

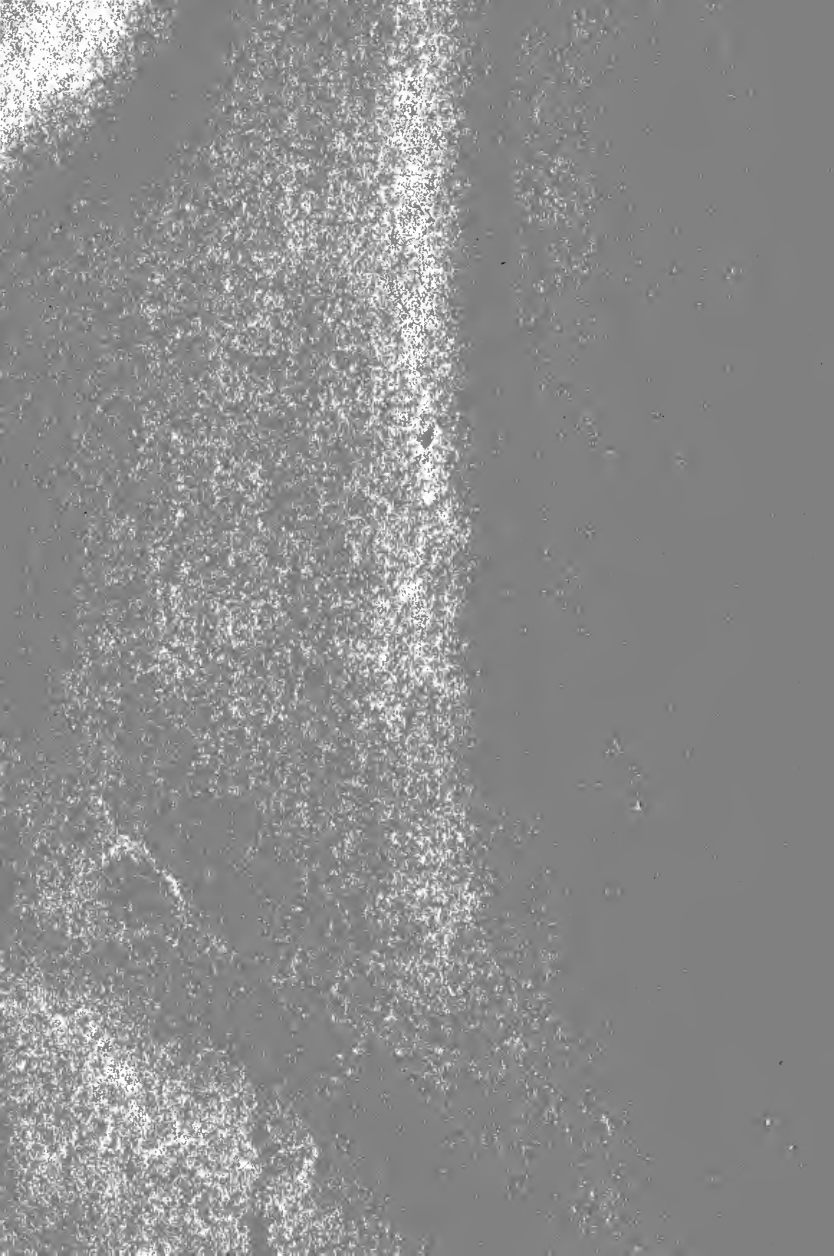




157

2 33

4



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2010 with funding from
State of Indiana through the Indiana State Library





A

SERMON,

PREACHED ON

SABBATH MORNING, APRIL 16, 1865.

THE DAY AFTER THE



DEATH OF PRESIDENT LINCOLN.



