh.”

Abel, the accepted worshipper and martyred brother, still lives in his faith and speaks in his example, declaring that sin can be pardoned only through the propitiation of Christ, of which his offering was the appropriate and significant type. Though this is the personal and primary reference of this brief sentence, it may be regarded as containing a general principle—a lesson to the living, as well as a touching memorial of the dead.

The world is full of voices—the voices of those that have lived, but are gone.

Their utterances did not cease when their voice was no longer heard.

They have a continuous oratory, awakening emotions and memories in the nursery, around the family hearthstone, and in the places of public concourse. Does not the voice of the little child still linger in your dwelling, though its form is no longer visible? Do not its familiar toys, its unused dress, its well-remembered smile, its last kiss speak in a tone of pathos such as no living voice could articulate?

Our fathers and mothers may be gone. Long years may have passed since the tie of affection was sundered, and we wept disconsolate orphans over their graves, but the father speaks still in his manly words and deeds, and the mother in the closet of her devotions.

The great—the good—the loving live; they are invisible, yet life is filled with their presence. They are with us in the sacredness and seclusion of home—in the paths of society, and in the crowded assemblies of men. They speak to us from the lonely wayside—from the council halls of the nation, and from the sanctuaries that echo to the voice of prayer.

Go where we will and the dead are with us. Their well-remembered tones mingle with the voices of nature—with the sound of the autumn leaf—with the jubilee shout of the spring time.

Every man who departs leaves a voice and an influence behind him.

The graves of the peasant and of the prince are alike vocal. The sepulchral vault in which the remains of our beloved President were laid the other day, as well as the cold, wet, opening earth in which the humble laborer was buried, utters a silent yet all-subduing oratory. From every one of the dead a voice is heard in the living circles of men, which the knell of their departure does not drown, which the earth and the green sod do not muffle,

which neither deafness nor distance, nor anything that man may devise, can possibly extinguish. The cemetery often speaks more thrilling accents than the senate house, and the chamber of the dead is often more eloquent than the council hall of the living. You perceive the sentiment then, which we gather from the text, that the influence of a man in his deeds and words while living survive him, so that he being dead yet speaketh, and his words and influence may abide forever through the ages.

Let this thought engage our meditations and give us fresh incentives to virtue and usefulness. It is a thought which may well mingle in the solemnities of this hour.

The nation weeps over the tragic end of its chief magistrate, but his kindly words and well-remembered deeds are left us as an imperishable legacy. They are enshrined in our hearts, and will live in our lives, and will help to form the nation's life and character.

Does not the principle thus stated find illustration in our daily life and experience? Do not the sayings and doings of your departed friends often arrest you in the stir of business or pleasure, imparting a new impulse either for good or evil? Do not their words often echo in the chambers of memory, stirring the heart to its deepest depths? Do not their features and forms start into bright contrast with the darkness of actual absence, and make the present radiant with the light of early recollections? Do not the sounds of the one and the sight of the other daguerreotype themselves upon our moral life?

Can we isolate and divest ourselves utterly from the impressions made upon us by those who have ceased to move in the throng of living men?

We are shaped and moulded in our characters, not less by the memories and forces of the past, than by the surroundings of the present. We are checked and stimula-

ted by the example and teaching of those who have rested from their labors, and which now come to us like a prophet's voice from out the dark and dreamlike past.

A young man, for instance, who has been trained under the best maternal influence, becomes restless and discontented, and leaves the home of his childhood and the restraints of former years, and yields himself a victim to passion and to crime. In the lapse of time, and in the far-off land of his prodigality, the ghosts of departed scenes of innocence flit before him, and the voice of the heart-broken mother rings amid his heart's emptiness, and though dead, she yet speaketh with an emphasis and effect she could not command when living.

