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SERMON

BY THE

REV. DR. J. SPENCER,

St. Michaels Parish, Md.,

ON THE DEATH OF PRESIDENT HARRISON.

LAM. v. 16.

THE CROWN IS FALLEN FROM OUR HEAD: WOE UNTO US, THAT WE HAVE SINNED!

The death of a chief magistrate of this great nation, while an incumbent of his high and dignified office, is an occurrence, which may well excite solemn reflections in the breast of every individual over whom his authority extended. No such occurrence has ever taken place before; the nation has never had occasion to lament the demise of any her Presidents while in power, but President Harrison's, they have all been permitted to retire from the duties of their exalted and responsible station, and to die, as many of them as are dead, in the calmness and quiet of private life. In this consideration there is something agreeable both as it respects the person thus peaceably leaving the noisy and turbulent scenes of this world's affairs, and also the nation at large. Why it is thus agreeable I need not take up your time in explaining, since it will doubtless appear, and, I trust, distinctly, from the observations which I am about to lay before you.

As we have met together to express our sorrow on account of the melancholy event which has deprived the nation of its head, to sympathise with our citizens at large in the loss we have sustained and also to manifest our respect for the deceased as the highest and most honorable officer in our country, the particular object of my remarks shall be to show the grounds upon which our sorrow and sympathy are demanded; or in other words to explain in what manner the death of Gen. Harrison is a great national calamity, in which as citizens of these United States we are all concerned, and which we ought deeply to lament. I shall then conclude my address with some hints as to the manner in which this occurrence may be turned to a profitable account.

Having thus stated my subject, & given you an idea of the particular turn which the discussion of it is to take, I shall here, before I enter upon that discussion, take the liberty to make an observation or two to guard my meaning against misapprehension, and to prevent it from being distorted to the purpose of unfriendly and unfounded charges on the score of politics. It is impossible to speak on such a subject without mingling with the reflections which may arise much that is political in its bearing and aspect; but I wish it understood, and I beg it may be understood, that I shall speak of Gen. Harrison not as a party man, but as a patriot; not as head of any one political faction, but as President of the United States. I disclaim all interest or concern in party politics. I have never troubled myself with them, nor shall I do so.—Political measures adopted on the ground of principle; that is, as promoting the welfare of the country; and supported by upright and honorable means, I shall never oppose, with whatever party they may have their origin. I may privately consider them wrong or inexpedient, but I shall not oppose them. Under such circumstances the Church teaches me submission, and therefore it is my duty to give no trouble, but to obey. But on the other hand, if I see men of little or no political or moral principle rising into offices, of trust and power, men who scoff at things sacred, and regard all religion as superstition and folly, I am bound, not only by my office as a Christian Minister, but my duty to my country to oppose them. And oppose such men I will as long as I am able to raise my voice in the cause of truth and goodness. They are the curse of a nation; not only turning away from it the favour and protection of Almighty GOD, but bringing upon it, sooner or later, certain destruction. By these; principles in political matters I have always been governed, and by no others: I have thought it necessary to state them, even at the expense of a little prolixity, and what is much less to my taste, a little egotism, because I am anxious that the views and sentiments about to be expressed on the subject before us should not be misunderstood. With the explanation that has been given I am quite certain they will not be misunderstood by any person of intelligence and candour.

I return now to my subject, which is, as you were just apprised, to show in what manner the death of Gen. Harrison is a great national calamity, calling for deep sorrow of heart from every citizen of the United States; and the point which first, and most urgently, presses upon our attention here is the peculiar state of the country itself. Never was this country perhaps, since it became a free and independent nation, in a state more likely to render such an event productive of the worst of evils, than that in which it is at this moment. I mention this as a fact an acknowledged, notorious fact. Of the cause to which it is to be ascribed it does not become me to speak, nor shall I presume to throw the blame upon any individual, or class of individuals. The truth is, it seems to be owing to various causes, and to the unwise conduct of persons of various political creeds. Look at the ruin which has been brought upon the trade of the country by the breaking up of banks, and the prostration of credit. If a man has money, or capital, it is absolutely dangerous to risk it any where, or in any business, or in any hands. Not only thousands of people have been thrown out of employment by the embarrassments of commercial men, but many, especially such as are least able to help themselves have been reduced to starvation. Even some of the States are almost bankrupt.—Their Internal Improvements, and banking speculations have brought them to the verge of an abyss, from which nothing but an appeal to the liberality of the people in the shape of a tax can save them.