BY THE

REV. WM. IRVIN,

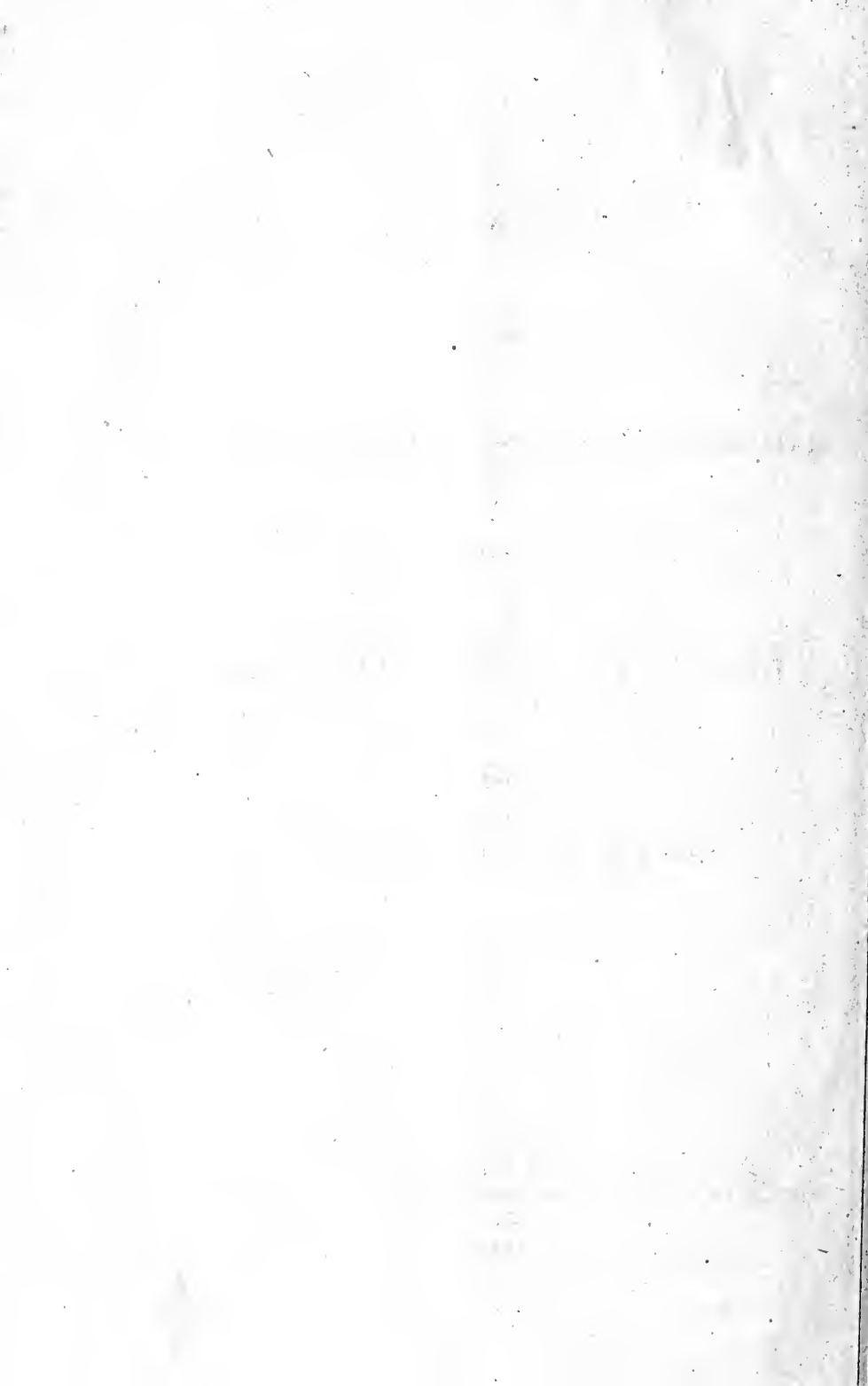
Pastor of the Presbyterian Church, Rondout, N. Y.

New-York:

JOHN A. GRAY & GREEN, PRINTERS, 16 AND 18 JACOB STREET.

1865.





Rondout, N. Y.

April 1. 1867.

My dear Sir,

Your favor of
Jan. 29th was duly received,
& has failed in being answered
at an earlier date, as it sh^d.
have been; for the same
reason, that your circular
was not replied to - a
misplacement & forgetfulness
on my part wh. I regret.
I cannot now find your circular,

but I presume your note
mentions all you desired to
know. The sermon, preached
by me about Pres^t. Lincoln's
death has as published the
following title page: - "A
Sermon preached on Sabbath
morning, April 16, 1865, the
day after the death of
President Lincoln. By the
Rev. Wm. Irwin, Pastor of
the Presbyterian Church, Rondout
N.Y. - New York: John A.