We may vary the illustration and take that of a departed minister of Christ. He stood as the ambassador of God, and his eye kindled with the fires of inspiration, and his face glowed with rapture as he gave utterance to the great messages of truth and salvation. He shunned not to declare the whole counsel of God :

“ Yet he was humble, kind, forgiving, mild,
And with all patience and affection taught,
Rebuked, persuaded, solaced, counselled, warned,
In fervent style and manner. Needy poor
And dying men, like music, heard his feet
Approach their beds, and guilty wretches took
New hope, and in his prayers wept and smiled
And blessed him as they died forgiven ; and all
Saw in his face contentment, in his life
The path to glory and perpetual joy.”

But he died ! the voice that brought consolation to the mourner's heart has become silent. The tongue which poured forth the irresistible stream of sacred eloquence has become mute and still. The eye that kindled with almost insufferable lustre has become rayless, and the lips on which hundreds hung with breathless attention

have been closed forever. But has all that excellence died? Is all his usefulness at an end? No, my brethren, "he being dead yet speaketh." His example lingers behind him. The good and imperishable of his nature walks among his flock, visiting their homes, comforting the sorrowing, warning the wicked, and reasoning in the crowded assembly "of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." And the multitude may not perceive till they see the parting wing that an angel has been with them.

Often there comes from the pastor laid in his grave a more tender and melting eloquence than there came from the same pastor when standing in the holy place and anointed for his work, and from the herald of Jesus wrapped in his winding sheet, a more successful sermon than from the herald of Jesus robed in the vestments of his official character. And aside from this, precious and perpetual harvests may be reaped by his successors from the seed sown by hands that have done their work. But, my brethren, this is the fair side of the picture, and were the influence left behind by the dead always of this character, then would men be throughout their entire history like angels of mercy scattering a golden radiance from their wings, or as glorious meteors rising in rapid succession over a world of darkness, anticipating and heralding the light of the millennial day.

But alas! if many of the dead yet speak for God and truth, and freedom, and oppressed humanity, others utter a different voice, and leave behind them a curse instead of a blessing. Reverse the portraits we have just sketched.

Suppose the mother to whom we have alluded, instead of training up her children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," had encouraged them both by precept

and example to walk in the ways of fashion, worldliness, and sin, to neglect God and the great salvation, what is the influence she leaves behind her? The same voice comes from her grave as from her home. And often and again will her evil maxims be quoted, and her life of thoughtless gayety appealed to as a sanction for more excessive frivolity and sin. She is dead, but the bane of her example lives; her form is beneath the sod, but her voice is still heard, and her spectre still lingers in the circle of her children and friends as a mighty incentive to evil.

We may pass from this to a higher sphere, and take the minister whose character is just the reverse of that to which we have referred:

“ He swore in sight of God
 And man to preach his master Jesus Christ,
 Yet preached himself; he swore that love of souls
 Alone had drawn him to the Church, yet strowed
 The path that led to hell with tempting flowers,
 And in the car of sinners, as they took
 The way of death, he whispered peace.
 The man, who came with thirsty soul to hear
 Of Jesus, went away unsatisfied;
 For he another gospel preached than Paul,
 And one that had no Saviour in it, and yet
 His life was worse.”

Now, what will be the posthumous influence of such a minister? Can it be other than evil only, evil continually?

The field on which he labored will have received a blight and a mildew. The gospel has been belied, and there will spring up a harvest of infidelity

Thus far have we spoken of the influence for good or evil, which men leave behind them in the immediate circle in which they moved while living. But there are other ways in which men may speak to the coming gen-

erations, as with a voice echoing through the ages. We refer not to the lettered tombstones, which often tell of deeds of valor and of a loving trust in God; nor of monuments erected to commemorate illustrious worth; nor of splendid legacies to the cause of beneficence, which enshrine the donor in the memory and affection of the Church. But the earth is filled with the labors—the works of the dead.