Consider again the vexatious excitement produced not long since by abolitionism. That excitement has not yet passed away. The monster is not dead; it only sleeps; and the slightest encouragement from persons in authority would make its roar to be heard from one end of the country to the other. It requires a vigorous arm, and judicious management to quiet its ravings: and I may add that there is little reason to hope the country will ever be entirely secure from the danger of its assaults, while the ignorance and fanaticism which gave it birth, meet with such favour and indulgence every where.

Consider further the state of the country as it regards its foreign relations. There are, just at this time, some nice and delicate questions pending between these states and Great Britain; and in settling them it is very apparent, that the scales must be held by impartial and steady hands, otherwise two of the most powerful nations in the world, nations strongly bound to each other by the ties of language, literature and blood, will be plunged into all the horrors of war. That the mass of the population—the intelligent population I mean—both in England and this country are greatly opposed to war, and most sincerely deprecate its evils I firmly believe. The only ground of apprehension is that the two governments, will, as governments have often done, place themselves in such an awkward and embarrassing posture in relation to each other, that they will find it difficult to change that posture without collision. Matters have recently tended very strongly to that condition of things: and unless wise men, and sincere patriots should be employed by both nations to adjust their differences scarcely a doubt can be entertained as to the consequence.

Such is briefly—very briefly indeed—the state of the country at this time; in such circumstances is her Chief Magistrate taken away from her, and she left to be directed in her course, among the rocks and opposing currents of a stormy period, by other persons than those to whom her helm was entrusted. Surely an event which bears so directly upon the most important interests of our country, and which may affect those interests very seriously and dangerously, cannot be too much lamented by every one who loves peace, and hates confusion and anarchy.

Another ground upon which we should lament the death of Gen. Harrison; or, another reason why his death should be considered a great national calamity, is the period of his administration at which he has been cut off. Scarcely had he taken the reins of government ino his hands, when they have been wrested from him by death. Raised to his high office by the almost unanimous voice of his countrymen, he has had no opportunity of making any return for the great confidence reposed in him. We cannot but believe that a grateful mind, and an honorable mind would, for such a singular exhibition of esteem and attachment, have put forth extraordinary efforts in promoting the prosperity and happiness of the nation. He might have failed—success might have not followed his efforts: but we do not know that it would not; and we cannot avoid lamenting that he was not permitted to give some proof more than words of his wish and ability to realize the hopes which had been formed of him. That those hopes would have been realized is, to my mind quite certain. This opinion is built upon the character which he sustained through life, and which has never been surpassed, as far as relates to those qualities, all and every one of them, which are necessary to constitute an efficient and safe Chief Magistrate, of our country, by that of any previous occupant of the presidential chair. The consideration of character, however, belongs more properly to the third ground upon which our sorrow is demanded for this great and truly afflicting bereavement. To this let us next, for a few moments, direct our thoughts.

The point to which I now refer is that in Gen. Harrison we have lost a true and ardent patriot, a wise statesman, and a sincere Christian. His inaugural address, with which I take it for granted my hearers are well acquainted, would, were there no other proof at hand, fully support me in this position. That address contains views of American policy, which, although they may be considered, by the wayward and innovating temper of the day, as somewhat antiquated and obsolete, are both enlarged and just; and it breathes a spirit, from beginning to end, not often to be met with in the speeches and writings of modern statesmen. But he has not been permitted to carry into action the principles, and to redeem the pledges by which he there binds himself with so much frankness and sincerity; and as some persons might be disposed to consider the address itself as nothing more than so many words, without any other meaning or object than that of increasing the confidence of his friends, and quieting the fears and disarming the opposition of his enemies, it may be well to see how far the general tenour of his life accords with his inaugural declarations. To do this as accurately and as satisfactorily as may be, I shall take the liberty to state the chief circumstances of his career. They are as follows.

