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HAMILTON
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THE
NEBRASKA OFFENCE





THE NEBRASKA OFFENCE.

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, OVID,

JUNE 4, 1854.

BY REV. L. HAMILTON.

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CORRESPONDENCE.

F. B. N. 1144-4-3

EV. L. HAMILTON,

Dear Sir :—Northern Slavery is a hideous ulcer feeding upon the vitals of the commonwealth. Nothing in our opinion can remove the loathsome thing but the keenest Scalpel. We rejoice in the successful operation you performed on Sabbath last and sincerely believe that great good will be the result.

Believing that the publication of your discourse will be beneficial we request a copy for publication.

June 10th, 1854.

JOHN I. CORNELL,
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ALFRED BOLTER,
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M. WEAVER,
GEORGE SMITH.

OVID, June 10th, 1854.

GENTLEMEN :—I have received your letter, expressing your approbation of my sermon on the Nebraska Bill, and requesting a copy for publication. I comply with your request willingly, yet, I think, without vanity. That it is the truth, I firmly believe. That it ought to be spoken, I am as firmly persuaded. That it would be acceptable to all, I have not dared to hope; yet am not without hope, that a more thorough review, which its publication will make possible, will procure for it a more candid consideration. In any case, I shrink not from the responsibility of having the sentiments it contains, known in this community as my own. I have consulted none but God and my own conscience, as to what I should speak, or whether I should speak. It is the honest expression of my opinions and feelings. As such I am willing it should be printed, praying that God may give success to the right.

Very truly yours,

L. HAMILTON.

Hon. JOHN E. SEELEY, and others.

SERMON.

LUKE XVII. 1.—*It is impossible but that offences will come; but wo unto him through whom they come.*
PSALM LXXVI. 10.—*Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.*

When men die we preach their funeral sermons. The custom arises mainly, not we think from a desire to honor the dead, for this the truth will not always permit us to do, but from the conviction that the event of death, although sad, has such bearings upon life that it affords profitable matter of reflection to the living. It concerns us to know what meaning death has for our practical life, and what consolations may sustain us under its visitations. And when it comes under circumstances that bring out its native dreadfulness in such dark perfection, that not one softening shade of light mitigates its terrors, it does not on this account impress its meaning with the less power, nor leave us in less need of legitimate consolations. It may be less pleasant, but will not be less profitable for our contemplation. Although we cannot revoke the decree of Providence and recall the dead to life, we may gain wisdom and incitement to rightly regulate, and earnestly improve, what of life remains to us.—We may thus compel good from what would otherwise be unmingled and unmitigated evil. And who will doubt the wisdom of doing this?

When the honor of a nation dies, a calamity has befallen its citizens in which sober wisdom finds the occasion for most serious, sad, yet, it may be, practically profitable, reflections. The death of no individual, however great and honorable he might be, could afford such matter for a funeral sermon. And all the reasons which justify and demand a funeral sermon in any case, by way of improving a mournful event for the benefit of the living, seem to have a full application in this.

It is known to all of you that the *Nebraska Bill* has become a law of the land. That measure, the announcement of whose proposal in our National Legislature, fell upon us like a thunderbolt from the clear sky, and whose discussion has for anxious months held the beating heart of the nation in painful suspense, is consummated.—The deed is done. And the quick, successive peals of cannon, booming from Capitol Hill, announcing its triumph, have sounded to me like the death-rattle of our expiring national integrity. I cannot, therefore, regard it as a desecration of the sacred office which I bear, nor of the place where I stand, nor of the holy time in which we are met to worship God, to make this event, in its moral and religious aspects, the theme of our present contemplation. In this view, if I do not err, it closely concerns us as individuals, not only in our dearest rights, but also in our most solemn obligations. Its political bearings, and even the question of its abstract justice, I leave for dis-

cession, to the statesman and the moral philosopher. To discuss the event in these aspects exclusively, comes not within the proper province of the pulpit. But that the most sacred and religious sense of honor and right in the great, feeling masses of the Northern States, has been grossly outraged by this measure, admits not of question or doubt. As a wrong thus touching the conscience, I cannot but feel it my *duty* to speak against it in the pulpit.

