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DAMON'S LINCOLN SERMON

**A Discourse Preached by
Rev. Samuel Chenery Damon
in
Honolulu, Hawaii
14 May, 1865**

1917
**WILLIAM M. CLEMENS
PUBLISHER**

56 & 58 Pine Street

New York City, N. Y.

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(Over a half a century ago, in the Seaman's Chapel, Honolulu, on 14 May, 1865, the Reverend S. C. Damon preached the following sermon on the assassination of Lincoln. It was published in *The Friend* of 1 June, 1865, and is republished at this time as a chapter of historic and religious literature that should not be forgotten.—Editor.)

DAMON'S LINCOLN SERMON

IN THE ADMINISTRATION of the affairs of this world God is ever doing and permitting things to be done the reasons for which cannot be seen by shortsighted mortals. Such is God's method of proceeding that we are continually compelled to take many things on trust. Faith in Him is the great lesson which He is ever teaching mankind. He has drawn an impenetrable veil before our eyes, shutting out the future from our view. "Ye know not what shall be on the morrow," or "what a day may bring forth." How impressively these scriptural declarations and those of my text are illustrated by events which have recently transpired on the other side of the globe. All the loyal people of that great country, stretching from the shores of the Atlantic to the Pacific, and from the Gulf to the Lakes, were preparing for such a day of thanksgiving and jubilee as never had been witnessed on the western continent. The national feeling, which, during the four years of civil war had been repressed, was rising, and about to burst forth in such scenes and shouts of rejoicing as would have made the "welkin ring." The dove of peace which had, during those four long years, been confined to the ark, rocked and tossed upon the troubled waters of civil strife, political contentions and cruel war, had now been released, and with the olive branch in her mouth, was winging her flight over mountains and valleys broad savannahs and boundless prairies. The good news was flashed with lightning speed over the land and the world. The dark clouds were rolling away, and the sun of the nation's glory was beginning to shine, and the rainbow of peace was distinctly seen spanning a continent,

as in days of yore, when lo! from the receding black clouds of secession, treachery and slavery, there darted forth a fiendish arm, holding in its hand an assassin's dagger. The whole scene is instantly changed. For a moment the pulse and heart of the nation cease to beat, but the next instant there follows a sigh of anguish and wail of sorrow. Abraham Lincoln, our beloved president, is dead! I do not believe, since the creation of the world, so many hearts, in so short a space of time, ever mourned over the death of a single human being. There is no disputing or gainsaying the fact, Abraham Lincoln had gradually been winning for himself a place in the hearts of the American people second only to that of Washington, the father of his country. But will not the people now call him the savior of the country, when the life of the nation was threatened?

This most tragic event is not an accident. It is not the work of chance. We do not live in a world ruled over by blind fate. Never before did I realize there was so much force and intensity of meaning in those words of our Savior: "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered," and even a sparrow "shall not fall on the ground without your Father." I do not think there ever was a public man who recognized more clearly and fully this doctrine of God's special providence than did our lamented President. Gathered as we now are in the house of God on this first Sabbath morning after having received the news of his death, how can I more appropriately employ the usual time allotted to a discourse than by directing your minds to some of those moral and spiritual lessons taught by this most sad and melancholy event. The telegraphic intelligence which has reached the Island is quite sufficient to disclose the naked facts, but insufficient to portray the effects upon the country at large. Under these circumstances, perhaps I may be allowed to dwell upon the religious features of Mr. Lincoln's character. He was a public man, and had been called to occupy a

most responsible and trying public position. He fully realized this fact from the very moment that he stepped forth from the sphere of a private American citizen to occupy the highest position within the gift of his countrymen. His brief address on leaving his home at Springfield, Illinois, is inimitably beautiful: "My Friends:—No one not in my position can appreciate the sadness I feel at this parting. To this people I owe all that I am. Here I have lived more than a quarter of a century; here my children were born, and here one of them lies buried. I know not how soon I shall see you again. 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. I hope you, my friends, will pray that I may receive that Divine assistance without which I cannot succeed, but with which success is certain. I bid you all an affectionate farewell."