President Harrison was a native of the State of Virginia, and was born in the year 1773. His father, Benjamin Harrison was a conspicuous member of Congress in the time of the Revolutionary war, being one of the signers of the famous Declaration of Independence, and an active supporter of all the measures which resulted in the separation of this country from Great Britain. He gave his son the best education which the country could afford at that period, who, upon leaving the seat of learning—Hampden Sydney College in Virginia—in which he had been trained for future usefulness and renown, at first applied himself to the study of medicine. But before he had completed his medical course, he abandoned his studies for the profession of arms. He was induced to do this perhaps by the excitement which prevailed through the country on account of the Indian war, which broke out in 1791, and which resulted so disastrously for the forces and fame of Gen. St. Clair. He received from Gen. Washington an ensign's commission, and was ordered to join St. Clair's army, but (did not reach it in time) to participate in the dangers and misfortunes of the campaign. Under Gen. Wayne, who was appointed to the command of the army the year following, he soon distinguished himself. For the part which he acted in the battle of Miami, in which a decided victory was gained over the Indians and their Canadian allies, he received the thanks of his commander, and was promoted to the rank of captain. Shortly after he was placed in command of Fort Washington, but not fancying the kind of life which such a command required him to lead, he resigned his commission in the army, and became secretary of the north-western territory. This station he obtained in 1797. In 1799 he was elected to Congress from the same territory. While a member of Congress at this period, he planned, and succeeded in effecting a measure, which has done more perhaps towards the increase and improvement of the country, than any other that ever was devised. I refer to the law which he caused, or was instrumental in causing to be made, respecting the public lands in the west. By this law the public lands were divided into small sections, and thus accommodated to the ability of purchasers of almost every amount of capital; whereas previously none but persons of wealth could buy of the government, four thousand acres being the smallest number allowed to be sold. The mode of payment also was rendered more accommodating and encouraging to small settlers. It is said that so favorable was the impression made by Gen. Harrison's services in Congress upon the minds of that body, that some zealous friends, who thought it would be easy to accomplish such a purpose, proposed making him governor of the North W. Territory, instead of Gen. St. Clair. But to this proposal he would by no means consent. He respected the misfortunes as well as the feelings of that officer; and could not be induced to do that which, however advantageous to himself, might have been detrimental to the interests of another. In 1800 he was appointed governor of Indiana, which had been erected into a separate territory. The affairs of this territory, to which Louisiana also was appended after its purchase by the United States, he managed with singular skill and success. It is remarked by the writer of a brief sketch of his life, that his mode of keeping the savages in check, by whom he was surrounded on all hands, was by combining 'mildness' with 'justice,' and conciliation with firmness, and by a 'never slumbering watchfulness,' which was constantly alive to all their movements, and always prepared to meet any hostile demonstration on their part. In 1811 the battle of Tippecanoe was fought, in which the savages under their renowned chief Tecumseh were entirely defeated. In this battle governor Harrison displayed great circumspection and bravery, for which the legislature of Kentucky, who passed a complimentary resolution respecting it, declared that he well deserved the thanks of the nation. On the breaking out of war between Great Britain and the United States in 1812, he received the appointment of Major General in the U. S. Army, and while he held that appointment, added greatly to his fame as a warrior, by various military operations, of which the signal defeat of the British general Proctor was the chief. In 1814 he resigned his commission in the army, owing to a misunderstanding with the secretary of war, and retired to his estate in Ohio. Since that period, however, he has served his country several times in Congress, and in 1828 was sent by president Adams as minister to Colombia, but was soon recalled by Gen. Jackson. On the circumstances of his election to the presidency of the United States I need not dwell. They are familiar to us all, as also are those of his inauguration, and his removal from us, just one month, wanting a few hours, after he had assumed the reins of government.