Almost all the literature—the discoveries of science—the glories of art—the ever-enduring temples—the dwelling places of many generations—the comforts and utilities of life—the very framework of society—the institutions of nations—the principles of government—the fabrics of empire—all are the works of our predecessors, and by these, though dead, they yet speak. Their memorials are all around us—our footsteps are in their paths—their presence is in our dwellings—their voices are in our ears; they speak to us in the sad reverie of contemplation—in the sharp pang of feeling—in the cold shadow of memory—in the bright light of hope; and can it be that we shall not be influenced by the language they utter?

But the dead speak through the press—the books they may have written—and thus perpetuate their influence through all time. Baxter, Bunyan, Doddridge, Howe, and Edwards are at this moment speaking to thousands, with all the freshness and force of personal eloquence, and more souls have doubtless been converted through their instrumentality since they entered upon their rest, than when their voices were heard in the assemblies of men. The gospel trumpet which they here put to their lips has not ceased its reverberating echo. It rolls like the voice of a clarion along down through the ages, and it shall continue until another trumpet shall be heard sounding the funeral knell of time.

But wicked men, too, speak through the press, and live in their writings to poison the fountains of influence, to corrupt hearts that might otherwise have been pure, and to desolate homes that otherwise might have been happy.

It will be the keenest sting of the worm which never dies, and the most agonizing pang of the fire which shall never be quenched, that they have written volumes which are circulated by every library and sold by every vender, in which the foundations of morality are sapped, and thousands of souls effectually and forever ruined.

The press, my brethren, is a mighty illustration of the truth of our text. It shows that the dead live and speak and exert an influence in moulding the character of the generations which succeed them. And if the wise and glorified in heaven wish that their pens had been more industriously employed, the fallen and lost in hell wish that their hands had been palsied ere they touched the scroll which was to scatter plague and pestilence through ranks of living men. Thus is the sentiment of our text illustrated and confirmed, that a man lives and speaks, in his words and deeds and influence, after he is dead.

There is, indeed, a voice in the providence which has bereaved us, that touches the great heart of the nation, filling it with sorrow as no other conceivable event could have done. We can conceive of nothing short of a universal earthquake, or the sound of the archangel's trump, which would have produced the gloom, the awe, the consternation which now surround us. Who that contemplated our country a few days previous to this dreadful calamity, and heard the shouts of victorious men, and saw everywhere the symbols of joy and of triumph, and listened to the expressions of hope, could have named any event, not miraculous, which, in a moment, as it were in

the twinkling of an eye, would have changed the whole aspect of things, would banish mirth from all the gay, composure from all the serene; make the merchant lay down his fabrics, the scribe his pen, and the mechanic his tools; unrobe the bride of her ornaments and the bridegroom of his attire, change the proclamations of chief magistrates from days of rejoicing to days of lamentation, and command a universal pause to business and pleasure, as though we all were anticipating the ushering in of the day of doom! Such a shock was inconceivable from the most natural causes! But God has done it, and we stand confronted before a providence so mysterious, a providence that bereaves us, without a moment's warning or anticipation, of one of the purest, wisest, and safest of men that ever presided over the interests and destinies of a great people. In a lecture delivered in this place a year ago, I characterized him as "the type man of the age." Now that death has ensphered and immortalized him, and disarmed envious and malignant criticism, I may venture to quote what I then said, without fear of giving offence to any one.

"Having thus presented Jefferson Davis as the type and exponent of Southern civilization, we come now briefly to consider our type man, or the exponent of Northern civilization.

