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# A DISCOURSE.

BY

REV. DR. BYRON SUNDERLAND,

ON THE

## SHOOTING OF PRESIDENT GARFIELD

AT THE DEPOT IN WASHINGTON, SATURDAY MORNING,  
JULY 2d, 1881, BY CHARLES J. GUTEAU :

DELIVERED AT

THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

WASHINGTON, D. C.,

SABBATH MORNING, JULY 3d, 1881.

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R. O. POLKINHORN, PRINTER.

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WASHINGTON, D. C., *4th July, 1881.*

Rev. BYRON SUNDERLAND, D. D.:

DEAR SIR: We earnestly unite in asking of you the manuscript of your able sermon of yesterday morning having for its subject the lessons to be learned of the atrocious attempt on Saturday last upon the life of our noble President, whose continued extreme danger has made this a day of deep solicitude and sorrow instead of celebration and joy.

It is our desire to print and give it circulation beyond the walls of the church of which you have been so long its loved pastor, for we believe it contains truth worthy of earnest heed on the part of every lover of our dear country.

Very sincerely and truly,

JOHN BAILEY,  
S. W. CURRIDEN,  
J. E. CARPENTER,  
H. CRITTENDEN,  
F. B. DALRYMPLE,  
CHARLES DUBOIS,  
G. M. FISHER,  
M. S. GIBSON,  
C. H. GRAVES,  
Dr. G. F. JOHNSTON,  
OCTAVIUS KNIGHT,

J. P. LOW,  
Gov. R. P. LOWE,  
JAMES PATTERSON,  
T. F. SARGENT,  
CHAUNCEY SMITH,  
E. B. TAYLOR,  
T. C. THAKER,  
ALFRED THOMAS,  
E. D. TRACY,  
S. M. WILLIAMSON,  
IRVING WILLIAMSON,

And others.

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WASHINGTON, *July 4th, 1880.*

Messrs. BAILEY, CURRIDEN, and others:

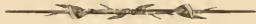
GENTLEMEN: In reply to your request, I submit the manuscript of my discourse for publication.

Thanking you for the favorable opinion and just sentiments you express; sharing with you, as well as the people of the whole country, in the astonishment and sorrow of this day; and fervently praying that this evil may be overruled for good—I remain, gentlemen,

Very truly, your friend,

B. SUNDERLAND.

## S E R M O N .



EZEKIEL VII. : 17. All hands shall be feeble and all knees shall be weak as water.

The event of yesterday has filled the land with a new dismay. "All hands are feeble and all knees are weak as water."

Assassination is the grimmest ghost that stalks among the nations. Of all the spectres that haunt our planet—to fill mankind with horror—none is more demoniac. Well it is for human kind that the fell spirit is but rarely permitted to execute its fiendish deeds. No sadder page does the muse of history record.

When Cæsar was slain the Roman people worshipped him as a god ; when Henry IV. of France was stabbed to the heart in the streets of Paris, his death was mourned as a national calamity. When Lincoln was laid low by the shot of a dastard stage-player, his demise was an event which raised the sympathetic indignation of the civilized world. When Alexander II. of Russia was torn in pieces by Nihilist torpedoes, a shudder ran through the nations of Europe, the tremors of which still linger in the hearts of men.

But who could dream that here in our peaceful,

favored country, under the freest government on earth, with so many severe struggles over-past, so many deliverances wrought out, so many prosperities smiling on every hand, so much happiness filling the hearts and hopes of the people, the dreadful shadow would break in upon us, the demon would spring again, as from the mouth of hell, and in a moment cover the land with the darkness of terror, making all hands feeble and all knees weak as water?

On the very eve of the Nation's anniversary, when the land should be filled with grateful jubilation, and men should have occasion to speak proudly of the position of the great Republic among this world's powers, ascribing to the God of our fathers the glory of our establishment and the splendor of our progress—here in his own Capitol, on a bright summer Saturday morning, before the eyes of men, women and children, at a public station, through which he was passing, bearing in his person the chief dignity of the Magistracy—that the President should be shot down as if he were a dog; that the murderous hand should bear an aim so cruel and then that the lips of the demoniac should pronounce the deed “a political necessity,” is all so sudden, so startling, so appalling, as to paralyze our very thoughts. In such a time Rumor, hundred tongued, gives voice to imagination, and public inquiry must await with patience the resolution of the dreadful confusion.

