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A SERMON

Preached on Sabbath, September 25, 1881,

ON THE

LESSONS OF THE LIFE AND DEATH

— OF —

JAMES ABRAM GARFIELD,

Late President of the United States,

IN THE

Metropolitan Presbyterian Church, Washington, D. C.,

BY THE PASTOR,

Rev. JOHN CHESTER, D. D.

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CORRESPONDENCE.

WASHINGTON, D. C., *September 26, 1881.*

Rev. JOHN CHESTER, D. D.

DEAR SIR: We, the undersigned members of the Metropolitan Presbyterian Church, being impressed with the power and importance of the great truths delivered to your congregation, in the eloquent and appropriate sermon of last Sabbath morning, on the noble life of the late President of the United States, James A. Garfield, and his tragic death at the hands of an assassin, and believing that the thoughts therein conveyed to your people are worthy of careful perusal and consideration by a wider circle, respectfully request a copy for publication.

ROBERT LEITCH.
GEORGE A. BOHRER.
THOMAS G. JONES.
JOHN R. ZIMMERMAN.
WILLIAM H. BARSTOW.
GEORGE W. N. CUSTIS.
JAMES T. BIRCHARD.
JOHN EATON.

MESSES. ROBERT LEITCH, GEORGE A. BOHRER, THOMAS G. JONES, and others.

GENTLEMEN: It is always a source of gratitude to a pastor when the truths uttered from the pulpit awaken interest in his people, and as you kindly express the opinion that the lessons I endeavored to glean from the life of our lamented President should have a wider hearing, they are at your service for publication.

Very truly yours,

JOHN CHESTER.

SERMON.



“By it he being dead yet speaketh.”—*Hebrews xi: 14.*

God has seen fit to visit this land with a universal sorrow. To-day a great nation weeps around the bier of its murdered President. Other nations look on from afar with a sympathy unsurpassed, perhaps unequalled in the annals of history. To attempt to divert your thoughts from this one great subject would be simply impossible, nor is it necessary, for the Christian Sabbath is the very time to consider an event through which God so manifestly speaks to the whole nation.

The life of President Garfield is so suggestive of lessons for the nation, that to him may indeed be applied the words spoken of Abel “By it he being dead yet speaketh.” These words are connected with the first death on record at the hand of an assassin. Abel, while engaged in the conscientious discharge of his duties, was stricken down by a man whose heart was full of devilish malignity. So fell our late President. Abel’s name henceforth passed into history as one to be cherished to the latest generation, so will be cherished the name of JAMES A. GARFIELD. Abel’s life continues to speak instructive lessons to posterity—so will the life of our President.

That life was so beautiful, so outreaching to all the needs

of humanity, so connected with Religion, Statesmanship, and Education that my only difficulty is to know which of its many virtues to select. I will, however, confine myself to three salient points in his character.

“THOUGH DEAD HE YET SPEAKETH” TO US OF THE POSSIBILITIES WITHIN THE REACH OF AMERICAN YOUTH THROUGH PIETY, INTEGRITY, AND INDUSTRY.

He started in life with no advantages of birth, wealth, or influence. The only education which he received was paid for by his own hard-earned wages. The influence he gained was the outcome of personal ability. Yet he rose step by step until the highest place in the government of the nation was reached, and our people recognized in him a man both of great force of character and large intellectual acquirements.

One advantage he did possess in youth immeasurable in its power, namely, the influence and example of pious parents, we may more properly say, of a pious mother, for his father died while his son was but a babe. Any one, who will carefully analyze the life of President Garfield, will find the incipency of its greatness in the religious discipline received from his mother. She taught her children “to fear God and keep his commandments.” Every day she instructed them out of God’s word. In the language of one of his biographers “young Garfield lived in an atmosphere of religious thought.” But his parents did more than this. Their example was an inspiration. The father hewed his home out of the forest with his own axe. The mother spun the yarn, wove the cloth, cooked the simple

meals, and sometimes even labored with her sons in the fields. Both seemed to say to their boy, "James, if you wish to be a good and great man, you must live aright and work hard." I believe what this country owes to James A. Garfield, it owes first to this parental training, based on these two ideas—religion and work; and you saw the result in that fine character, that massive brow, that healthy frame.