"The two forms of civilization are distinctly before you, the bases on which they respectively rest, the principles which they embody, and the spirit with which they are animated. And of all the men now before the public eye, whether in the cabinet or in the field, Abraham Lincoln, the censured and the praised, is our ideal, the impersonation of republican principles, the thinker, and the type man of the age! I am aware that this avowal is in advance of the popular sentiment, but posterity will

do him justice and give him his appropriate niche in the temple of fame. He is not perfect; he needs refinement and taste. Just as our civilization is not perfect; it is in its boyhood state; it needs development, especially in its æsthetic forms. It is not graceful; nor wrought out into perfect symmetry and beauty. Neither is Lincoln handsome; but he is frank, generous, and true. He has muscle and sinew. He has wrought in the log cabin; on the flatboats of the Mississippi; he has wrestled with poverty and the tall forest trees of the West. He is, in the strictest sense, a man of the working classes. He was born to the inheritance of hard work as truly as the poorest laborer's son that digs in the field; and yet, by the strength of his intellect and by his untiring devotion to truth and right, he has come up, through an ascending series, from the walks of the lowly, from the toils of a day-laborer, to stand at the head of one of the most powerful nations on the earth! Is he not great? Is he not entitled to our confidence and esteem?

“Our ship of state is now in a storm of fearful magnitude—the elements are in high commotion, and every part of her noble structure is strained to the utmost tension, but the mind of the thinker is calm, and his strong hand is on the helm. The eyes of all nations are turned to this plain back-woodsman, with his good sense, his noble generosity, his determined self-reliance, and his incorruptible integrity, as he sits amid the war of conflicting elements, striving to guide the national ship through a tempest, at whose violence and perils the world's wisest and oldest statesmen stand aghast! Leave him at the helm and he will bring the vessel, with all her sails set and her pennants flying, to the desired haven, though the old scow which she has towed and which has retarded her progress from the beginning will have been sunk to the bot-

tom, never again to rise to the surface on our American waters!

“Lincoln is a strong man, but his strength is of a peculiar kind; it is not aggressive so much as passive, and among passive things it is like the strength, not so much of a stone buttress as of a wire cable. It is strength swaying to every influence, yielding on this side and on that to popular and present needs, yet tenaciously and inflexibly bound to carry its great end. Surrounded at first by all sorts of conflicting claims and elements, by traitors, by timid loyalists, by radicals, and conservatives, he has listened to all, weighed the words of all, watched, waited for light; but still self-reliant and full of hope, he has kept steadily to the one great purpose; and let him alone and the issue is certain—the rebellion will be crushed—the Union restored—our national honor vindicated, and America shall be all that poets have dreamed or sung: ‘The home of the brave and the land of the free!’”

Are not these true words? Some of you then thought that they were said for party effect, but they were spoken out of the convictions of an honest heart. Has he not done what was predicted of him? And when the storm-fiend was on the waters and the tempest rose high, and we all trembled with apprehension, did he not abide calm in the ship, his hand steady on the helm, and when the storm lulled and the sky began to clear and the sun to burst forth from the darkened clouds, and we saw the old ship gallantly nearing a peaceful harbor, the stars and the stripes floating from her topmost mast, and the multitude on the shore all jubilant with hope—all elated with joy—lo! the pilot falls by a cowardly assassin, cold and unconscious on the deck, his hand still at the helm. The commander is dead, but the ship is safe! The flag floats at half mast, but the stars and stripes are all there! Let

our mourning then be tempered with gratitude that our beloved chief was permitted to live to accomplish his work. He could not have died with greater lustre, when his laurels were all fresh and green, and now, the auroral halo of the martyr will preserve them unfading through all ages. And now, my hearers, what is the voice addressed to us from the life, teachings, and example of our deceased President?

First, that "honesty is the best policy;" that to do right is the wisest and safest, leaving our reputation and all consequences in the hand of God.

Abraham Lincoln's administration was characterized by no crooked or sinister policy. He was called to his responsible position at a time the most difficult and dangerous to the interests and life of the nation, when treason was rampant in the different sections of the land—when rebellion assumed an attitude the most menacing and appalling—when the great republic seemed to be shaken to its very foundations and the wisest statesmen trembled for the result. But the President was calm and firm. He sought to know his duty and then to do it. He adopted his policy, and determined to maintain the integrity of the government and to vindicate her laws. To this end he saw that the rebellion must be subdued, and when those in arms would not yield to wise and paternal counsel he resolved to settle the great questions at issue by the stern arbitrament of the sword. He called for large forces and the munitions of war. The people nobly and promptly responded, for our national honor had been insulted and our national life was in jeopardy. Thousands of our best and bravest from all the loyal North rushed to the rescue of our imperiled country. They fought—they fell on many a battle-field. The rebels were desperate, and when our noble President discovered that slavery was to