Through day and night suspense has held her breath, while the bulletins from the White House, where he

lies, have announced the progress of his struggle for life; and while the Faculty are using their utmost skill to turn the trembling scale in his favor, the heart of every christian in the land has been pouring forth its prayer into the ears of God that He will raise up again the prostrate ruler of this people. One touch of the Almighty finger can turn His servant at this time from the issues of death!

But what a spectacle! Around the couch of Garfield a procession files to-day with muffled tread and tearful countenance. In that procession is the Fealty of fifty millions of people to our form of government. There is the woful face of our National Constitution, looking on the pallid and bleeding form of *him* in whom it has been so brutally and basely desecrated; there I see the sad genius of our American Institutions, bending in grief and shame at the outrage committed in the name of political necessity. There, too, is the venerable and august presence of Civil Liberty, weeping for the dishonor of her much-favored people; and there, in deepest sympathy of affliction, stand Public Order, and Honest Labor, and Sober Industry, and Eager Commerce, and Gold-Browed Finance, each smitten with the shock; each grieving with apprehension; yea, and all the Trades of Human Discovery and Invention, the Sons of Literature and Science, come bowing in anguish.

He was on his way to the Alma Mater, where expectation had long prepared for his coming, and where in the classic halls of learning his laurel wreath

awaited him. But more than this. May we not say that over that bloody couch bend down at this moment the immortal shades of our fathers with looks of lamentation? Alas! when they laid the foundation of this free nation—when in the old historic Hall they affixed their names to the Declaration, and when they proclaimed it would be celebrated in all generations by “festivities, bon-fires, and illuminations,” how little did they imagine that the demon spirit which had stained the roll of history with the crime of regicide would ever assault the sovereignty of the people in the person of their Chief Magistrate.

So, in this period dedicated to memories which stir our minds with gratitude and pride, the pæans turn to songs of mourning, the gladness is changed to grief, mirth ceases from the land, and every patriot’s head hangs low with dread and shame.

How changed will be the tone of the pulpit and the press through all the land to-day. This year of marvels has now added to its portrait one foul blot which cannot be effaced. The bullet of a bloody man has laid low in the dust this great nation’s pride—and the Calends of July, 1881, will stand in the records of time signalled with fiendish crime.

With such events staring us in the face, what heart can we have, as a people, to celebrate our liberties; with such possibilities before us, in peaceful and quiet times, what civic honors can ever be safe; what pleasing anticipations may be suddenly cut off. It is thus, we find, alike with men and nations—the good

and evil commingled, the mystery of darkness shadowing the brightest lines of human life. When on this day we would have opened our mouth in gladness, and made remembrance of our national historic fame, and sounded the trumpet of the future, calling all hearts to omens of hope and deeds of heroic virtue, we have suddenly to suppress our growing ardor and give way to the anguish of deep humiliation.

But in the stillness of the dread hush which lies upon the Nation, what lessons spring from the contemplation of such a tragedy? What views should be taken of an event like this? The secular press will no doubt fully express and diffuse the atheistic notions prevailing in our times, and will discuss, without reference to God or His providence, the nature and influence of this flagitious crime. But it is the duty of the Christian pulpit to direct the public mind in those channels of sober thought which are opened in the Christian theory of a Supreme Ruler guiding the affairs of men, and working out from age to age the sublime purposes of a Divine administration.

1. First, then, it may be said that the shooting of the President was the work of a wretched adventurer, who, broken in fortune and claiming some place under the Government, was driven to desperation, and who sought relief by an assault on the life of the Chief Magistrate. That a man of right principles and a sound mind could ever be induced to the performance of such a deed is wholly inadmissible. The



expressions which the homicide is reported to have made on his arrest—the views announced by him in a letter taken from his person, must be regarded as the vaporings of an unbalanced intellect attempting to justify his most heinous crime. He styles himself a lawyer, a theologian and a politician. Under which of these professions he would rank his infamous deed he has not attempted to disclose. But any ascription of the crime to either would be a libel on the truth, and a horrid travesty on all the honorable pursuits of men. Can, then, the irreligious science or philosophy of our day explain the state of mind or trace the effectual causes which led him to the act? It is evident that his own explanation must be taken as simply the baseless raving of a fanatic too vicious for sober logic, and yet too studied to escape responsibility.

