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A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

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First Baptist Meeting-House, Providence,

SUNDAY MORNING, JUNE 9, 1861,

BEFORE THE

SECOND REGIMENT OF RHODE ISLAND VOLUNTEERS:

BY SAMUEL L. CALDWELL,

MINISTER OF THE CHURCH.

PROVIDENCE:

KNOWLES, ANTHONY & CO., PRINTERS.

1861.

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THE
S. C.

“ The Land we from our fathers had in trust,
And to our children will transmit, or die:
This is our maxim, this our piety;
And God and Nature say that it is just.
That which we *would* perform in arms,—we must.
We read the dictate in the infant’s eye;
In the wife’s smile; and in the placid sky;
And at our feet, amid the silent dust
Of them that were before us;
While we go forth, a self-devoted crowd,
With weapons grasped in fearless hands, to assert
Our virtue, and to vindicate mankind.”

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THE
S. C.

S E R M O N . *

Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord.

For ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight: for the Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your rearward.—ISAIAH LII.: 11, 12.

BLESSED indeed is the army which carries with it the benediction of religion, and sets up its banners in the name of God. It goes as his servant, and he goes as its van and rearward. Such was the grand vision of the prophet, of the marriage, in the history of his nation, of the martial and the sacerdotal, the priest and the soldier; of a march and a procession; of an army and a church; a “sacramental host,” bearing the vessels of the Lord, whether Levites serving at the altar, or soldiers serving in the camp; of Jehovah in the midst of Israel, alike when they fought and when they worshipped.

For it is not one God who is in the sanctuary, and another who is in the camp, but the same God, leader and follower of the Hebrews, who goes before and behind our hosts to the battle. He consents, nay, demands, to be served sometimes by the soldier as well as the priest. He strikes the hour when a nation must fight or die.

*These few words of address are printed at the instance of gentlemen who wished, for the sake of the soldiers who heard them, that they might prolong their influence a little beyond the hour in which they were spoken; and especially to execute the liberal proposition of two gentlemen of Providence, to place a copy in the hands of each soldier in the two Regiments of the State.

The musket of the soldier may be a vessel of the Lord, executing the powers ordained of Him, speaking for Him to men who are deaf to other arguments. You may serve God, even as a priest unto Him, with as clear a sense of duty, with a conscience as loyal to Him, in smiting rebellion, as in supporting His worship. Powder may be sanctified by the word of God and prayer, as well as your daily bread. The magistrate is not to bear the sword in vain, any more than the minister is to handle the word of God deceitfully. The nation which will yield its government and its life, without resistance, will not wait long before it gives up its God. If it is too timid, or too mercenary, to strike for its imperilled existence, its God has already become a tradition, and its existence will soon become a shame. And so, too, when its army is only brute muscle and metal, with no soul behind, or only with a devil instead of God in it; handling its weapons without regard to God, or the things God loves; when righteousness and religion cease out of the conflict; then there is no place for it in the sanctuary of God, only to humble itself in the sackcloth of penitence, and in supplications for a new and consecrating faith.

Therefore, this is the first thing I have to say to you in God's behalf, as you wait here in His house for an hour, on the way to your perilous place of duty:—that you enter upon this service of your country, as on some service for God; that you remember that you bear the vessels of the Lord, and that therefore you must be clean.

You expect brevity: allow, therefore, a necessary and military directness.

1. This God requires, that you go into this work, as into every other, in a spirit of careful fidelity to Him ; for this calling of a soldier is no exception to the usual rules of life. There is nothing in his occupation to separate him from God,—to exempt him from a continual and religious responsibility to his Maker. The sword, the pen, the plough, the hammer, alike you may make vessels of the Lord, by the spirit in which you use them. Indeed, there are special reasons why he who carries the gun, and represents the law and avenging genius of his outraged country, should do it in a temper of the bravest loyalty to God. He who is faithful to the stars of his flag, why shall he not be faithful to his God, who is above the stars of heaven? He who arms himself for law, order, righteousness,—whose first virtue as a soldier is obedience,—shall he break from the orders of his heavenly King, and disown all moral obligations? Shall he suppress rebellion, while he is insurgent against all heavenly authorities? The Law of God, high, serene, eternal,—it follows you in the camp and the field. While human laws may be silent amidst the contest of arms, *that* cannot suspend its tremendous authority. Your friend, or your enemy, it will follow you; sentinel over you as you walk your lonely watch under the silent stars; in the day, shining over your soul brighter than the sun. As you drop your common duties, and take up the sword, think not it is necessary to drop religion,—one of its most sacred sentiments,—any of its divine obligations or affections. Christianity is a religion for man and for life—for life everywhere. Angel of heaven, breathing God's peace; expecting and announcing the final truce when the sword shall cease to slay; if we *must* go to the battle, it

also will go. Mercy of God it is, that it can go, tempering the dreadful necessities of war; that God has not forbidden it to enter the awful hour when a nation buys its freedom, its security, at the terrible price of blood.