It seems, then, as if he, though dead, speaks to-day to every parent and child in this land, and says, "Implant early the seeds of religious truth in your children's hearts; train them up to regard work as a necessity; make them self-dependent, and they will prove good and great men."

May not one of the special providences of this death be the necessity of emphasizing this truth at the present time. We are fast becoming a rich nation. The tendency of our modern inventions is to ease our labors. Public sentiment tends rather in the direction of brain work than hand work. Wealth is regarded too much as an honor; poverty as a disgrace. Now, in the providence of God, the attention and homage of the world is centered around a man who, in one sense of the term, made himself; who rose from a canal boatman to the Presidency of the United States.

He thus speaks to our young men, bidding them trust in God and themselves, if they desire to achieve a noble manhood. Yea, he speaks, not only through the memory of his life, but by his very words, for among his recorded sayings is the following: "From the genius of our Government the pathway to honorable distinction lies open to all. No post of honor so high, but the poorest boy may reach it. It is the pride of every American that many cherished names, at

whose mention our hearts beat with a quicker bound, were worn by the sons of poverty, who conquered obscurity, and became fixed stars in our firmament."

As we recall his memory to-day let us refresh our minds with the truth that the virtue of our citizenship, the stability of our institutions depend on that education which combines the moral, mental, and physical training of the young. Piety, integrity, and industry are the foundation stones on which rests the grand super-structures of American manhood. And I would, to-day, that every boy and girl would reflect on this great lesson which the life of our President teaches them, and resolve that they will attempt to mount the ladder of promotion by only such steps as these—Christian integrity and hard work.

AGAIN, HE BEING DEAD SPEAKS TO US OF THE DUTY OF
PATRIOTISM.

Mr. Garfield was always a patriot, never, in the strict sense of the term, a partisan. It is partly owing to this that men of all political creeds mingle their tears over his memory. In Congress, some of his warmest personal friends were among his political opponents. His patriotism was conscientious. His political preferences were not dictated by personal ambition, but by a sincere belief that they reflected principles of wisdom and justice. Hence, from his first to his last vote, he espoused the side of Loyalty against Rebellion, of Freedom against Slavery. When the Union was threatened he enlisted for its defence, and his "war record" is one of the brightest pages of his history. His desire to sink personal ambition in the good of the country

had a beautiful illustration in his remaining in the House when he could have been elected to the Senate. This he did, at the personal solicitation of President Hayes, who thought that there Mr. Garfield could be of more use to the country. Even when nominated for the Presidency he protested against the use of his name, thinking that others were more deserving of the position. It was not for James A. Garfield, but for his country, that he lived and died.

Surely if there is any time when we need a voice to speak to us on this point, it is now. For many years the fires of political ambition have threatened to consume the relics of our patriotism. The rush for office has swept the patriot into the ranks of the office seeker. Political strife has threatened to undermine our institutions. Partisan rancor has descended to the meanest weapons in efforts to destroy its opponents. Men's characters have been vilified; even forgeries have been employed to tarnish reputations, and slanders invented to blast characters. Our late President did not escape these attacks, but his character stood proof against them, and the contempt of a nation follows those who invented and aided in their circulation. Thank God, to-day this strife for office, this partisan rancor stands abashed in the presence of a great national sorrow, yet it is to be feared that after the scenes connected with his death and burial are over, it may again attempt to raise its serpentine head, and hiss and sting. God forbid that it should be so! Surely if there is any time when our political leaders should sink all partisanship and become patriots, this is the time. Not only the interests of the government, but the wishes of the people demand it; they are heartily sick of mere party scramblings for power and office, what they want are the