The thing has become a *fact*—a thing *done*—a certainty past all hope of recall. It seems to me therefore of vast importance that we know in what spirit we should bear ourselves under it; what hopes or fears for our country, for the cause of universal Liberty, and for the kingdom of Christ, its indications are the reasonable ground of; and especially, what sacred obligations it presses home upon *us* as individuals. To help, in some degree, towards the attainment of this important knowledge is my present hope and aim.

The text I have selected furnishes a point from which to start, and opens a way through which to advance, in order to reach this object. The two verses of which it is composed, present a full and single thought. They first assert a fact; then intimate its more direct consequences affecting the individual; and finally exhibit the ultimate and more general result which Divine direction and restraint will bring out of that fact.

Let us consider these points in their order, with a view to their direct application to the subject in hand.

I. *The fact asserted; viz. That offences are inevitable. It is impossible but that offences will come.*

The human heart is wicked—prone to wrong. It is sure to act out its nature.—Wrongs *will* be done. But not only is the individual heart wicked, and must work out his wickedness in the individual's actions: the individual is a type of the community, and of the nation. Depravity steams forth from the thousand, and the million individual hearts, and taints the entire mass. Sin becomes *organic* in society, and in the nation; i. e. becomes so interwoven with all the pursuits and interests of life, that it seems an essential part of the means indispensable to the attainment of proper and necessary ends. For example, the votary of fashion, thinks a sinful extravagance absolutely indispensable to the maintenance of a respectable and influential position in society. The man of business sometimes excuses a sort of respectable misrepresentation in bargain, upon the plea that it is necessary in order to successful competition with rivals in trade. The politician may see that the only way to attain and hold a position of honor and power in the Government, is by conniving at, or actually abetting great social and political wrongs. Particular sins become thus organic—*grow* into the living organism by which society acts and moves. Now, when this takes place it is impossible but that offences will come. Wrongs will be perpetrated. Men will not forego their desired ends, because they can see their way to them only through wrong and iniquitous means. The organic disease in the body politic, or the body social, will concentrate itself, and come to a head, on some particular part. An

unsightly and inflamed tumor will swell out on some individual member. The evil will express its strength and virulence in some wrong deed of monstrous proportions. Moreover, such organic evils are *progressive*. They work on and on. The corruption grows deep and deeper. The disease spreads wider and takes a stronger hold. Hence reiterated offences of steadily increasing magnitude will come. The growing evil needs must manifest its growth, in deeds of wickedness towering high and higher, until some colossal and peerless wrong, overtopping all that precede, proclaims that the disease has reached its climax and its crisis. Offences are inevitable. Such is the *fact* with respect to the existence and working of wickedness in the human heart, and with respect to its *working out*.

Let us glance,

II. *At the more direct consequences of these offences which affect the individual; viz: the frustration and punishment of the offender. Wo unto him through whom the offence cometh.*

The wrongs done will react upon the wrong-doer. Wickedness will overreach itself, and stumble upon its own destruction. No matter that offences are inevitable: no matter that they *must* come. This cannot relieve the offender of his personal responsibility, nor give impunity to his offences. If it be Divinely predetermined, and foretold in prophecy, that "The Son of man shall be betrayed," the "Son of perdition" shall not escape the reward of his treachery. Wo, wo to him by whom the offence cometh. Wrongs will out; and God has so made man, and man, in spite of himself, so stands affected towards his fellow, that the detected evil-doer must be hated by those whom his wickedness wrongs, and despised by those whose interests he has sold his conscience to serve. Verily he shall have his reward.

The truth is so palpable here, as to make the further illustration of this point unnecessary. We pass to notice,

III. *What will be the ultimate result of these inevitable offences, viz: Through Divine direction and restraint, The Glory of God in the general Good. Surely, the wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.*