This I say, not for you only, but for all of us,—that our cause is just; that God, in his righteous attributes, is on our side; that this case is so clear,—this war so righteous—so forced upon us by Heaven and earth,—so utterly unavoidable without destroying ourselves, without recreancy to trusts more solemn than were ever laid by the Almighty on any people, without crime against the dearest and divinest things in a nation's life,—that we must try to rise to the level of our cause, and be worthy of it; that we must purge out of our resistance to this most iniquitous and unprovoked aggression, all selfishness, malice, revenge; that we must arm ourselves not only with steel, but with righteousness, which is mightier and more invincible than that. Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord. Let the cause lift and sanctify the spirit of the people, whose it is; especially of these select sons and soldiers of the people, bearers of the flag of our sovereignty through the smoke of battle, carriers of the national authority across every parallel of latitude to the waters of Mexico. Let Holiness to the Lord be written on their very guns, out of whose smoking mouths this cause of God and humanity is looking for its pure and immortal victory.

2. The peril always lies over against the duty, and this is the special peril and temptation to leave God out, and a religious fidelity to him; to disown him, and so to lose the blessings, to incur the risks which go with

obedience or disobedience. This is the moral peril of all life. Much more is it of a time like this, the peril of all of us, to forget God; after the godless creed of Frederick of Prussia, to trust the strongest battalions; to burn incense to our own arms; perhaps to let the higher and religious life decline. Much more than all is it the peril of life in the camp. It were a false and disreputable modesty if I hesitated to tell you the truth about the life on whose perilous edge you stand. I do not say your camp may not be as pure, as free from reckless passions, as devout in its recognition of God, as beautiful with the humanities and charities and pieties of life, as the peaceful town and home you leave behind. It may be; but not without care,—without some knowledge beforehand of the danger,—without even a more stringent moral and religious discipline than you put upon your life at home.

Home,—that is the word, for that is the first thing you will miss. That is the first disadvantage and peril of the camp. It is not home. The gentleness of woman, the love of children, the restraints, the inspirations of domestic life, become a memory,—and the memory you must by all means cherish as a most vital bond to purity and happiness: but the ill-assorted, often harsh and rude companionships of the camp are not home. You leave one of the great safeguards of virtue. You submit to one of the great provocations to looseness in manners. You are liable to brush off refinement, to lose the impulse to decorous life, when you exchange the household for the company of a thousand men of all sorts, in the shifting and necessarily unhomelike life under tents, in the fields. At home you may have the secret oratory of devotion. In the camp, you must

make it as you can, and often cannot make it except in your own breast.

Hold on to the memories of home and the good you leave behind. Carry it with you,—the home, the church, all of your usual life you can,—and set it up wherever your tent is pitched. Ye who remain, keep it round them, by visits, letters, all possible communications, which shall make each man feel that he is surrounded by the vigilance, the love, which serves to keep the heart tender and the life pure.

Again, you go to *war*, you handle arms, you are to become familiar with physical violence, perhaps to shed blood. You may keep your tenderness, truth, meekness, through it all. Believe not that war *obliges* a man to be anything but a humane, humble, true man, as long as Robert Anderson lives on the earth. But where one man does it, ten grow hard, cruel,—their moral natures suffering all the dangerous consequences of a life given to the arts of war and the use of physical force.

There is the peril, too, on the side of the senses, of the appetites; the temptation to foul pleasures, to unclean and intemperate indulgences, provoked by the hardness of the soldier's life, by the unnatural state in which he is placed; the passion for it kept down at home, and fearfully kindled in the exhaustions and excitements of the comparatively wild life of camps.

I do not forget for one moment, I remember with grateful joy, all that redeems you from many of these dangers, in the admirable means which all classes supply to protect, to cheer, to benefit you; the provisions which the State has made; the personal and pains-taking carefulness of our noble chief magistrate, and of your officers; the prayers which rise in clouds to Heaven

for every one of you; a chaplain solicitous for your highest welfare; the pride, the affliction, the hopes of a whole people which will follow you; but because there is danger, I speak for God to your hearts, now tender with thoughts of exile from home, and of the unknown fate which lies before you. Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord. For no army is so thick, so pressing, so perpetually on front and rear, as these invisible powers of mischief, assailing all life, and most surely yours; corrupting with secret contagion, digging trenches under your very feet, and wounding with a hurt immedicable by anything but the infinite grace of Christ.