Wm. H. Allen, Printers, 16 & 18
Jacob St. 1865." I believe
250 copies were published.

Yours very respectfully,
Wm. H. Allen.

Mr. Chas. H. Hart,

1819 Chestnut St.
Philadelphia.



A

SERMON,

PREACHED ON

SABBATH MORNING, APRIL 16, 1865.

THE DAY AFTER THE

DEATH OF PRESIDENT LINCOLN.

BY THE

REV. WM. IRVIN,

Pastor of the Presbyterian Church, Rondout, N. Y.



New-York:

JOHN A. GRAY & GREEN, PRINTERS, 16 AND 18 JACOB STREET.

—
1865.



CORRESPONDENCE.

REV. WM. IRVIN :

DEAR SIR : Having listened with great gratification to your sermon of yesterday morning, we beg you to furnish us a copy for publication.

Respectfully yours,

JOHN McCAUSLAND,
WILLIAM H. DE GRAFF,
GEORGE W. DUBOIS,
WALTER B. CRANE,
JOHN P. HILL,

Members of Session.

RONDOUT, April 17, 1865.

RONDOUT, N. Y., April 28, 1865.

DEAR BRETHREN : I have received your note, requesting for publication the sermon preached to you on the Sabbath morning following the death of President Lincoln. In complying with your request, I have written out the sermon, not written when preached, nearly as it was spoken, preferring to do so, rather than attempt by improvement to make it possibly more worthy of the permanent form you wish to give it.

Yours, most sincerely,

WM. IRVIN.

MESSRS. McCAUSLAND, DE GRAFF, etc.

Members of Session.

17

18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60
61
62
63
64
65
66
67
68
69
70
71
72
73
74
75
76
77
78
79
80
81
82
83
84
85
86
87
88
89
90
91
92
93
94
95
96
97
98
99
100

S E R M O N .



II SAMUEL 3 : 34, 38.

“As a man falleth before wicked men, so fellest thou.”

“Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?”

You are doubtless familiar, my brethren, with the circumstances in which these words were spoken. Abner, to whom they refer, had been the able and faithful general of the army of Saul. He had stood by his royal master through every vicissitude of fortune, and after Saul's death espoused the cause of Ishbosheth, his son; but becoming disaffected to the latter, and recognizing the divine purpose to give the kingdom to David, he transferred his allegiance to him. David received him with honor, accepted his offer of service, and sent him away in peace. Joab, the leader of David's host, soon heard of this reconciliation; and cherishing a purpose of revenge against Abner for the death of his brother Asahel, slain by him in battle, and perhaps likewise fearing to find in him a formidable rival, he treacherously slew him under pretence of a friendly interview. David-dis-

claimed with horror all complicity in the murder, and invoked divine vengeance upon Joab; and he and his people made great lamentation over Abner's grave.

There is, of course, but little resemblance between the circumstances we have thus narrated, and those which suggest their use to-day; and yet the words we have read are most appropriate to that appalling tragedy which is now pressing so heavily upon our hearts. For I take it for granted that one thought is uppermost in every mind to-day. You are all filled and burdened with one absorbing theme, and any other would be a mere impertinence and intrusion. And yet how hard it seems—how impossible—to utter any thing of what we all so deeply feel! There are times when thought and feeling appear too great and deep for speech—when excitement outruns expression; and so it is now with us. How little we anticipated the presence of these emblems of mourning here to-day! Every thing seemed to summon us to rejoicing, at this glad and hallowed hour. The bright and opening promise of this early spring-time; the day of rest, with its sacred associations, familiar, yet ever new; this particular Sabbath, observed by the Church for centuries as the anniversary of that triumphant resurrection which “abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light;” and the thought of victory and the hope of peace, swelling our hearts with unutterable gratitude and immeasurable gladness: all these conspired, and concentrated upon this morning in a singular and unprecedented call to cheerful praise.