Yet I discover in an infidel book the following exposition of a theme which bears directly upon this point: “In the phenomena of mind we find the same endless chain of efficient causes—the same mechanical necessity. Every thought must have had an efficient cause: every motive, every desire, every fear, every hope and dream, must have been necessarily produced. There is no room in the mind of man for providence or chance. The facts and forces governing thought are as absolute as those governing the motions of the planets. A poem is produced by the forces of nature, and is as necessarily and naturally produced as mountains and seas. You will seek in vain for a thought

in man's brain without its efficient cause.--Every mental operation is the necessary result of certain facts and conditions.—Mental phenomena are considered more complicated than those of matter, and consequently more mysterious. Being more mysterious they are considered better evidence of the existence of a God. No one infers a god from the simple--from the known--from what is understood, but from the complex, from the unknown and incomprehensible—our ignorance is God. What we know is science. When we abandon the doctrine that some infinite Being created matter and force, and enacted a code of laws for their government, the idea of interference will be lost. The real priest will then be not the mouth-piece of some pretended deity, but the interpreter of nature. From that moment the church ceases to exist: the tapers will die out upon the dusty altar; the moths will eat the fading velvet of pew and pulpit; the Bible will take its place with the Shastras, Puranas, Vedas, Eddas, Sagas, and Korans, and the fetters of a degrading faith will fall from the minds of men.”

This is the blind and superficial doctrine of the current evolution. It is the survival of the fittest in the struggle for existence. It is the doctrine of positive fate and mechanical necessity—and, as applied to the case before us, it is an imposition on the moral and religious convictions of the whole country. What place has an infidel philosophy in meeting a great national calamity like this? How vain and vapid

are its reasonings ! How frigid and fruitless its consolations !

If the teaching above cited be true, then why has the homicide been incarcerated ? Why is he held in custody for a moment ? He is as much a victim of fate as the victim of his assault ; and courts of justice are a mockery and criminal punishment an oppression. With what repugnance does the soul of the afflicted nation turn away from the maudlin vaporings of atheism in such a day as this !

2. But what is the Christian philosophy of this event ? It is simply that which the Bible reveals — an almighty and perfect moral Governor of the world, who has created the human race and placed them under His law as free moral agents ; who has given them, within certain limitations, the power of choice, and who holds them responsible for the exercise of that choice. And so this same Supreme Ruler of the world has divided the nations, both in time and space. He raises up one and puts down another. He so controls all things in His providence as to hold men in themselves and in society amenable to His law for the deeds they do ; and it is upon this righteous principle of God's moral government that all enlightened and civilized modern human government is founded ; and when society forgets his principle ; when, through the influence of human depravity and practical atheism, the laws and ordinances of heaven are trampled underfoot ; when public discipline becomes lax, and the whole mass of the people—espec-

ially the dregs of society—are delivered up to the free license of vanity and conceit in the sacred name of God and liberty; when all social order is broken down, and there is no more any veneration for authority in the land—then a state of things has been prepared in which such events as this may easily transpire!

It is plain that the stroke which has now fallen on the head of the nation has not made him the victim on any merely personal grounds; but as the representative of the nation's authority, he has been smitten down by the hand of murder—and this horrible deed has been permitted to take place, under the providence of God, in order that the people of this country and the world may learn the perils of unbounded license as they have already learned those of despotic tyranny in ages past; and the lesson which springs from the day's disaster is one which no system of atheistic philosophy would suggest—namely, that it is unsafe to permit the domicile of the magistrate, or the movements of his person, to be haunted by fanatical tramps, hungry with greed of office and maddened by disappointment to deeds of desperation.

I hold that the powers which be are ordained of God; and that in this country those powers derived from the people themselves, and expressed by their representatives in the laws established, and in their just and faithful administration, must be respected and obeyed, in order to preserve society from utter dissolution. But what are the actual facts of the

case? Vice and irreligion abound on every hand; the Sabbath of God is with multitudes becoming a thing of the past; intemperance and profanation of all sacred things are wide-spread; and a universal greed of gain without labor has eaten at the core of the public morals of the nation. In too many cases, gambling speculation controls politics and legislation; men high in popular favor have lent their influence to this demoralization; the example of prominent station has contributed to the growing laxity; the public press has only too often and too constantly sneered at moral sentiments, indulged in the wildest spirit of defamation, and prostituted its mighty powers in pandering to the basest passions; the sanctions of religion have been undermined, and the reverence denied to God and his laws has been followed in too many cases by the repudiation of all respect for the obligations between man and man.

