

THE NATION'S TEARS.

A SERMON

IN MEMORY OF
PRESIDENT GARFIELD,

PREACHED IN THE

WEST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

BINGHAMTON, N. Y.,

Sabbath Morning, Sept. 25, 1881,

BY THE PASTOR,

Rev. SAMUEL DUNHAM.

“Weep,
Ye stricken people, weep
Around the hallowed bier
Of Garfield's silent sleep.”

[PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.]

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Mr. W. T. Putnam,
In exchange.

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THE PRESIDENT'S LAST LETTER TO HIS MOTHER.

[WRITTEN FROM HIS SICK BED.]

WASHINGTON, D. C., August 11th, 1881.

Dear Mother:—Don't be disturbed by conflicting reports about my condition. It is true I am still weak, and on my back: but I am gaining every day, and need only time and patience to bring me through.

Give my love to all the relatives and friends, and especially to sisters Hatty and Mary.

Your Loving Son,

JAMES A. GARFIELD.

Mrs. Eliza Garfield, Hiram, Ohio.



Memorial services were held yesterday morning at the West Presbyterian church. A large congregation was present. A fine portrait of President Garfield, tastefully draped and trimmed with white flowers, was placed in front of the pulpit, and on either side were stands and vases of flowers. The choir excellently rendered an appropriate anthem, and also the hymns, "God Moves in a Mysterious Way," "Come, ye Disconsolate," and "Nearer, my God, to Thee." The pastor, Rev. Samuel Dunham, read Luther's favorite Psalm, the 118th, remarking that the great reformer wrote on his study wall, "The 118th Psalm is the Psalm that I love. Without it, neither Emperor nor King, though wise and prudent, nor saints could have helped me." Also, Isaiah, III: 1-3; Habakkuk, III: 17, 18; Romans, XI: 9-21, and James, IV: 7-14.—*Binghamton Daily Republican, Sept. 26, 1881.*

SERMON.

“ Weep with them that weep.”—Rom. 12, 15.

The flags of the country are at half mast, and the eyes of a pitying God look down to-day upon a nation in mourning. On Monday evening, September 19th, between the hours of ten and eleven, at Long Branch, N. J., passed away President Garfield, a man doubly endeared to the nation's heart by more than eleven weeks of patient and heroic suffering. That night was breathed out the last breath of a life, than which no purer or nobler has ever blessed this young Republic. On this sacred day of rest the cherished remains of all that is mortal lie in solemn state on the banks of Lake Erie, amid the grief of a heart-broken family, and the lavish affection of fifty millions of deeply sympathizing people. Everywhere throughout this broad land—

“ Sorrow darkens hamlet and hall.”

Sadder Sabbath this nation never knew, though our country is no stranger to dark, sad days in its history.

The very sea as its curling waves, at regular intervals come, at this still Sabbath hour, breaking on the sandy beach at Elberon, seems to murmur a solemn requiem over the illustrious dead. And the waters of that historic lake, whereon sixty-eight years ago the present month, thundered the cannon of Commodore Perry, and whose neighboring heights, where now stands the city of Cleveland, resounded with the noise of battle and the victorious shout, “ We have met the enemy, and they are ours,” these waters, I say, to-day, and the city that overlooks them, seem hushed and awed to silence in the presence of death.

The very skies seem to weep this morning, as they look down upon a continent draped from ocean to ocean, and from Canada to the Gulf, with the everywhere visible symbols of mourning. And never were mourning emblems more truly expressive of sorrow unfeigned and sincere.

Few are the households in all this land that have had no tear-blinded eyes during all this season of painful suspense and bitter sorrow, as they have thought of all the disappointed hopes, as they have seen the heroic struggle with death, and thought of the grief of an aged mother, and the sad bereavement of fatherless children, and more than all, the pent up, inexpressible sorrow of a brave, womanly heart that knoweth its own bitterness as none else on earth can know.