God seemed to say to us : " My children, rejoice to-day : rejoice in the budding and bursting spring ; rejoice in the Sabbath's sacred peace ; rejoice in a risen and reigning Saviour ; rejoice in the triumph of law, and liberty, and righteousness, and the cheering dawn of a better and grander national prosperity. Any one of these might well give you ground for gladness ; but in my lavish and royal bounty I give you them all at once—wherefore gather in my house of prayer, and rejoice greatly before me." Such seemed to be God's voice in our ears, as we looked forward to this day. But how suddenly and sadly all this is changed ! On the eventful anniversary of that day, when, four years ago, our country's flag was first lowered, in surrender, though not in disgrace, before open and armed rebellion ; when, after four years of terrible and bloody war, the same sturdy and loyal hands which lowered it then, hoisted it again on that same war-worn spot, where treason had its birth and its death-blow ; when by broad and rolling rivers, and on Northern mountain-slopes, and on limitless Western prairies, and by the shores of the far Pacific sea, in city and village, in ship and camp, the loyal millions who could not in person witness that timely and fitting restitution, were joining in its jubilant celebration ; when the National capital itself was thrilling with its full share of the nation's joy : on the evening of that momentous and illustrious day, in the very centre and heart of government, two assassins select and steal upon their victims. One, the revered and beloved Chief-Magistrate of the

Republic; the other, his highest and wisest helper—the calmest, coolest, most sagacious, most truly conservative of our statesmen—the man whose place among us to-day no other living statesman could fill—the man who, while the nation's strength has been strained to the utmost in her desperate contest with domestic foes, has watched with clear and tranquil eye the conduct of the outer world—whose hand, with steady persistence, in spite of thoughtless misapprehension and malicious calumny, has for four years held us back from the terrible, perhaps it would have been the fatal, complication of foreign war:—the one, in the careless relaxation of a welcome hour of ease; the other, an old man, already maimed and mangled, stretched on a bed of helpless suffering—to assault whom was an act of dastardly ferocity which belittles and palliates mere murder. A few brief moments suffice them to do the deed—with full success in the one case, with all but full success in the other—and to vanish into mysterious concealment. Then, through the hours of that appalling night, the strange electric whisper tells the horrible tidings over the land; as day returns, men come forth and gaze on one another with white faces and trembling lips; the flag, hoisted to the masthead in triumph, sinks to the half-mast in mourning; the bells which pealed for victory, toll their muffled sorrow; and the nation which wakened to rejoice, is bowed in anguish and in tears. As with ancient Israel, when David's triumph was marred and saddened by Absalom's death, so verily our "victory

that day was turned into mourning unto all the people." The page then written in history is one never to be forgotten. History has indeed recorded some such things before. Great despots and tyrants have often fallen victims to the vengeance of their outraged and desperate subjects, who found in this last resort the vindication of their liberties; the gallant Henry the Fourth of France perished by an assassin's knife, a victim to the fierce hate of Popery, imperilled by his reign; and a far nearer parallel was furnished three centuries ago, when the illustrious William of Orange was stricken down by murder, in the midst of the great task of asserting and securing the independence of the States of Holland from the tyranny of Spain. But in this age, and especially on this continent, the crime is new and strange. We are shocked and horror-stricken by its unlooked-for revival. We recognize it with dismay as an importation from foreign climes—a relic of long past and almost forgotten barbarism—nay, a deed fresh from the atmosphere of the infernal pit. We thought that four years, with their unutterable experience, had sufficed to sound the depths and gauge the dimensions of rebellion. We thought that the wholesale and shameless perjury in which it had its birth, its cold-blooded massacre of hundreds of disarmed and surrendered prisoners, its slow, deliberate torture and starvation of, they tell us, sixty thousand helpless captives, compared to which hot murder seems like mercy, had exhausted its catalogue of crimes, and embodied all its malignant spirit. But we have now

found "in the lowest deep a lower deep;" the American people have learned—and the lesson has been burned into their hearts and memories as with a red-hot iron—that the spirit of treason is the very spirit of hell. Warm it, and like a viper it will sting you. Dally and treat with it, and it will turn again and rend you. Spare it, and it will strike you to the heart. It wields the sword of open war up to the utmost limit of compulsory surrender, and then takes up the torch of the incendiary and the knife of the assassin.