May I not be permitted now to ask, whether it does not distinctly appear from the facts which you have heard, briefly as they have been stated, that our late much lamented president merits as justly as any man ever did the title of a true patriot and a wise statesman? If brilliant military achievements, producing great honor and benefit to the public, combined with civil services, of many years continuance, and of a most laborious, and, it is likely, not very profitable character to himself, can vindicate that title for any human being, president Harrison deserves it. On the score of military achievements it has been said of him, that he was engaged in more battles than any of his cotemporaries, without ever having sustained a defeat; no slight praise this for a soldier, whose life is passed in the midst of tumult, stratagems, and dangers. And as to his services as a statesman, there is not a spot to be found in the western regions of our country that does not exhibit their effects and bear ample testimony to their importance. Where a few years ago not a solitary trace of civilization was to be seen, where nothing met the view but the lonely Indian wigwam, the boundless prairie, or the solitary and pathless wilderness, where no sound fell upon the ear but the savage war whoop, and the startling cries of wild beasts, there now are great and flourishing cities, smiling fields and plentiful harvests, the busy and unceasing hum of thronging multitudes, and all the arts and comforts and enjoyments of man in his most polished state; and chiefly, if not entirely through the wisdom of Harrison. Shall we not, therefore lament him as a patriot and statesman? Since the death of Washington, none of our distinguished men have had a juster claim to that character; and I am fully convinced that no true-hearted American, of whatever party he may be, will refuse him those laurels which he won with such persevering and unfiring firmness and toil.

In addition to all this, we have lost in Gen. Harrison a Christian; a sincere Christian; a Christian president! I mean by a Christian not one who merely assents to the truth of Christianity, but who feels its truth, and acts under its influence; whose convictions and whose hopes are all founded upon a crucified and mediating Saviour. It is truly refreshing to a pious spirit to behold, amidst the striking and often most painful evidences of worldliness and of an entire disregard of religion which are so abundantly manifested in the conduct and principles of our public men, any signs of the fear and love of GOD—any traces of that reverence which is so becoming in man towards his creator. It is a fact, it cannot be denied that public men are generally not religious men—in short that they are positively irreligious. For this fact I have often puzzled myself with endeavoring to find out an adequate cause; and the conclusion at which I have arrived in my reasonings and surmises on the subject is this, that as a strict and decided profession of religion would necessarily unite them to some one Christian society, so it would, they think, be likely to diminish their popularity, and to drive them back into the obscurity of private life. I offer this only as one cause—but a prominent one. There are others very plain, and doubtless very powerful, but still subordinate to the all-absorbing desire of popular favour. I will not attempt to paint this disposition in its true colours. It speaks so badly for human nature, that, perhaps, it would be unwise, at least it would be painful, to drag it fairly into open day, and to expose its ugliness and deformity. President Harrison did not possess this disposition. He did not regard popularity more than his hopes and his preparations for eternity. Nor did any dread of losing the good opinion of his countrymen prevent him from uniting with that class of Christians in the worship of GOD, to whose principles and mode of worship he gave the preference. There is reason to believe also that private devotion was habitual with him. It is stated in the public prints that the very first purchase made by him after his inauguration, and occupancy of the president's house, consisted of a Bible and a Prayer Book. This circumstance seems to indicate that he considered these precious volumes not merely in the light of appropriate and beautiful ornaments to the President's house, but also as essential companions of the President's private hours. And allow me to ask, who needs more the presence and companionship of such faithful and sound counsellors, than the chief officer of these United States? It is not by the wisdom of this world alone—should I not rather say that it is not by the wisdom of this world at all, "that kings reign, and princes decree justice." If rulers, no matter whether they be kings, or princes, or presidents are destitute of the wisdom which is from above, what hope is there, what hope can there be that the great ends of civil government will be attained—the prosperity and well being of the governed? I do not assert—I am very far from asserting—that every man of prayer would make a wise ruler; but, at the same time, I am nearly, if not quite as far from believing that any man can be a truly wise and good ruler, who is not a man of prayer. GOD gives wisdom to them that ask him. When one of the most renowned kings that ever reigned, desired that heavenly treasure of him in preference to any other favor, in order that he might manage the affairs of his kingdom with uprightness and success, GOD commended his choice, and gave him, besides the thing he asked for, both long life and riches. It is a fair and scriptural conclusion, therefore, that he hears the voice of rulers especially, when raised in sincere and earnest supplication to his throne; and that wise and salutary counsel will be vouchsafed to them, if they fear and worship his blessed name, and repose in him with confidence and hope. If his aid *is* not asked for, of course, there is no ground for expecting it; and yet even then he may sometimes grant and no doubt does grant to the godless, unworshipping ruler his secret influence, for the welfare of his Church and the happiness of his people.