A gross instance of this laxity occurred in our own city but a short time since, and to which I shall take the liberty here to refer. A well-meaning citizen propounded a question of Sabbath desecration to the District authorities and they referred it to the law officer for an opinion. His answer was a disgrace to his profession, and an affront to the religious sentiment of the age. He cited, for the purpose of holding up to contempt, the statute on blasphemy—and even ventured to impugn the Sabbath labors of the Christian clergy. He stated that the almost universal belief was that the Supreme Ruler of the universe

could not have His own way upon our globe, even with such aid as man had been disposed to volunteer. He quoted the penalties of the law which were, in the judgment of the framers of it, the measure of such deserts—and in which we should only differ from them in relegating them to the hand of God himself; and he concluded by virtually admitting that no competent Sabbath laws were in force among us—and the whole Christian church sat by and made no protest or sign of dissent whatsoever.

The fact is, we are all more or less responsible in this community for such a state of things, when the very officers of the law and custodians of the public morals, with the tacit consent of the whole Christian church, thus formally and officially cast down all the sanctions of authority both human and divine. What may we expect shall not transpire to pollute the very soil on which we stand!

3. But there is another lesson which this calamity most deeply impresses—namely, the different values in the lives of men and the perils which yet belong the same to all. In this case it is bad enough at the best. The career of the Chief Magistrate for a score of years in public life, has been distinguished, and is familiar to us all; and whatever may be men's views of his policy and procedure since his inauguration, no true American, of any class, will, for a moment, seek to disparage the fact that he has risen to the highest office of human fame, and stands clothed with the majesty of the Executive power of a great people.

To strike him down from his high office is to wound the nation's very *head*. And when, on the other hand, we turn to scrutinize the personal value of the life of the assassin, what compensation might his death be for the loss of the President of the United States? Life for life it may be; but how unequal the exchange! Amid what dangers do the most favored walk when, as the great poet of nature writes—"An eagle soaring in his pride of power is hawked at by a mousing owl and killed." Whoever has strength enough to pull a trigger and malice enough to assault the fairest, proudest citadel of human life, can put in jeopardy the very Chosen of the people—and there is absolutely no adequate atonement. If the President should die then the miserable carcass of the assassin may adorn the gallows. But if the President should by any means survive, then his would-be murderer would simply be domiciled in some house of correction at government expense. And what satisfaction can this furnish for the commission of so great a crime!

Out of the bright hours and happy throngs of rejoicing people—full of the plans and pleasures of the coming days—this new anguish grows upon the Nation, and the whole land shudders with a deep dread of apprehension as to the hope of the morning succeeds the night's uncertainty and the gloom of mortal suspense. And all this fearful change is wrought as in a moment by a vagabond's bloody caprice. They will doubtless attempt to shield him by prov-



ing him a maniac. But maniac or not the gallows *should* claim him for its own. The error of this country, perhaps more than of any other, is lenity toward criminals. And when a few more Presidents are slaughtered perhaps the dilettanti dream of an illusive humanitarianism may finally be dispelled and some more competent punishment devised. Till then the only price for an offence like this must be the confinement of the offender at public cost.

Yes, men may scoff at the idea of atonement under the government of God, that sin may be destroyed and the sinner live; but look at the great characters in human history, and the effect of their death by the hand of violence. They have been the foremost men of all the world. It is a sad, strange thing that only thus has the evil of the world been counter-vailed. There must be sacrifice. It is the doctrine of the New Testament, and the Supreme sacrifice was *Christ* Himself. Never was there a truer saying than this: the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church; and I will add what has also been proved in history, the blood of patriots is the seed of the State. There are many who complain of the despotism of the Church—the cruelty of the priesthood. They have yet to learn of the despotism of the mob and the more fearful cruelty of the autocrat of the pavement! The liberalism of our day needs a lesson in the volume of European communism and nihilism, and there are men among us who are the forerunners and abettors of this carnival of crime;



men who, by their public teachings, are corrupters of society at its very foundations, and who, applauded by listening thousands, are preparing this people for the renewal of those old dreadful Roman days, so vividly drawn in the mouth of the great conspirator, Catiline :

“Traitor, I go. but I return! Look to your hearths, my lords, for there henceforth shall sit for household gods shapes hot from Tartarus—all shames and crimes—wan Treachery with his thirsty dagger drawn—Suspicion poisoning his brother’s cup—naked Rebellion, with his torch and axe, making his wild sport of your blazing thrones till Anarchy comes down on you like night, and Massacre seals Rome’s eternal grave!”