Nor is it the families of this nation alone that share this feeling. The hearts of many nations have flowed together in sympathy, and have been cemented by tears into one sorrowing group of mourners. Do we read in sacred story of the sorrow-stricken sisters of Bethany, bent in tears over the grave of a brother beloved? See this day the spectacle of the whole sisterhood of nations standing in silent grief around a single, open grave.

The legend that finds conspicuous place on the front of our Court House in this city, is substantially, if not literally, true: "The World Mourns Our Nation's Loss." The great heart of the world is certainly touched as it has rarely, if ever, been since sin and woe entered this abode of mankind. The name of Garfield has become a household word, not alone in America, South as well as North, but in England, in Scotland, in Ireland, in France, in Germany, in Spain, in Russia; and henceforth will so be cherished and revered in hundreds of thousands of homes. The Russian people, especially, can well appreciate our sorrow. It is but six months since I preached from this pulpit a sermon upon the assassination of their great "Liberator,"—the late Czar, Alexander II.

No man, not excepting President Lincoln, ever came nearer to the popular heart than James A. Garfield. The death of no public man in this country was ever more deeply felt, not merely as a public loss, but as a personal bereavement. It is as if a death had occurred in our own families. Many is the man who to-day might well and truly say, in words that Shakespeare puts upon the lips of Mark Antony in his famous speech over Cæsar's dead body—"My heart is in the coffin there with Cæsar."

Nor is it men of distinction alone—Mr. Garfield's peers—men who have stood around him as counselors, or who hold positions of honor and influence, that thus feel the pangs of a personal

loss. But the great mass of the common people, the low as well as the high, and even the poorest and most obscure feel the loss no less keenly. Aside from the grief of the immediate family of the President, nothing since his death has affected my own heart more deeply, or drawn tears from my eyes more copiously, than the reading in the daily papers of the touching tokens of sympathy manifested by all classes alike—the poor as well as the rich—the hard working men and women, without name and without honor, as truly as the Governor of a State, or a member of the Cabinet, or a Queen on her throne.

Indeed, it is said that in New York, while Broadway and the adjacent avenues are fairly deluged with linen and bunting, the most tasteful displays are made in the poorer parts of the city. There the skillful hands of housewives have been at work, bestowing a personal care upon the drapings. In this the Germans especially excel. One scene that attracted much attention in New York, as it passed through Grand street, was a ragman's cart with a string of bells in its rear. The bells were clothed in black and white, and in the middle of the cart was a wooden frame holding a cheap print likeness of the President. Immediately under it, in uncouth lettering, but large and bold, were words which proclaim one of the grand secrets of the deep hold President Garfield had upon the hearts and affections of the lower classes of society: "He loved the poor, and I revere his memory."

So is it all through the land. The poor man feels that he has lost a dear friend, one who, having himself risen by the force of his genius, out of poverty and obscurity, knew, and never forgot, how to sympathize with the lowly. A man of the people, and living all his life close to the popular heart, the bitter trials of these last sad weeks have served to draw him much nearer to us all than ever before.

There is no finer mark of genuine greatness and true nobility of character than this, that when a man has attained to high position and power, he has not become divorced in his sympathies from the poor and lowly; that while growing great in intellect and station and influence, he does not, at the same time, grow small of heart and ungenerous and disdainful towards his inferiors. Such was James A. Garfield, a man of consummate ability, who might well aspire to the highest offices and honors

in the gift of the nation, and yet like Lincoln, of blessed memory, simple, honest, true-hearted, and magnanimous.—a man from whose lips, (if from any one's) on his dying bed we might expect would fall those words, so characteristic of the spirit of the man: "The people, the people, my trust!"

In contrast, now, with the demonstrations of sorrow and affection on the part of the populace, in contrast, especially, with the manifestations of mourning by that poor ragman in New York, place such as these:

[At this point the speaker made reference to the unprecedented manifestations of sorrow in Europe, and the touching messages of condolence and sympathy from various foreign courts, alluding also to Queen Victoria's beautiful floral tribute, accompanied by a mourning card bearing the inscription: "Queen Victoria to the memory of the late President Garfield, an expression of her sorrow and sympathy with Mrs. Garfield and the American nation. September 22d, 1881."]