The present is no time to attempt to delineate the character or narrate the deeds of Abraham Lincoln. We must have for that, calmer minds and cooler moments. We must wait until time has healed our grief and soothed our bitterness; until distance has softened the horrid scene of his tragic death, and left his life and acts to be, as they shall be, a theme and study for the centuries. We can do little more now than feel, as we all do so deeply and painfully feel, our vast and irreparable loss. We all know, and all remember to-day, what great things he has been the instrument in God's hand of doing for us and for our country. This plain and once obscure man, four years ago almost unknown to fame, possessing little more than a mere local notoriety—how in that brief space has he loomed up and grown great before the world! How we trembled, in doubt and anxiety, when in the nation's dark crisis and extremity he stepped out of the ranks, and took upon his shoulders his mighty responsibilities!

The work appointed him was greater, I verily believe, than has been laid on any man, since Moses received his divine commission to lead forth Israel from bondage to freedom. And yet who will say to-day that those responsibilities have not been well and nobly borne—that his work has not been faithfully and wisely done—that he had not attained, even though the final consummation was not realized, an unexpected and magnificent success? Putting aside minor defects in judgment—errors which to some may have seemed great in principle or policy—occasional shortcomings in forecast and sagacity about which men's opinions vary—the nation records in its tears to-day its all but unanimous verdict, that the gigantic burden he has now laid down for ever was carried manfully and well; that the almost superhuman service demanded of him by his country was not only faithfully but ably rendered. As we trace back the brief but brilliant record of American history, how few names we find fit to serve as his measure and parallel! We hesitate instinctively to compare any man with Washington. We seem to have agreed to place him upon a pedestal where no other feet shall ever be suffered to stand—an altitude of worth and greatness where none may approach and rival him. And yet it is obvious and undeniable that, vast as was the work of George Washington, the task and burden of Abraham Lincoln were ten-fold greater. Three millions of people, along a narrow strip of sea-coast, separated from their foe by three thousand miles of ocean, were the trust confided

to the Father of his country. The single State of New-York comprises a larger population and more precious interests to-day, than the united colonies when Washington headed them in their struggle for independence. Thirty millions of men—for it was the whole nation which it was his aim and task to save from the common abyss and madness of rebellion—thirty millions, spread across the broad continent from the Eastern to the Western sea—even the loyal masses rent by party discord—an army numbered by hundreds of thousands, first to create, and then to wield—an interminable stretch of sea-coast, a stupendous expanse of territory, which naval and military operations must cover and penetrate—and the jealousy and ill-will of foreign lands—these were the elements of the gigantic problem whose solution was intrusted to Abraham Lincoln. He wore no regal purple; but the weight of a colossal empire rested on his shoulders. And not only did he nobly bear its burdens, but he manfully resisted its temptations. Washington has received, and right deservedly, the applause of the world, which wondered as it applauded, for his modest withdrawal when his work was done—for his forbearing, in imitation of other great leaders of revolutions, to take up the sceptre, after he had laid down the sword. But did Abraham Lincoln withstand less nobly the manifold greater seductions which appealed to his ambition? Who dare accuse him to-day—whatever else may be laid to his charge—of acting in his high place from selfish and mercenary motives? Who ventures to say, that in any

shape or measure he employed to elevate and aggrandize himself the enormous power thrust into his hands by his generous and confiding countrymen? How singularly pure he was, when too many in high places were corrupt; how unambitious he was, when others found in their country's calamities the means of their own advancement; how simple and unaffected he was, when a sudden rise to the giddy heights of greatness so rarely fails to overthrow the balance and spoil the temper; how cheerful and resolute he was, even when others faltered and gave ground—when so large a part of the loyal people once and again fell back from around him, and left him almost alone, in the heat and din of the conflict, on the ground which his steadfast feet never yielded for a moment! But there is a still tenderer element in our loving sorrow. His personal and private traits, full as much as his more public attributes and official manifestations, have laid such a hold on the nation's heart as was hardly ever established by any other man. Who that ever came within its range has failed to feel and do homage to the unfeigned and transparent goodness of his nature? And how wonderfully have his broad and genial kindness and charity, like a magic spell cast over the land, drawn the hearts of even opponents and bitter detractors to him with magnetic and irresistible power! It is not always so—it has not been often so, with the great and mighty. Often, kings and potentates who have swayed the sceptre and wielded power wisely and justly and well, chill and awe and repel those who approach them nearer;