4. But the question ever returns: Why do offences come? Why this demon deed, like a bolt from a clear sky? In what mystery of evil must it transpire? In the reported query of the President himself, “why did that man shoot me?”—who, in answer to this question, can trace the working of a disordered mind? Will the infidel philosopher tell us it was a mechanical necessity? Will the wretched homicide himself tell us it was a political necessity? And one answer is equally satisfactory as the other to the great, surging, palpitating heart of this nation on this fair summer Sabbath day!

But why, if God rules (and rules most surely He does), was such a deed permitted to fall like a leaden weight upon our national name—staining the fair escutcheon of America, and lowering the mighty flag of the Republic to half-mast on the country’s proudest day in all the year?

Why should the innocent be made to suffer by the

hand of the guilty? Why should the honored and distinguished be laid low by the murderous act of an insignificant and crawling miscreant, prowling in the very sanctuary of women, and watching his chance for an immortality of infamy? Why does the Almighty Ruler of the Universe permit such things to be, unless upon the principle that human agency is free? Men are moral beings, and are acting themselves out, and acting on one another to resolve the stupendous problem of human life—so that good may be evolved from evil; so that nations may learn more thoroughly the value of authority and subordination—the very marrow of tranquillity and peace; so that men may know that the laws of God are the only foundation on which the stability of States can safely repose; to stain the vanity of human pride; to show how greatness may be suddenly crippled by littleness; to show what small credit lies in all the boasted glory of human progress; to show that the vaunted civilization of our times can be equally shamed by deeds that once stained the barbarism, so called, of former ages; that human nature is the same in all climes and centuries; and that the Bible of the Christian is God's faithful transcript of the history of man on Earth, and that the muttering, peeping wizards of a shallow philosophy are the most arrogant deceivers and most virulent enemies of mankind.

In this year of wonders—when the physical elements seem to be astir with unwonted energy; when the political elements in all nations are filling the

hearts of men with perplexity and fear; when comets blaze in the midnight sky, and tempests make havoc of the homes of men; when murder stalks abroad in open day, and the honored head of a great people lies in the anguish of his mighty struggle for life itself—what ought to be the attitude of such a people before the Supreme King of the world? There is, and there can be, but one rational reply.

Let the feuds of party and the bickerings of ambition have a pause. Let vice be arrested—let corruption perish. Let blasphemy seal her lips. Let the tongue of slander be paralyzed, and the hand of detraction be palsied. Let the lying spirit abroad in the land be made silent as the grave. Let the church be purified and re-indoctrinated in the saving truth and energy of the cross. Let Sabbath profanation cease. Let the scourge of intemperance no longer waste the country's genius and flower. Let humility take the place of pride. Let infidelity hide its hideous head. Let superstition and fanaticism be suppressed. Let the wandering and infatuated people return to the sanctuaries of God, and there, by the altars of prayer and praise and worship, learn once more in penitence and tears that the favor of the Omnipotent Jehovah is the only buckler of a nation's prowess—the only fortress of a nation's peace!

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## APPENDIX.

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The *Washington Post*, a prominent journal of the day, had an editorial commenting on a paragraph of this discourse, in its issue of Tuesday, July 5, 1881.

As that article is personally dignified and respectful, and contains some points in which I heartily concur, I take the liberty of adding below a communication which was prepared so soon as my attention was called to it, but which, through some unavoidable delay, was not sent to the conductors of that paper.

*To the Editor of the Post.*

MY DEAR SIR: In the rush of events, and the anxiety of these days, I had not seen your comments of the 5th instant on a paragraph of my last Sabbath discourse. In fact, my attention was called to it by a letter from a gentleman in Virginia received yesterday, and inspired by his reading your article. He also sent me a pamphlet which he published in New York not yet a month ago.