Thus it would seem that all the great powers of the world are mourners to-day. And well may they vie with each other in their tributes of respect and honor—

* * * * * To the great name,
Which he has won so pure of blame,
In praise and dispraise the same:
A man of well-attemper'd fame.
O, civic muse, to such a name,
To such a name for ages long,
To such a name,
Preserve a broad approach of fame,
And ever-ringing avenues of song."

It is not my purpose to-day to recount the incidents of this eventful life; to follow him whose death we mourn, in his remarkable career from a poor tow-boy on a western canal, through the early years of his study at school, and his course of training at Williams' College: to trace his advancement to the post of professor, and then to the Presidency of Hiram College: to speak of his occasional efforts as a lay preacher of the Gospel: to detail the history of his military exploits in the war for the Union, or of his public life in the House of Representatives, and his promotion to the Senate of the United States, till, at length, he finds himself, by the suffrages of the people, elevated to the Presidential Chair at Washington, at the head of the nation.

All this has become, in the months past, a matter of familiar record. And his brief administration and sad and sudden fate, form too recent a page of history to require any recital on this occasion. Suffice it to say, in every position held by him he has acquitted himself with honor, and his whole career is almost without a parallel in the annals of the nation.

Lessons and impressions too deep, I trust, ever to be effaced or forgotten, have been written as with pen of iron, and ink of crimson hue *into* the nation's heart, to which I scarcely need refer, and of which, perhaps, it ill becomes me to speak particularly at this time. But this one fact will ever stand out conspicuously in the history of this dreadful tragedy—that the nations of the earth have been drawn, as by some irresistible, magic attraction, into a closer unity. Though separated by a thousand leagues of ocean, and though sundered more widely still by the mountain barriers of race and language and religion, yet so close have the sovereigns and peoples of other lands been drawn together around the victim of a great calamity, and around us as a nation in our sorrow, that we have almost heard each others' hearts beat.

In His last prayer with His Apostles, Jesus, taking the great world in his thought, prayed "that they all may be one." And on a previous occasion, having declared that He, as the Good Shepherd, was to lay down His life for the sheep, bethinking himself also of the great Gentile nations, as well as the nation of the Jews, He says: "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice: and there shall be one fold and one Shepherd." Is this Scripture, then, being fulfilled in our time, in a way that we looked not for? Is it Christ's mighty voice in Providence—as well as in the Word of His grace—that the nations are now hearing, and that is bringing them thus together into one fold and fellowship of a common sorrow and sympathy, if not of faith? Is it through such sorrows and misfortunes as that which we to-day deplore, that the whole Christian world, at least, is to be attracted together, and bound in sacred and inseparable union? Is it thus, by pain, and sacrifices, and tears, over the grave of one universally honored and beloved, that we are to be cemented in lasting concord and peace as nations?

Great, indeed, is the change already wrought—especially as

between the various warring factions of our own country. As for every drop of Lincoln's blood there sprang up in this land a score of new patriots, and as his assassination served instantly to unify and strengthen all loyal hearts, and to nerve all loyal arms, and so greatly helped the cause of the Union: so, for every drop of Garfield's blood there appeared a hundred enthusiastic friends of the Administration. In that terrible, fatal wound, from which the Chief Magistrate of the nation has suffered so long and so much, and from which, at length, he has died—in that deadly wound, I say, through all these painful weeks there has been a *tongue*, and in that tongue a voice, and that voice, more eloquently by far and more persuasively, too, than any speech of man, has been pleading for peace, and unity, and friendship, and harmony and brotherly love, and not least, for radical Civil Service Reform. Oh, with what power of conviction, and with what irresistible, tender pathos has that mute voice been saying, and now that the patient sufferer's lips and eyes are closed in death, it speaks with yet greater power of solemn earnestness, as if it were the very voice of God himself, saying to all parties and all people in this land: "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice; and be ye kind, one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another," in the exalted and noble spirit of Him who had no words of bitterness, even for his worst foes and accusers. "With malice towards none, and with charity for all, let us do the right as God gives us to see the right, and all will be well."