3. There is the duty and the peril, and so also is there the encouraging and yet admonishing fact in the text, that God goes before, and behind, and in the midst, Inspector, Sentinel, Leader and Commander. A pure God, too pure to love sin, or to look kindly on it, walks through the land and through the camp. Oh! let us see Him whose face shines as the light, and whose purity burns like fire, going in the midst of us. For here He is, inevitable, present always, asleep never, our God to see us, and our God to help us. If we expect Him to help us, we must be careful, we must keep ourselves clean. Our success is to come of Him. If we cast Him out, or try to, if we provoke and offend Him, how soon can He loosen our joints, and turn the mighty energies which now seem swinging us on irresistibly to victory, into the unmanageable tempests which shall dash us more swiftly to ruin. Forty years He kept this people of the Hebrews marching across from the Red Sea to Jordan, instead of the month in which they might have crossed it, for the uncleanness, unbelief, sin

He found in their camp. We may provoke Him to keep us for a generation in the wilderness, till we are purged by bitter trials, and make clean by adversity, what we would not purify by faith, and loyal love to Him.

And the voice which speaks to all the people, goes to you who carry the standard and bear the arms of the Republic. You are the priests of the Lord. You are anointed, and set forward for this great, heroic, immortal service. Harden not your heart as in the provocation. Be ye clean, who bear the vessels of the Lord.

Be clean, without, within. Count it no impertinence, if I tell you that physical purity is pleasing to God. How carefully He prescribed their washings, how clean He required his priests to be, you may see in the Old Testament. What plagues and death he has bred in the uncleanness of camps, let military history tell you. For if cleanliness has not always its proverbial neighborhood to godliness, it is close to health; to the best estate of mind and body. Keep the body pure. Keep it under; its fiery and its unclean passions. Wash off all sensualities, as you would the stain of blood.

Above all, it is an inward cleanness God speaks for,— a clean heart, clean unto Him, clean with a holy reverence, with a penitent humility, with a filial trust. For this is the first word of the gospel, and the first necessity of your soul immortal, that it be renewed with the spiritual washing of regeneration, and the turning of the whole heart to God. And when, in the sight of the pure God with whom you have to do, you feel through all your aching soul the defiling, poisonous sin, and cry Unclean, unclean, that I am, what shall I do? look

not only to the purity there is in God, but to the mercy there is in the Cross of his Son; to the Blood which cleanseth utterly, and from all sin. When you feel, as you will, how hard it is to keep this commandment of God,—Be ye clean,—and feel condemned altogether by it, know that there is a Fountain open, that the Cleanser is he who once fought the hard battle on Calvary, and conquered, that you might be “more than conquerors.” You will learn, on the field you are going to, as never before, that it is by the blood of sacrifice that God secures the rights, the happiness, the peace of nations, the stability of government, the progress of civilization; and so you will learn to see new meaning and power, and your own life and salvation, in that great Sacrifice in which the most sacred blood was contributed to pacify God’s rebellious empire, to reconsecrate His authority, and to purge us all from sin, its dread disabilities, its unclean mark and power.

Sons, soldiers of Rhode Island! you go out from the sight of our eyes, but we shall not let you go out of our hearts, our prayers, our hopes and fears. Unseen arms will embrace you; homes which yearn after you in the watches of midnight, in the sultry noon; these churches bearing you first and most tenderly in the bosom of every prayer; this State, from its gallant Governor, sharing your march, and generously careful for your needs, to every citizen solicitous for its honor, which is now on a field in sight of all the world, entrusted to your keeping; ten thousand sympathies, solitudes, pieties, the pride, the gratitude, the patriotism of a hundred thousand hearts,—all will follow you, and breathe their blessings round you, if so you will allow. Hail, with hospitable joy, these angels of mercy,—mes-

sengers between us and you. Let them keep burning in your souls,—often sad, often weary, tried, tempted, hard beset as they will be,—the memories, the affections, which will be your comfort, which may be your salvation.

Go, go, with the hope of our patriotism, with the benediction of our religion! God Almighty bless you. God, the all-pure, breathe his purifying, unquenchable life into your hearts! May His everlasting arms clasp you, as no love or prayer of ours can do! And you, whom we shall see no more, if so God has ordained it, into your dying eyes, may a light shine from that radiant Lamb in the centre of Heaven, once slain for sinners, whose merciful look, in that hour, will give such peace as can only come from God; peace like a river, like an infinite sea, on which you shall float into joy which is unspeakable and full of glory.

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