During the delivery of this short address the audience was much affected and when it closed there was the hearty response, "We will pray for you." During his progress to Washington he uttered similar sentiments at Columbus and Steubenville, in Ohio, ever expressing the hope that he should be sustained by the prayers of the American people. In this address we have the keynote to all his subsequent addresses, letters, proclamations and public documents. I cannot recall a single one in which he did not fully and frankly recognize God's agency in the management of the affairs of this world. His allusions to an overruling Providence were not in a half-apologetic and semi-infidel style, as if he wished to conciliate the feelings of Christians, while at the same time he had no very clear and definite idea of what he was saying or writing. Read

his second inaugural, on the 4th of last March. The staunchest and most orthodox divine could not have given utterance to more evangelical doctrines or religious sentiments. He quotes and comments upon the very words of our Divine Savior, in the eighteenth chapter of Matthew. "Woe unto the world because of offences." Then, too, with what masterly emphasis he quotes the words of the Psalmist David, prefacing, "If God wills that the war continue until all the wealth piled by the bondman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil, shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, 'The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.' " Noble utterances and sublime language, which will live as long as the English language shall be spoken. Such truthful sayings will go forth from the Chief Magistrate of a great people to break asunder the fetters of slavery throughout the world. His name through all coming time will be associated with that most important of all his state documents—his Emancipation Proclamation. It may well be compared with the imperial ukase of the Emperor Alexander, giving liberty to twenty millions of Russian serfs. From the time and circumstances under which it was issued it must ever be viewed as marking the transition point from slavery to freedom, in the history of the Republic of America. I cannot stop to dwell upon Mr. Lincoln's efforts and labors in behalf of the slaves and the colored people of America. It was noble and philanthropic, and it doubtless accorded him unfeigned pleasure, during the latter months of his eventful life, to learn, in so many ways, that they appreciated his services. This was apparent when he received a copy of the Holy Bible from the loyal colored people of Baltimore as a token of respect and gratitude. They hailed him as the "friend of universal freedom." It never will be known in time

how many millions of earnest prayers went up for "Massa Linkum" from the Uncle Tom cabins scattered all over the slave States, from the Potomac to the Rio Grande. Those sincere but enslaved people took hold of the arm that sustained the universe. America stands forth today disenthralled and saved, not merely by the achievements of our noble soldiers and the masterly statesmanship of our cabinet ministers, senators and representatives, but there was a power behind all these outward manifestations. That power was prayer—the prayers, too, of the poor. Says the son of Sirach, "A prayer out of a poor man's mouth reacheth to the ears of God, and His judgment cometh speedily." "He will hear the prayer of the oppressed." "The prayer of the humble pierceth the clouds, and till it come nigh he will not be comforted, and will not depart till the Most High shall behold to judge righteously and execute judgment." Mr. Lincoln recognized that power of prayer, as I have already shown, when he left his home for the White House at Washington.

How intensely interesting the fact that while he was thus occupied with the great and momentous affairs of thirty millions of people—of whom four or five millions were in open rebellion, and a million more were girded as soldiers, yet even amidst all these cares he did not neglect the poor who were his neighbors, as the following incident will show:

A newspaper correspondent from Chicago one day dropped in upon Mr. Lincoln and found him busy counting greenbacks. "This, sir," said the President, in his cheerful way, "is something out of my usual line; but a President of the United States has a multiplicity of duties not specified in the Constitution or Acts of Congress. This is one of them. This money belongs to a poor negro who is porter in one of the departments (the Treasury), who is at present ill with the small pox. He is now in the hospital and could not draw his pay because he could not

sign his name. I have been at considerable trouble to overcome the difficulty and get it for him, and have at length succeeded in cutting red tape, as you newspapermen say. I am now dividing the money and putting by a portion labeled, in an envelope, with my own hands, according to his wish." Such unostentatious acts of kindness need no comment. Our Savior said, when upon earth: "And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you he shall in no wise lose his reward." I doubt not that the good man is now reaping his reward in glory for befriending the poor colored porter who could not write his name—sick with the smallpox in the hospital. It is an interesting fact that the American citizen at home and abroad, however humble his lot, was not forgotten by him. When it was reported at Washington through the correspondence of our minister, to Mr. Seward, that a sailor had been ill-treated at the Marquesas Islands, Mr. Lincoln immediately directs that five hundred dollars in gold be devoted to the purchase of presents to be distributed among Hawaiian missionaries and others who had rescued the unfortunate man.