great interests of the whole country preserved and conserved. One of the grandest events connected with our President was that over his sick bed and over his coffin, the nation North and South, East and West, have joined hands and linked hearts. Yea, that noblest of Queens, the Queen of England, has, as it were, stretched her hand over the ocean and laid on that coffin a tribute of esteem for the dead, and sympathy with the American nation. If England, (our victory over which we are about to celebrate at Yorktown,) if England, our former foe, can clasp our hand over Garfield's coffin, surely North and South, East and West can clasp theirs, saying, "Let us, while true to our personal convictions, while earnest in the support of our own ideas, while working for the interests of our own party, let us harmonize in one common love, one common effort for the good of the whole nation; let us bury in the grave of our President, all sectional division, all partisan bitterness." For he still seems to speak to us again in these words, so eloquently uttered in Congress: "I look forward with joy and hope to the day when our brave people, one in heart, one in their aspirations, freedom, and peace, shall see that the darkness through which we have traveled was but a part of that stern but beneficent discipline, by which the great disposer of events has been leading us to a higher and nobler national life."

BUT WE SEEM TO HEAR HIS VOICE, ONCE MORE, SPEAKING
TO US IN A NOBLE TESTIMONY TO THE TRUTHS OF THE
CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

Mr. Garfield seems to have been a Christian from his youth. At the age of eighteen he united with the church, and from that time until his death was an esteemed member of the "Church of the Disciples." He was never, strictly speaking, an ordained minister of that church, though he often, in accordance with its discipline, addressed his fellow Christians in their religious meetings. He was not what is known as a demonstrative Christian—preferring to express his religion more by acts than words.

His pastor, Rev. Mr. Power, in an address at the funeral of President Garfield, gave a full unequivocal testimony to his consistency, devotion, and usefulness as a member of the Christian Church. This address is so fresh in your minds that I need not quote from it, but there are incidents in his life which it may be well to recall, as showing a constant sense of dependence on God. Just after the assassination of President Lincoln, the public mind being wrought to a frenzy of feeling, a mob was rushing up the streets of New York, when Mr. Garfield appeared waving a paper in his hands. It was a telegram announcing the succession of President Johnson, an event which, like the succession of our present President, gave a general sense of relief. How magnificent was the burst of eloquence which came from Mr. Garfield's lips. How noble the idea of calming the mind of the infuriated populace by leading their thoughts up to God. "Fellow-Citizens," he began, "Clouds and dark-

ness are round about Him. His pavilion is thick waters and thick clouds of the sky. Justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne. Mercy and truth shall go before his face. Fellow-Citizens, *God reigns*, and the Government at Washington still lives."

Those of you who listened to his eloquent Inaugural Address will remember these closing words: "I shall greatly rely upon the wisdom and patriotism of Congress, and of those who may share with me the responsibilities and duties of administration, *and above all to second my efforts to promote the welfare of this great people and this great Government, I earnestly invoke the support and blessings of Almighty God.*" When the nation read this Inaugural there was a feeling of thankfulness that we had a man to rule over us in the fear of God.

President Garfield showed in many ways his desire to "keep a conscience void of offence toward God and man." That remarkable saying of his, which should be embalmed in the memory of every legislator, well illustrates his conscientiousness: "I have represented (he said) a district in Congress whose approbation I greatly desired, * * * but I yet desired still more the approbation of one person, and his name was Garfield. He is the only man I am compelled to sleep with, and eat with, and live and die with, and if I could not have his approbation I should have had bad company." What is this but the exact sentiment of the Bible, "our rejoicing is this, the testimony of a good conscience."