But let us look at this point once more, and in a light slightly differing from that in which it has just been examined. It was asked a moment ago, who stands more in need of the study of the scriptures and of prayer, than the president of the United States? I referred by this question to the intricate, the perplexing, the arduous character of the duties he has to perform. Is it a slight matter, is it an easy matter to control and regulate with success the separate and often jarring interests of so many political communities as compose this vast union? to keep in due and prosperous order their internal movements and relations? Is it a slight matter, is it an easy matter to defend them against foreign encroachment and assault; to maintain their honour and dignity with other nations of the world? These are great duties, and obviously require that the machinery of government should be kept in bright and beautiful condition, well supplied with the oil of true wisdom, and put in motion by a hand of superior steadiness and skill. They are duties too which are infinite in their details, and which demand in all their details, however minute, the most unwearied and painful attention. From these considerations does it not plainly appear that he who undertakes to perform them without constantly invoking the assistance of Almighty GOD commits an act of consummate and fearful presumption—that, in fact, he is endangering not only the welfare of himself but also of the people over whom he is placed? There is scarcely a shadow of doubt, but Gen. Harrison thought so. All his conduct proves it. He thought, yea, he felt that he needed divine help; and, therefore, he feared GOD, and worshipped GOD, as the only means of obtaining the help which he needed. We have lost in him, therefore, a true Christian ruler, and it becomes us, as citizens of this great nation which has suffered so severe a bereavement, deeply to mourn for him as such.

Having explained the grounds upon which our sorrow for the death of Gen. Harrison is demanded; or the light in which it is to be considered a great national calamity. I am now to conclude with a few hints as to the manner in which so serious a visitation is to be improved. I say hints; because I intend what I shall say as nothing more. The text which I chose as my guide on this occasion, might suggest to the minds of some the idea that I consider the event we deplore as a punishment for the sins of the nation. I am not prepared to say that I even *think* so, much less am I prepared to assert such an opinion dogmatically. It would be presumption. But this point I will suggest because it is perfectly within the line of my duty, namely, whether we may not, as a nation, have sinned in some way, of which we are not perhaps conscious, and therefore need rebuke and correction? And whether the death of our president is not designed to make us examine into the state of affairs, both politically and morally and religiously, among us. It is designed for some most important purpose doubtless. Such occurrences are not the whims of chance; they do not come fortuitously, or happen, as people say, but are brought about by the Almighty governor of the world for accomplishing the designs of his wisdom and goodness. A sparrow does not fall to the ground without his cognizance; and shall the head of a great nation be cut off without his direction or permission? It would be impiety to suppose it. It is true Gen. Harrison had to die, as all men have, he was mortal, as we ourselves are; but if his death is to be ascribed to chance, we cannot help wondering at the chance which caused it under such a combination of most singular and serious circumstances as those in which this nation is at this moment placed. It was not chance; it was the hand of GOD which effected it; and if it was not intended for our punishment, or as a judicial visitation of our sins, which, as I have already said, I would not dare to assert, it may very safely and truly be considered a warning from heaven, a rebuke, a fatherly correction, necessary to render us more revereful of the divine majesty, and more afraid of disobedience to his commands.