God has so wisely constructed His system of government over men, so disposed its reforming influences, that it forces good out of evil. The licentiousness of wickedness, reacts upon and corrects itself. This is true of the individual. The more furious the rage of the passionate man, the sooner it spends its force and leaves him tame and passionless. The more unbounded the excess of the glutton, the sooner he destroys his appetite, and his capacity for further indulgence. And sometimes nothing could be more fortunate for one gradually forming an enslaving appetite for intoxicating drinks, than the misfortune of being enticed into a debauch so disgraceful, that returning consciousness awakens the keenest agony of shame and remorse. Excess, for a time without restraint, is often the only means of ultimate restraint and cure. With full force does this truth apply to those great evils which have become *organic* in society and in the nation. It is only as they get themselves acted out in

such glaring wrongs, that the indignation of the whole people is turned upon them, that any good hope arises of their speedy remedy. Nothing could be more dangerous than for such evils, while they really exist to be left to work on silently and unheeded. Nothing could be a more fatal symptom, than a general apathy with regard to them. When indolent inactivity, and long indulgence of appetite, have made the body gross and plethoric with the accumulated elements of disease, the effort of nature to throw off the growing distemper, may be attended with burning fever, and racking pains, and sleepless agitation; but is not this better than that cold, apathetic, lethargy, which leaves the invalid ignorant or heedless of the fatal malady that is working death in his system? So with these organic diseases in society, and in the body politic. Better that there be signs of life and a vigorous constitution, in a violent struggle to throw them off, with whatever agitation attended, than that a torpor of inactivity and indifference, should show that not enough of life and vigor is left to struggle. There is hope that such agitation will be followed by the calm, and the health of a robust virtue.

But as this earnest wrestling with overgrown iniquities, is only provoked when enormous wrongs arouse the mass to a consciousness of the evil that is working its ruin in the midst of them, it is a hopeful sign, rather than otherwise, when such wrongs begin to make their appearance. It is a hopeful sign when their increasing frequency and magnitude, indicate that the disease is approaching its crisis. The whirlwinds of commotion, which mark their first effect upon society, may shake into ruins the hopes and prospects of self-aggrandizement, which their authors and abettors, have built for themselves; but they will also leave behind them a purified atmosphere. Society will be purged of their sources. The standing pools will no longer remain to send forth their fetid and poisonous exhalations. Through and beyond this wreck of individual interests, we can see as the ultimate result, the general purity and universal good. The wrath of man shall work out the glory of God.

Let us now apply this discussion of general facts and principles, to the particular subject before us. We will follow the order of the three points as they have been discussed, and consider,

1. *The fact that the Nebraska Offence was inevitable.*

It was impossible but that it should come. Let us look into the reasons why.—The sin of Slavery was interwoven with the system of our general government, when we first became a Nation. It has grown thoroughly into the system. Its poison pervades every part and member, penetrating even to the remotest extremities. It is, in the fullest sense, a national *organic sin*. It has, moreover, shown itself rapidly progressive. It has continually grown more bold in its demands, and more shameless and enormous in its wrongs. At first it was regarded with but little anxiety. When the ordinance respecting it was introduced into the constitution in 1787, its entire, and not very remote, extinction from the land, was contemplated as the end of legislation and trouble about it. And any sin that we think will be soon and easily disposed of, never gives us much anxiety. But it was discovered in 1820, that this evil, so far from having died out, was not only alive, but flourishing, and