Not only have we been drawn nearer to each other in sympathy and affection, by the sad scenes and events of the past weeks, but nearer, also, to God, and nearer to Christ in devout and humble trust. In all this season of sorrow, we have felt that there is One on the throne whose divine heart throbs with pity for us as that of a father for his children. We have felt the sustaining power of the thought that we have not in Jesus an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities.

During all these weeks of suspense and of hope deferred, this nation, it is safe to say, has been bowed in prayer as never before in all its history—in earnest, importunate, almost agonizing prayer to God for the recovery of the wounded President. And, although these millions of intercessions at the Throne of Grace

have not been answered according to our expectation and hope, yet who can doubt they have been answered, and that in a way, without doubt, wiser and better even than our thought?

Be that as it may, this is certain,—through these weeks of prayer, and through the events that have called us to such prayer, we have learned a sublime lesson of trust in God in dark hours, when we could not trace His finger: when clouds and darkness were round about Him, amid profound mysteries which we could not fathom. Thus out of our very woes and distresses have we been lifted as a people nearer to the throne and heart of that God who doeth according to His will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of earth: by whom kings reign and princes decree justice: who removeth kings, and setteth up kings: and who rules supreme in the counsels of nations.

My eyes have fallen this morning, since writing the foregoing, upon General Garfield's own eloquent words, uttered in April, 1866, upon the floor of the House of Representatives, when he arose in that body and moved an adjournment, as a mark of deference to the memory of President Lincoln, it being the first anniversary of his death. Verily, history repeats itself, and words more fit could not be spoken as applicable to the circumstances of the present hour:—

“Sir, there are times in the history of men and nations, when they stand so near the veil which separates mortals from immortals, time from eternity, and men from their God, that they can almost hear the beatings and feel the pulsations of the heart of the Infinite. Through such a time has this nation passed. When two hundred and fifty thousand brave spirits passed from the field of honor through that thin veil into the presence of God, and when at last, its parting folds admitted the martyr President to the company of those dead heroes of the Republic, the nation stood so near the veil that the whispers of God were heard by the children of men. Awe-stricken by His voice, the American people knelt in tearful reverence, and made a solemn covenant with Him, and with each other, that this nation should be saved from its enemies: that all its glories should be restored, and on the ruins of slavery and treason, the temples of Freedom and Justice should be built, and should survive forever.”

Thus, who shall say that, through the power of that sovereign

God who maketh the wrath of man to praise Him, we may not have escaped far more dire evils, as a nation, than all the evils we have suffered? What though that result has been reached at the great cost of the most valuable and precious life in the whole nation, and through the mysterious agency, moreover, of a mean and cowardly assassin, and an utterly base and worthless traitor! Does not the redemption of a lost world through the crucifixion of the Son of God, by the agency of a foul and wicked traitor and assassin, more than furnish a parallel case? And is it not written, "It is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not?"

I look upon President Garfield's death as a vicarious sacrifice for the sins and crimes of the nation. But, while saying this, I no more justify the dastardly assassin in his damnable outrage, than Christ exculpated Judas Iscariot, when He declared, "The Son of Man goeth as it is written of him: but *woe* unto that man of whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born." So say we to-day of the hard-hearted, cruel, unrepentant wretch, Guiteau.

But, if the martyr-like death of our President be but another vicarious sacrifice,—if it be another case of wounding for our national transgressions, then, most surely, my friends, to us belongs the imperative and immediate duty of penitence on account of our sins, and an utter forsaking of them. The great and solemn truth which this awful tragedy lifts into especial prominence, and writes out as on the very clouds before the eyes of all our rulers and citizens is, "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people."