When I speak of national sins I wish to be thoroughly understood; I shall, therefore, presume to offer a word of explanation. By national sins I do not mean errors in the *constitution* or *organization* of our government—for on that point I do not pretend to be a judge; nor do I mean errors in the *administration* of the government, as far as relates to the fitness and usefulness of the measures employed in the management of its concerns. I mean two things; first, that our public acts, although excellent in themselves, and the best perhaps that could be adopted, may not, after all, be sufficiently based upon religious principle, and therefore not acceptable to GOD; and secondly, that there may be opinions or principles prevailing among the great mass of our countrymen on moral and religious subjects, and practices growing out of those principles, which are violations of our duty to GOD, and positively and greatly displeasing to him. I shall not—although it is not unlikely I might make out a very strong case—point out any indications of the existence of such sins among us. I leave that exercise to be performed by the members of this congregation. What has been said is intended only to lead to the exercise itself, and to urge the necessity of timely repentance for whatever we may discover amiss. Otherwise it may be our unhappy lot to suffer a more terrible calamity than even the death of our President.

Here another, and not less serious reflection connects itself with that which has just occupied our attention. Men are prone, from their very nature, to commit offences against GOD, and to incur his displeasure, not only as members of a body politic, and in combinations and multitudes, but also as individuals. Each one may have, and very few, perhaps none, have not their private personal sins, sins peculiar to themselves, and these also may expose a nation to warning and chastisement from the Almighty. For besides being various,—as various or nearly so as the persons themselves who commit them, they may be grievous and aggravated, and altogether unrepented of; and thus the whole civil community may become, as it were, gangrened with guilt and require powerful and painful applications to restore it to soundness and health. I do not say that this is our case; I only say that the things is possible, and that it may exist, independant of, or a part from those national sins that have been described. Is not, then, the mere possibility of such a state a reason why, immediately after so great a loss as we have sustained, we should turn seriously to ourselves, and with the most searching scrutiny, try our principles, our feelings, and our actions by the touchstone of truth and duty? And not only so, but it is not also a reason why we should humbly confess our transgressions, throw ourselves upon the divine mercy, and earnestly entreat forgiveness for what is past, and grace, that we may henceforth please GOD in newness of life, and by all our walk and conversation.—Were all, or the majority of the citizens of this great nation so to act, and so to live, ours would be a happy country indeed. There is, however, too much vice among us, and we have reason to dread the consequences.

One thought more, and I have done. This event should make us meditate, with something of fear and trembling, upon the changeableness of this worlds affairs, and upon, the termination of all its greatness, the grave. Where is he who so late was called, by the voice of confiding and admiring thousands from his peaceful retirement, and placed on the very summit of all human grandeur and power? in the grave! The undying spirit has gone, we trust, and believe, to calmer, and more tranquil regions, a happier home; and we feel that all the honour and glory it has lost, nay, ten thousand times as much, could not prevail upon it to return, were such a thing possible, to the troubles and cares of this world. But as far as human things are concerned they are all passed away with it. The body in which it dwelt is crumbling into dust. Its honour, glory, power, departed. They are now numbered with the things that have been, and that are to be no more. Is not such a consideration infinitely humbling to the pride of man? Does it not show, most forcibly and impressively, the utter insignificance of all human greatness? Death is common it is true: we see him moving and destroying all around us, all orders and classes of men, the young, the old, the rich, the poor, the wise, the ignorant the great and the humble, fall beneath his terrible hand; but he does not often lay prostrate, as he has now done, so much all this world admires; so much power, so much honour so much popularity. Let the blow which he has dealt us, in the person of our President, admonish us of our own approaching doom; and let us endeavour to be prepared to meet that doom whenever it shall come. We know not when death will come, and therefore we have no time for delay. He may cut us down suddenly in an instant, even when we are dreaming of long days of pleasure here, and putting far from us the thoughts of judgment and eternity. Let us lay aside then, in good earnest, all negligence, and delay, and at once devote ourselves, unreservedly and perseveringly, to the great business of making preparations for death. If we do so, we shall die in peace; if not, we shall die it is probable with fear and trembling; perhaps in despair. May GOD grant us the comfort of hope in that trying moment, and bring us to the kingdom of his glory above for Chris's sake. Amen.

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