having a more vital hold upon the organism of our political system. It had grown to such strength and importance, that it began to lay plans to perpetuate itself through all coming generations. For this purpose, it needed not only room, territory, but more especially, a larger representation in our National Legislature, in order that it might be able to cope with the Freedom of the North. It saw plainly, that, under the Constitution and plan of Government which unite the North and the South together into one organic Body Politic, the Northern States were armed with a power that might easily be used to its own detriment, if not destruction. It demanded, therefore, a stronger representation. Freedom made a show of resistance; and Slavery, in order to gain its end, agreed to stay, forever afterwards, on the South side of a certain line, duly designated. Upon this promise, its demand was complied with; and the conscience of the North, for a time, soothed itself with the idea that it had separated itself so far from Slavery as to be free from all further responsibility with regard to its existence and workings. The subsequent advances of Slavery, have dispelled this illusion. The North has been compelled to learn that as united—made one—with the South, by a common Political Organization, it cannot avoid sharing the guilt and misery of this great organic sin, without resistance to the death. The whole body must suffer, until the cause of inflammation be removed. Slavery has grown more painfully sensitive and troublesome, with every effort to soothe and pacify its excitability. Concession made to it, has been taken as a new license to increase the exorbitance of its exactions. It has successively demanded and obtained, from the North, among various other less important boons, Texas, the Fugitive Slave Law, and now, at last the Nebraska Bill, repealing the Missouri Compromise, and erasing the line which was drawn as a barrier to the progress of Slavery Northward. But the successive breaking out upon the body politic, only shows how virulent, and deep-seated, and rapidly progressive, is the disease itself. What is worse than all this, and the secret of its success in obtaining all these extravagant demands, Slavery has regularly, and systematically, controlled our votes and our elections. It has dictated to us whom we should choose to rule over us. It is through the throbbing arteries of Political Organizations, that Slavery sends its virus to penetrate and corrupt the North. It says to us, "You must help us of the South, place a man before the people as candidate for the Presidency, who will be devoted to our interests, or we will combine and defeat him." We yield; and as the aspirants to less exalted and responsible offices in the Government, must hold the same Political opinions with their leader, Slavery succeeds in dictating, not only who shall be our principal rulers, but, through the inevitable workings of party organizations, often determines what shall be the sentiments of men who hold the most insignificant offices in the gift of a remote, frontier, township, or village corporation. Such, until within a few weeks past, was the tremendous power that Slavery was wielding over us. And so long as popular sentiment confirmed this power, is it not plain that the demagogue who aspired to the Presidential Chair, would not have had even a forlorn hope of

success, unless he had first offered up his conscience, as a propitiatory sacrifice, to the Idol of Slavery? Yet there are men who would be President at any expense whatever. And the fact that there are such men, existing under the Political influences just described, shows plainly why it was impossible but that the Nebraska Offence, should come. The last *fact* was the certain *resultant* of the former two. The Presidency was desired above all things else. Slavery must be propitiated. Hence, the Nebraska Offence was inevitable.

2. *Let us notice the more immediate consequences of this offence, as they must affect individuals.*

And here emphatically "Wo unto him by whom the offence cometh." You spontaneously exclaim, "Wo, then, to Douglass," and exclaim rightly if present signs indicate anything; for "Dead as Douglass," is said to have become a political proverb. At the second thought, you as naturally exclaim, "Wo, also, to his Coadjutors from the North, by whom this offence has come." Here, again, you rightly interpret; for their constituents are undoubtedly in the majority, who will say that they have sealed their own political death-warrant. But this is a comparatively insignificant matter. The fate of these individuals, is of little consequence to us. I should not have noticed them at all but for the fear that, under existing circumstances, your minds would be diverted to them as the objects of my aim. I take up the burden of this wo in a more important meaning for us, and cry, Wo unto you and to me! Through us, indirectly, this offence has come. Are not you and I guilty of it? By whose silence and indifference with respect to the enormous wrong of Slavery in our land, has that popular sentiment been formed, through which alone it was possible for us to be represented in our great National Council, by men of such political views as prompted to the plotting and perpetration of this deed? By yours and mine.—Had we of the North, been as earnest, vigilant, and conscientious, as we should have been, in our opposition to Slavery, we should not have been represented, or rather misrepresented, there by such opinions. This offence would not have come. It is not a sufficient excuse for our apathy, that we feared to identify ourselves with the movements of fanaticism. We needed to abet no movement that we could not approve. We needed only to express decidedly and earnestly, the condemnation which our consciences compelled us to pass upon Slavery, and a correct popular sentiment with regard to it, would have been formed. But this great organic evil in the body politic, silently penetrated and corrupted us. We have not resisted; we have yielded to it. Through us, therefore, this great offence has come. Wo unto us! You and I must suffer the consequences of our culpable indifference. In what particular form our punishment may fall upon us, we cannot predict. We think they greatly err as to what is either possible or desirable, who hope that the "Glorious Union," of which we boast so much and so justly, can be long preserved, and the disorganizing element of Slavery, remain a constituent part, working upon its vitals. Can it be hoped that Slavery will become less evil in its nature, less active in its efforts, less exacting in its demands, less ruinous in its whole influence? Can it be supposed, on the other