as the towering mountain, swelling on the distant sight in graceful outlines, reveals to the near beholder rude rocks and barren and shaggy precipices uninviting and inaccessible to man. But in his case, while the ruler was admirable, the man was dear; and to the collective nation's reverent esteem, was added the individual citizen's instinctive and involuntary love for that large-hearted, gentle, clement, noble nature. And in this view we see, not only the demoniac wickedness of this black deed, but its insensate folly also. All sin is folly; but this act embodies the wildest insanity of crime. Well might the man-slayer have bethought himself—and stayed his sacrilegious hand at the remembrance—of those words, familiar both to his memory and his lips, which our great English poet puts into the mouth of an expectant murderer in relation to his intended victim :

“——this Duncan

Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against
The deep damnation of his taking-off.”

The author of all evil—that “murderer from the beginning”—the prince and prompter of assassins—never served his friends and followers worse—never more utterly and manifestly betrayed, while he used them—than when he incited and helped them to do this deed of infamy; and treason, staggering and overwhelmed, by this last fugitive and desperate blow, has not only gathered no strength and gained no ground, but has swept away her last refuge, blotted out her last hope

of mercy, and robbed her adherents of one who, in the ready exercise of pardon, even to the verge of weakness, would have proved their kindest intercessor and their ablest friend.

We may gather, my brethren, from this appalling experience, the weightiest and most profitable instruction—as we always may from the providence of God, if we “wisely consider of his doing.” And we may learn, not only the plain and ordinary lessons of the frail mortality of man, the shadowy vanity of earthly greatness, the inscrutable sovereignty of the Eternal King—but also special ones, which are all the more significant and emphatic for being taught us by such unusual and appalling means. Perhaps we sorely needed so stern an admonition as this. Perhaps we were in danger, in the exultation of triumph, of relaxing that “eternal vigilance” which is, and ever must be, the “price of liberty.” Perhaps we were risking, in the final hour of apparently complete success, the loss of the very prize for which we had toiled and yearned and prayed and waited so wearily and so long—for which we had poured out so much blood, expended such countless treasure, offered such costly sacrifices. Perhaps, in the very good nature and careless joy of present victory and coming peace, we were tending to a weak and culpable clemency toward those red-handed ringleaders of rebellion, who had stricken at the nation’s life, and almost compassed its ruin. Saul was rejected from being king over Israel, because he spared the Amalekitish Agag, whom God had com-

manded him to destroy. Ahab welcomed Benhadad, the vanquished king of Syria and enemy of Israel, with the words, "Is he yet alive? he is my brother:"—and Jehovah's message to him was: "Because thou hast let go out of thy hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people." I assume no parallels between our history and that of ancient Israel. God forbid that I should presumptuously ascribe to his providential dealings of to-day an interpretation identical with that given by his own word to his dealings with his people of old. But the great principles of his moral government are the same then and now and always; and this I do say, in the fear of God, and as the truth of God, enforced by this appalling calamity and crime—that a national tendency and crying sin among us is a growing failure and reluctance to enforce justice and vindicate by punishment the majesty of law. Our jails are filled with murderers;—and who swings upon the scaffold? Our land is red with violence and stained with crime; and how many pay the swift and righteous penalty of their transgressions? And now, when we were almost ready to absolve and welcome back the perpetrators of the most gigantic crime which has ever cursed our land, no thoughtful mind can fail, or refuse to see the strange significance of the fact, that the two men reached by this murderous deed, were the very two men who were most inclined to stamp on the coming era of reconstruction and peace the policy of leniency and forgiveness. But if this tendency to excess of mer-