As to the tone and manner of your criticism I note no exception—unless it be that you have taken a single paragraph for the whole discourse. I perceive you hold the optimist view of the occurrence—and surely it is more grateful to our nature to make the best of everything—but you will agree with me that there is a time to *mourn* as well as a time to *dance*. And does it not pertain to the christian pulpit to point out the danger of society, and raise a voice of warning against the evils which threaten it? If the christian clergy may not, or ought not, to do this, to what class of men shall we look? Many, I know, affect to despise them as inferior in intellect, and incapable of tracing causes and effects; yet if this could be shown to demonstration, the clergy might, possibly, be of some public utility—since we are told that on one occasion it was the cackling of geese that saved Rome.

Every thoughtful man will seek to find, as far as possible, a final cause for such events as that which the civilized world is now deploring. In this pursuit I ventured to give an interpretation to the dispensation of Providence. But to this you take exception—as you surely have the full liberty to do. You and I both believe in the superintending Providence of God, and that by His purposes, either positive or permissive, He designs to deal with men and nations as moral agents, capable of free choice, and responsible to law. We are not of those who seek to sit in judgment on the Supreme Being, and with vain hardihood speak of Him in terms of contempt and blasphemy.

But you think I have failed to draw the rightful lesson from the premises; not because there is *no* lesson, but because the *evil* specified does not in fact exist.

As to the perils of “unbounded license,” were it agreed that such an evil does exist I presume we should not differ. Nor do I imagine you to dissent from the liability that this evil may come to exist, even if it does not now, and in either case to be forewarned is to be forearmed. You will take notice that I have only discussed the tendency

of the current state of things, without attempting to define the point to which we have already reached.

Of course you are looking at the aspect from one stand-point and I am looking at it from another; and viewing it as I do, I must confess that while my hope as a christian predominates, my fears as a citizen are many and great.

I fully agree with you in the doctrine of toleration; but at the same time I deplore many sentiments which seem to me to be most pernicious, and which, if they could prevail, would, in my opinion, inflict the deepest injury upon society.

There are many points in your editorial which deserve candid consideration, but I will only ask for space at this time to elucidate my statement toward the close of the paragraph you cited from the discourse—

“There are men among us who are the forerunners and abettors of this carnival of crime,” &c.

This you emphatically deny, and declare that no class of men among us teach assassination. While I perfectly agree with you that, so far as now appears, the crime of this assassin should not be laid to another man's door; and while it would be cruel to intimate or suggest, at this time, that another human being had any knowledge or thought of the murderer's intention; still records have been made in this country, within the last few years, which I think would justify a rational fear of the evil I pointed out.

From the pamphlet above referred to, I extract the following:

P. 91. “In the *New York Weekly Herald* of March 19th, 1881, we have the programme of Nihilism authenticated to us and taken from the columns of the *Journal of the Congress of Internationals* not long since convened at Berne, Switzerland.”

After citing the creed of the Nihilist—which is “to destroy everything, the good with the bad”—the writer follows with a reference to New York Nihilism, and the proceedings of a large meeting convened at the Steuben House, March 15th, 1881; and states that a preamble and resolutions were adopted, the conclusion of which is in these words—“kill, destroy, assassinate, annihilate, even to the very germ, your aristocracy. Have for them no feeling of love, for they are incapable of that noble emotion.”

And prior to this, the writer states that a public lecturer (whose name I now withhold for a similar reason to that given by the authorities for withholding the name of the person who furnished Guiteau with money) said in a certain lecture, contained in a volume the page of which is given, what will, no doubt, shock the public mind and create surprise in unaccustomed quarters. The language is as follows:

“I suppose Alexander of Russia was put there by the order of God, was he? I am sorry he was not removed by the Nihilist that shot at him the other day. We telegraphed to that country congratulating that wretch that he was not killed. \* \* \* My sympathies cluster around the point of the dagger!”

Mr. Editor, contemplate these utterances, and then say whether my language was too strong for the facts. “The voice of the raven” may be hoarse, but I respectfully submit if he is not a more seemly bird at a funeral than the fowl of the Argus tail?

Very truly,

B. SUNDERLAND.

July 8th, 1881.

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