hand, that the moral sense of the North will become less keenly alive to this great sin, or impel to a less energetic opposition? Who can help but see that these two antagonist elements in our Union, are growing, and *must* grow, in the strength and intensity of their hatred, until they meet in deadly conflict, and the one or the other be vanquished, or a line of separation be drawn between them, which will leave them no longer united in one organic whole? The disease must be purged out, whatever agitations or agonies it may cost. What calamities, involving the individual interests of you and me and every one, both North and South, may attend this process, none are wise enough to foretell. That we *may* be called to suffer in our own persons, or through our friends, *facts* are now in evidence. Already has one man in Boston experienced the wo decreed against this offence, in the last of earthly calamities. Others are lying in prison, for the same reason, awaiting their trial upon the charge of the highest crime that can be imputed to man. The end is not yet. What may lie between us and the consummation, is known to God alone. That it will involve the wide ruin of individual interests is as plain as it is certain that offences must come.

3. Finally—*let us turn our eyes upon the ultimate result to the Nation, and to Freedom.*

Here the prospect appears to me bright with hope. God rules. The wrath of man shall praise Him; the remainder of wrath He will restrain. We need not shrink from the contemplation of that which is inevitable. We may look at it and be calm. I cannot wholly sympathize, humble as I am in position and intellect, with that great Statesman, who so feelingly and eloquently, deprecates the disposition, "to hang over the precipice of disunion, to see whether with our short sight, we can fathom the depth of the abyss below." For my part, I choose to look over before I leap, if leap I must, and see, if possible, what chances of safety or life, the perilous descent will leave me, or if I must perish, what hopes will remain to Freedom and the Generations to come after me. In taking this look, I can see nothing to appal me. Even should it be that the "last feeble and lingering glance" of these eyes, should be compelled to rest "on the broken and dishonored fragments of a once Glorious Union; on States dissevered, discordant, belligerent; on a Land rent with civil feuds, or drenched in fraternal blood;" still should I not "bate one jot of heart or hope." When the waves of passion from the South, shall meet the firm rock of a righteous resistance in the North, the more violent the shock, the sooner will their rage be spent. God, by an immutable decree, has set their bounds, and put a restraint upon their wrath. The echoes of their roaring shall sound back upon us in hymns of Divine praise.—The more furious their onset, the sooner will they be rolled back to overwhelm and bury American Slavery in an eternal grave. And when this source of discord and disunion, shall be no more—when the storm of passion arising from it, shall have cleared away, the paramount advantages of UNION, no longer obscured, will reappear. The Love of Country, gathering around it the hallowed remembrances of that united struggle which gave us our being and our glory as a Nation, will triumph over the

animosity of sectional strife, and again appear in the ascendant. A deep fraternal feeling and sympathy, reviving between the alienated members of this great Family of States, will draw them irresistibly together again. Peace will follow purity; and Freedom will deny her blessings, save it be for crime, to Lone who seek a refuge, or find a dwelling place, in this her cherished Home.

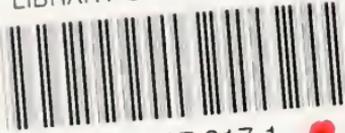
I have to add, in conclusion, only a remark or two upon the temper of mind we should cherish, and the obligations resting upon us, in the present crisis. And,

First. We should be *intensely calm*. We should be calm, for God rules this commotion of warring elements about us. He controls the result. Why should we be over-anxious? And, surely, we have as little cause for anger as for anxiety.—It would betray conscious weakness to fall into a passion, for passion is ever weak. What is done in anger, is never well done. Yet we should feel intensely. It is not for the good man, least of all for the christian, to look with cold indifference upon the perpetration of wrong. We ought to feel here. Our calmness should be that of molten metal—the still, intense calm of a red heat.

Secondly. We should be awake to duty. We have slumbered too long. We should be on the alert to act. How, the turn of future events will indicate. What we need is a readiness and a disposition to seize upon occasions as they arise. It is not through the ballot-box alone, that we can rebuke this wrong, and wound the head of Slavery. Popular sentiment must be prepared for the ballot-box. Our daily words and actions must do this; for it is by our daily words and actions, that we contribute the drop of our individual influence to the great ocean of popular sentiment. Up to the measure of that influence, are we, each, responsible; and for us individually, the responsibility is not a light one. Let us seek to know clearly, to feel justly, and to act wisely, in reference to this great evil; and so wash *our* hands in innocency.



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