them a source of strength, he resolved to strike the monster to the earth. The timid feared; the semi-loyal press howled, and the more rebellious heaped abuse upon the President. Nothing was too vile for them to say. His policy was all wrong. He was threatened and villified. But Abraham Lincoln was firm in the calm consciousness of right and duty.

But where are his accusers now? The *Daily News* and the *World*, that never had a kind word to offer—that indulged in unmeasured vituperation and abuse while he was living, are among the first to do him honor now that he is dead. Have they been converted? Has death changed their views? No, my brethren; in their deep heart they knew that Abraham Lincoln was honest and true to his country's weal. But they were under the ban of party, and could not speak peaceably of him. His acts survive him; his deeds live, and by these, though dead, he yet speaketh. Posterity will do justice to his memory, and he will be known in history as the great Emancipator—the savior of his country. The almost universal feeling even now is, that in his death liberty has lost her greatest champion, humanity her truest friend, and America her purest patriot.

What then is the voice that comes to us from out the back-ground of his noble life?

Be honest—true to your convictions of right—firm in duty, leaving all issues with God. This marked his character and will give immortality to his name.

Another voice, which he being dead, yet speaketh to us, is the folly and sin of putting our trust in an arm of flesh. He did not.

If any man ever cherished a firm reliance on Divine Providence, it was Abraham Lincoln. Listen to his address to his fellow-citizens, when first leaving his home

for the scene of his labors. He says: "A duty devolves upon me which is perhaps greater than that which has devolved upon any other man since the days of Washington. He never would have succeeded except for the aid of Divine Providence, upon which he, at all times, relied. I feel that I cannot succeed without the same Divine aid, which sustained him, and on the same Almighty Being I place my reliance for support; and I hope you, my friends, will all pray that I may receive that Divine assistance, without which I cannot succeed, but with which success is certain."

Through all the progress of this terrible war, his trust has been not so much in the strength of his armies, or the skill of his chief captains, as in the favoring providence of God. His last inaugural is an outflow of a heart trusting in God, in which he confesses he has been the child of his providence, and simply an instrument in his hand.

But our danger all along has been in trusting to an arm of flesh. In the early history of the war one man received almost universal homage until hope deferred, the national heart fainted. And now, in our more recently brilliant successes, we are in danger of overlooking the true source of success in the prominence given to the instrumentalities employed. But from the life, as well as from the grave of the President, comes this startling admonition:

"Lean not on earth; 'twill pierce thee to the heart;
A broken reed at best—but oft a spear,—
On its sharp point, peace bleeds and hope expires."

A similar warning comes from the Divine Oracle:

"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."—Psalm clxvi. 3, 4.

The thoughts of our late President respecting the welfare, peace, and prosperity of the country, though they lingered with him to the last, have perished. He had done his work of subduing the rebellion. Other hands must do the work of punishing the rebels and reconstructing the government, and in this, as in the other, we need the Divine guidance and blessing.

Not Seward nor all the wisdom of the national council, but God, must help us to the end. And as his hand has been so obviously in the great struggle guiding our armies, may we not hope that he will be with us presiding over our councils in the restoration of peace and union? And in this work of pacification and reconstruction, in my utterance this day I think I have the mind of God. If I were the President I would show no mercy to traitors and rebels and assassins at the expense of justice. I would see to it that the majesty of law was vindicated and the government sustained, if it required a whole hecatomb of human victims. Shall we hate and punish theft and arson, and murder, and shall we fraternize with treason and rebellion? "Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph."