It is also to be noted with gratitude that no stain rests upon the private character of our dead President. While in the White House it presented all the elements of a pure

Christian home. He was a model son in his affection for his mother; a model husband in his tender solicitude for his wife; a model father in bringing up his children in simple, honest, industrious habits. The American people felt proud that they had a ruler stainless in character. To-day, then, though dead he speaks to us of the importance of allying character with office; of seeing that we have good men to rule over us, those who respect the laws of the home as well as of the State.

It is a pleasant thought that the two greatest nations of the earth, the United States and Great Britain, were ruled over at the same time, one, by a man, the model of a husband and father; the other, by a woman, the model of a wife and mother. And, thank God, we have reason to believe that he who is now our President possesses the same noble traits of private character, and that this nation will continue to present to the eyes of the world a ruler who can be honored both for his private character and official integrity.

The great question of the hour is this: Will the nation *hear* these voices speaking to us through the memory of our dead President? We seem, as a nation, to stand on an elevated point in our history. So far there has been a gradual ascent in power, influence, and prestige. Shall we now ascend further or turn and retrace our steps? Instead of progress, experience decadence. Instead of development, disintegration. Instead of union and peace, division and discord. Let us not overlook the fact that the decision of this question rests in some measure with every citizen. Being a representative Government, its rulers must always reflect the character and opinions of the ruled. It is, then,

not only a solemn juncture in our country's history but equally in that of every one of its citizens. One duty of this hour is to lay hold of God in prayer. We need prayer to-day as much for a living President as we have needed it lately for a dying one. Few rulers have ever been called to the helm of state at so solemn a period as has our present Chief Magistrate. Let, then, the prayers, sympathies, and efforts of a nation centre around him. Let the members of both parties be the Aarons and Hurs to hold up his hands, while he strives to direct the affairs of this great nation. Let us also strive to have the habits of our people brought more into conformity to God's laws. Let us face the fact that righteousness is the only basis of true national exaltation; that righteousness which consists in obedience to God's laws; that which not only antagonizes but punishes crime, whether the criminal be an assassin of men's lives, through the use of deadly weapons, or an assassin of men's happiness by making them drunkards, or an assassin of our civil liberties by stirring up party strife. From the grave of our martyred President comes a call to this nation to to see that justice be administered to all evil-doers. Not the justice of mob-law, but of regularly administered legal process. And I believe that this land will have on it the stain of blood, crying like Abel's to God for vengeance, until it shall have, by regular process of law, convicted and executed the wretch who caused our President's death.

And now, in a few hours the body of our late President will be committed to the tomb, amid the silent, deep, reverential sorrow of the civilized world. Over that tomb may be finally erected a monument of marble, but over his memory has already been placed a monument which will

stand when marble crumbles to dust. It is a monument composed of countless stones, each stone being the respect, love, and sympathy of each upright heart in these fifty millions of people. While the wreaths which encircle Garfield's coffin must soon wither, the wreaths of affection which encircle his memory will, to use his own words (in reference to the memory of President Lincoln,) "endure till the last syllable of recorded time, when the volume of human history shall be sealed up and delivered to the Omnipotent Judge."

HYMN SUNG AT THE CLOSE OF THE SERVICES.

Go to the grave in all thy glorious prime!
 In full activity of zeal and power;
 A Christian cannot die before his time;
 The Lord's appointment is the servant's hour.

Go to the grave; at noon from labor cease;
 Rest on thy sheaves, thy harvest-task is done;
 Come from the heat of battle, and in peace,
 Soldier! go home; with thee the fight is won.

Go to the grave, which, faithful to its trust,
 The germ of immortality shall keep;
 While, safe as watched by cherubim, thy dust
 Shall to the judgment day in Jesus sleep.

Go to the grave, for there thy Saviour lay
 In death's embraces, ere He rose on high;
 And all the ransomed, by that narrow way,
 Pass to eternal life beyond the sky.

Go to the grave! No, take thy seat above!
 Be thy pure spirit present with the Lord,
 Where thou for faith and hope hast perfect love
 And open vision for the written Word.

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