It is an interesting fact that the very last public address which Mr. Lincoln ever made, March 17th, was in reference to colored soldiers being employed by the rebels. He remarked that he hoped they would try the experiment! In all his efforts in behalf of the colored people of America he has endeavored to manage the subject with an enlightened regard to the highest Christian duty to his country and to God. Having shown that Mr. Lincoln was actuated as a public officer by Christian principle, I am fully confident that he was truly an experimental Christian, one whose Christianity did not begin and end in a mere formal acknowledgment of Divine Providence. The following incident is reported by the Rev. Mr. Adams, a Presbyterian minister of Philadelphia. He was on a visit

to Washington, and had made an appointment to call upon the President at the White House, at 5 o'clock in the morning. Says Mr. Adams, "Morning came, and I hastened my toilet and found myself at a quarter to five in the waiting room of the President. I asked the usher if I could see Mr. Lincoln. He said I could not. 'But I have an engagement to meet him this morning.' 'At what hour?' 'At 5 o'clock.' 'Well, sir, he will see you at 5.' I then walked to and fro for a few minutes, and hearing a voice, as if in grave conversation, I asked the servant, 'Who is talking in the next room?' 'It is the President, sir.' 'Is anybody with him?' 'No, sir; he is reading the Bible.' 'Is that his habit so early in the morning?' 'Yes, sir; he spends every morning from 4 o'clock to 5 in reading the scriptures and praying.'" How beautiful an illustration this is of the injunction of our Savior, "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and pray to thy Father which is in secret." How beautiful an instance of one who followed our Savior's devotional habit, who, "in the morning, rising up a great while before day," went out and prayed.

"Prayer ardent opens heaven, lets down a stream
Of glory on the concentrated hour
Of man, and audience with the Diety!"

The following incident, however, sets forth Mr. Lincoln's views upon the question of vital godliness, in the very strongest light: Several months before his ever-to-be-lamented death a gentleman called upon him on business. After the business was closed and they were about to part the gentleman said to the President, "On leaving home a friend requested me to ask Mr. Lincoln whether he loved Jesus." The gentleman makes the following report: "The President buried his face in his handkerchief, turned away and wept." He then turned and said, "When I left home to take the chair of state I requested my countrymen to pray for me. I was not then a Christian. When my son died—the severest trial of my life—I was not a

Christian. But when I went to Gettysburg and looked upon the graves of our dead heroes who had fallen in defense of their country, I then and there consecrated myself to Christ. *I do love Jesus!*" This simple and touching confession needs no comment. It opens to the world the heart and religious experience of the good man. The people felt that he was honest in all his dealings with them, and so he was equally honest with himself and God. These few simple utterances, welling up from the depths of his heart, and accompanied with tears, will ever be cherished by Christians of every name and sect as the most precious sayings of his life. They touch the tenderest chord in the Christian's heart. Christians of every name will ever regard him as a brother beloved, but departed, and when thinking of him as departed the language of the burial service will not be inappropriate: "It hath pleased Almighty God, in His wise providence to take out of this world the soul of our deceased Brother!"

Think, not, my hearers, that I have brought forward these facts and incidents in the life of our lamented President because I think it requires an argument in the style of special pleading to prove his adherence to the principles of Christianity and the doctrines of the New Testament. No; his Christian, as well as his public and political character, is known and read of all men. With him there was no reserve or concealment. His character was perfectly transparent. His faults as well as his virtues were equally apparent.

"And e'en his failings lean'd to virtue's side."

He went to the theater on that fatal night, the telegraph informs us, because he wished to please his friends and not disappoint the people, who were expecting the presence of Gen. Grant.

"His life was gentle; and the elements
So mixed in his that Nature might stand up
And say to all the world, This was a man!"