Again, had I the ears of the heads of this government, I would say, in its reconstruction, whatever else you do or fail to do, let not one vestige or germ of that accursed system, which has been the cause of all our trouble, remain. Let it be upturned, root and branch, and thrown into the great dead sea of past time! Let there be no yielding, no concession, no compromise here, unless you would have history repeat itself in a second fratricidal, and still more desperate and bloody war!

The only remaining utterance or voice which comes to

us from the life and the grave of our lamented President, is in reference to the evanescent nature of all earthly good. He had reached the acme of human fame; he was the commander in chief of half a million of armed men; he was the ruler of a mighty nation; he was in the meridian of his days; he was esteemed for his personal character and worth; and yet in a moment how is the mighty fallen, and all the glory of his fame is to him as though it had never been.

But few of all the wrestlers reach the goal of their ambition, or realize their hopes. And such as do, have only stood for a short time on the giddy height, and then vanished like the passing meteor, or died a sudden and, perhaps, a violent death. Cæsar met with the assassin's dagger in the Roman senate. Charles the First, King of England, and Mary, Queen of Scots, were beheaded. Henry the Fourth, King of France, died by the knife of the assassin. Napoleon the First was banished. Alexander, after his brilliant career, died in a drunken revel, at an early age. And now our beloved President is added, as an illustration of the vanishing nature of all human greatness. He, too, has died by the hand of violence.

“Death sitteth in the Capitol! His sable wing
Flung its black shadow o'er a country's hope,
And lo! a nation bendeth down in tears.”

Never was grief so heartfelt and universal. It is said that death loves a shining mark, and often against such are his swiftest arrows hurled. All that we love, value, venerate, and press to our hearts, must bow to the inevitable decree, “Dust thou art, and unto dust thou must return.” But when the end comes by violence, how doubly inconsolable is the grief! But still

this tragedy has its voice, and will answer its providential end.

“A thrill of horror through the nation sweeps,
 And tears of anguish from the eyelids fall;
 All party ties and lines forgotten are,
 And thus in grief, if not in patriotic joy,
 The nation is as one.
 'Twere well to weep such tears,
 They purge the heart, and to the soul give strength
 To do great deeds, when deeds are needed most;
 Who loves his country, therefore, shame not now
 O'er her great woe, with me to weep.
 For now each sigh is but a bitter oath,
 Each tear a seal, which makes the oath a bond,
 That every loyal heart doth feel and swear
 Upon the altar of his country's cause,
 Which, by the sacrilegious hand of one
 Who would deface the noblest work of God
 Without a sigh, hath been outraged,
 As never did a fiend the laws of God
 Or man outrage before!”

But the assassin, though he may elude the vigilance of the government for a time, cannot escape. The mark of Cain is on his brow, the murderer's guilt is on his soul, and the Nemesis of vengeance will find him out, and bring him to an awful retribution. But though justice may thus be satisfied, though the act may have been suffered in the Divine providence to tone up the public mind to a keener sense of retributive justice, still all this does not recall the people's favorite—the type-man of his time—our generous, noble, and patriotic President.

“Gone, gone, gone, to his blest and honored grave,
 Gone, gone, alas! our noble, and true, and brave;
 When fond hopes clustered around his life,
 When every heart with love was rife,
 Our brave, true chieftain fell.

Lincoln, Lincoln, beloved, fare thee well !
Our country's flag around him fold,
What shroud more meet for heart so brave,
A nation's prayer shall bless his mould,
A nation's tears bedew his grave.
And shall we bear one word of scorn ?
One rebel taunt, one hostile sneer ?
No ! freemen, no ! his foes we spurn,
And pledge our fealty round his bier.
Freemen ! behold your murdered chief,
His memory to your care we trust ;
Let mercy mingle with your grief,
But strike the traitors to the dust.
Sleep on, brave chief, the flag you bore
O'er North and South, shall surely wave,
And Union, peace, and love once more
Shall meet and mourn around your grave."