We hope and fervently pray that our government and nation may be so far purified and cleansed from their foulness and selfishness and unboly ambitions, that our sins shall not soon need again to be atoned for with the nation's best and costliest blood. In circumstances like the present, the language of an eminent English divine, spoken concerning his country many years ago, will be found to have singular fitness now as applied to our own land and time, the names and phraseology only being changed to suit our side of the Atlantic:—

"If America wish to preserve her might among the nations, let her sons and daughters confess their transgressions, and repent them of their sins: let covetousness, the curse and darling

of commercial cities be abhorred, and lust renounced, and ambition mortified, and every bold working of impiety chased from amongst them: and let them, covered with the sack-cloth of deep humiliation, bind themselves in a holy league for the advancement of the purposes of an enlarged philanthropy. Then, and not till then, may the hope be cherished that the political hurricanes which shake the dynasties of the Old World, shall leave unscathed the Republic of the new: and that whilst the rushing of a wrathful deluge dash away the land marks of foreign states, America may lift her granite cliffs above the surges, and rise amid the eddies like Mount Ararat from out the flood."

If, my friends, we observe faithfully these prime conditions of national prosperity and growth, yea, rather of national existence, may not this, after all, be the beginning of one of the best eras yet known in our history?

Upon us is now laid, with a new and solemn weight, the sacred obligation of guarding and cherishing with renewed care and fidelity, these grand institutions, founded, and so far also perpetuated, alas! by tears, and sacrifices, and blood. Ours it is gallantly and manfully to defend the Government and liberties bequeathed to us at such costly sacrifice of noble life: and ours to transmit, untarnished and unimpaired, to coming generations, the priceless boon of a nation true and loyal to God, and bringing forth the fruits of righteousness.

At such an hour as this—

“On God and Godlike men we build our trust.
Hush! the Dead March wails in the people's ears;
The dark crowd moves and there are sobs and tears;
The black earth yawns; the mortal disappears;
Ashes to ashes, dust to dust:
He is gone who seemed so great.
Gone: but nothing can bereave him
Of the force he made his own
Being here, and we believe him
Something far advanced in State,
And that he wears a truer crown
Than any wreath that man can weave him.”

To-morrow, when the treasured remains of the late James A. Garfield, amidst the grief—almost too deep for tears—of a sorrowing wife and mother and children, and the lamentation of a stricken nation, shall be deposited upon an eminence commanding the view of Lake Erie, in Lake View Cemetery, Cleveland,—that beautiful and fit resting place of the honored dead—all that

is mortal of one of America's most illustrious sons will have been buried out of human sight. The stately form of an accomplished scholar, a brilliant orator, a brave and daring soldier, a prudent counselor, a wise and honest and pure statesman, a revered and tenderly loved President, a Christian man and patriot of noblest aspirations and highest hopes, a son and husband and father without soil or stain upon his character, will have been laid calmly down to rest beneath the sod.

“Let the sound of those he wrought for,
And the feet of those he fought for,
Echo round his bones forevermore.”

In him we have seen a well-rounded Christian manhood, built up on Christ as a model, to stand as a perpetual example to the young men of this great American nation.

Peace to his sacred ashes, and happiness and victory eternal to his ransomed soul, when, out of all tribulation, he shall come to the heavenly Zion, with songs and everlasting joy, like a crown of glory, upon his head,—sorrow and sighing and pain of heart having forever fled away.

To him, in closing, we will apply—and I know not to whom they can better be applied—the words of England's poet laureate, uttered as an eloquent tribute to the memory of the Duke of Wellington, whose honored dust reposes to-day within the charmed walls and beneath the noble arches of old St. Paul's Cathedral, London :

“Such was he ; his work is done ;
But while the races of mankind endure,
Let his great example stand
Colossal, seen of every land.
And keep the soldier firm, the statesman pure :
Till in all lands and through all human story
The path of duty be the way to glory :
And let the land whose hearths he saved from shame,
For many and many an age proclaim
At civic revel and pomp and game,
And when the long-illumined cities flame,
Their ever-loyal, iron leader's fame,
With honor, honor, honor, honor to him—
Eternal honor to his name.”



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