In turning our thoughts from a contemplation of his

character to our bleeding country, the question forces itself upon every thoughtful mind, what will be the effect of Abraham Lincoln's assassination upon the Nation? Our latest dates afford us, as yet, no facts by which we can satisfactorily answer this question. Time must determine. Our minds must for the present find consolation in dwelling upon the great truth that God lives and reigns, and that He is able and "will make the wrath of man to praise Him." We may also recall to mind some of those pages of history wherein somewhat similar events are recorded. When Brutus and his fellow-assassins smote down Caesar in the senate at Rome they supposed that with Caesar's death Caesar's influence would no longer be felt. They were disappointed. Caesar, disappeared, but, exclaims Cicero, "All the acts of Caesar's life, his writings, his words, his promises, thoughts, are more powerful after his death than if he were still alive." So I trust, and doubt not, it will be with the life, writings, words, promises, thoughts of Abraham Lincoln. His blood has stamped an impress upon these which will immeasurably increase their value throughout all coming time.

When the hired assassin, Balthazar Gerard, brought to an untimely end the eventful life of William the Silent, Prince of Orange, on the 10th of July, 1584, Philip II., all the enemies of civil and religious liberty imagined that with the death of the Prince of Orange would end his usefulness. But how dissatisfied were these men. In the beautiful language of Motley, The Prince was entombed amid the tears of a whole nation. Never was a more extensive, unaffected and legitimate sorrow felt at the death of any human being. As long as he lived he was the guiding star of a whole brave nation, and when he died the little children cried in the streets." The commonwealth which William had liberated forever from Spanish tyranny continued to exist as a great and flourishing republic during more than two centuries, under the successive stad.

holderates of his sons and descendants. So I doubt not a similar result will follow the assassination of the illustrious man whose most unexpected death we now lament. He died the martyr to liberty. He was assassinated by the hand of Booth, but it was negro-chattel slavery which nerved that arm and prompted that basest of crimes in the annals of nations. This was the crowning act of the slaveholders' rebellion. Sumter was fired upon on the 12th of April, 1861, Booth shot President Lincoln on the 14th of April, 1865. The same bad animus that first struck down the flag in '61 fired the assassin's bosom when he smote down the President, commander-in-chief of all the military and naval forces of the republic. No powers of metaphysical analysis can separate the two. Perhaps it was needed that this crime of crimes should be perpetrated to arouse the minds of the American people to the awful enormity of the crime of slavery and treason. The deed has been accomplished, and henceforth and forever, in the minds of all loyal Americans and lovers of liberty throughout the world, a stigma has been fastened upon the crime of slavery and treason which can never be wiped away.

The event to which your attention has now been called will not pass into oblivion and be forgotten. It was not done in a corner, but the crime was perpetrated, as it were, in the presence of a gazing crowd of spectators infinitely larger than that gathered in the theater where it took place. Abraham Lincoln was assassinated on the world's wide stage. There was a great cloud of witnesses. Now what shall be its influence upon the Nation and the world we know not now but we shall know hereafter. It will be overruled for good. How unspeakably thankful we all should be that he was spared thus long to the Nation, even to see a virtual ending of the rebellion. God permitted this stunning blow to fall for the accomplishment of some wise purpose. I do believe that in

after years and ages it will be seen to have been necessary for bringing about the final triumph of justice and truth, and the punishment of the guilty. For a season clouds and darkness may surround the throne of God and envelope His plans and purposes, but ere long He will make all clear and plain. If we are watchful and take the word of God for our guide we shall see the dark clouds revealing a rainbow of glorious promise. I am confident that a bright and glorious future is opening before our country. Let us be hopeful. Great results must follow from these tragic events of war and commotion. Surely we have witnessed enough to make us trustful and confiding. It seems to be a law or principle which God observes in his management of nations as well as individuals, that when He would bestow some signal favor He prepares the way by severe chastisements. Surely, I think we may hope that God has great good in store for that people when He shall have chastised them for that great sin of slavery. That must be removed before the millennium come and the Gospel shall everywhere triumph. In the appropriate language of Longfellow, I would exhort you, "Look not mournfully upon the past; it comes not back again. Wisely improve the present; it is thine. Go forth and meet the shadowy future, without fear and with a manly heart." Let us not go forth, however, trusting in an "arm of flesh," but in God, our Savior and Deliverer, most fully believing the sentiment of the text, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." God is the Judge!

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