cy has been dangerous, it is needless to say there is no such danger now. The madness of crime—a rude but effective remedy—has cured the nation of the weak folly of mercy. Indulgence and amnesty are not the kind of mercy which a righteous God deals out to the transgressors of his law; such grace is not the grace of that Lord God Almighty who “will by no means clear the guilty;” and God’s providence forces on our minds the corroboration of the indubitable teaching of His word. The American people learn to-day, not only that rebellion must be crushed, but that traitors must be punished—not in hot and blood-thirsty vengeance, but in stern and solemn vindication of eternal right and law. And they learn, too—well will it be for them if they never forget it more—a new hatred of that accursed system of oppression and bondage which has been the source of all our woes. Slavery was the root—and lo! we have plucked the bitter fruit in its full ripeness—first treason, and now murder! Looking upon him who was fondly loved and foully murdered, we resolve, not only to decree freedom, but to obliterate slavery; to strike the fetters from every limb, and give to every creature on our country’s soil made in the image of God, the full and sacred liberty of manhood.

But we find in our loss and grief not only instruction, but consolation also. The infamous purpose of treason cannot be thus accomplished. There may be a way in which the fabric of our government and liberties may be overthrown; but manifest at least it is that

this is not the way. Any other government on earth but one, perhaps, would at such a shock have crumbled into shapeless and hopeless anarchy; but here, with a quiet readiness which seems to us a matter of course, but at which the world will marvel, the vacancy which murder makes is instantly filled by the constitutional successor; and the ponderous machine of the republic moves on, without pause or jar! And as to him for whom we mourn—evidently, in God's wise purpose, Abraham Lincoln's life-work was done. He saw and hailed the promise of reünion and peace, like the glad coming of the breaking day—how rich a reward for his hard working and weary waiting! Like the Lawgiver of old, who led rescued Israel through the desert way, he looked upon the promised land of liberty and peace, and fondly longed and hoped to enter it and rest in it, and reap there the pleasant fruit of toil and trial; but God had said to him also, though we knew it not: "I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither." Like the farmer, who tills and sows in the chill and early spring-time, and sees at last the yellow promise of the harvest, but dies before he can gather in the golden sheaves,—so he had sown with us in tears, but was not to be one of the rejoicing reapers. He saw only the beginning of the end; but he saw it early and plainly. More than a year ago, in that noble proclamation of national thanksgiving, which history will preserve as one of the grandest and most memorable utterances which ever fell on a nation's ear from a ruler's lips, he

recorded his sure and sanguine expectation, in his country's behalf, of "*continuance of years, with large increase of freedom*"—an expectation which every hour since that day has strengthened and justified, and which was strongest and brightest, for him and for all, the very hour he died ! His latest utterances were full of hope and cheer ; and his eye was beaming with joyous and genial anticipations—bright with the radiance of final victory—the very instant its light was quenched for ever. And then, "we sorrow not even as others which have no hope." How comforting to-day to the Christian heart, is the ground we have for trusting that he who has been so cruelly and suddenly smitten down, was not unprepared for the dread and solemn change ! Even a careless observer cannot have failed to notice, not only the conscientious uprightness, but also the growingly reverential tone, of his acts and words ; and private testimony, more direct and convincing, has assured us from his own lips of his trust for salvation in the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. Unspeakably consoling at this hour, is the hope thus permitted to us, that from that bloody scene of successful violence,—in that dread hour of fainting and swooning nature,—his soul was gathered in the mighty arms of a Divine Redeemer—that after his rough life-voyage, buffeted to the last by storms and surges, he was harbored in that safe shelter, where care and trouble can never reach him, where treachery and murder can never harm him more.

God's promises comfort us well, in this trying hour.

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” “The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.” Man dies—but God lives on. Other and untried hands now grasp the reins of executive power, and assume, under God, the trust of our country’s destinies. Let us fervently and unceasingly pray, that on the new President’s shoulders, the mantle of the illustrious dead may fall. Let us stand by him and by our country’s cause with invincible and hopeful resolution; and if we thus “deal courageously,” “the Lord shall be with the good.”

The first part of the report deals with the general situation of the country and the progress of the work. It is followed by a detailed account of the various projects and the results achieved. The report concludes with a summary of the work done and a list of the names of the persons who have taken part in it.

7

M. R. N. I. N. O. S. I. N. I.



with the sympathy
of

MR G. W. LUDLUM.

Rouder
N.Y.



