

NATIONAL CALAMITIES  
A CALL TO REPENTANCE.

A S E R M O N

Preached April 18th, 1855,

BEING THE DAY APPOINTED BY PROCLAMATION, FOR A GENERAL  
FAST, HUMILIATION, AND PRAYER,

FOR THE SUCCESS OF

HER MAJESTY'S ARMS IN THE CRIMEA.

BY EDWARD H. DEWAR, M. A.,  
RECTOR OF SANDWICH, C. W.

PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF MANY PARISHIONERS.

HENRY ROWSELL, TORONTO.  
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O, Almighty God, in whose holy Word we are taught that "except the Lord build the house, their labour is but lost that build it," look down on pray Thee, with favour upon this work, which we now commence in Thy faith and fear. Grant that within the walls to be raised upon this foundation justice may ever prevail, yet so prevail that the voice of mercy shall not be unheard. Indue the Judges, the Magistrates, and all others, to whom the administration of the laws shall be committed, <sup>with the</sup> Spirit of wisdom and knowledge, give them grace to execute justice, and to maintain truth, for the punishment of wickedness and vice, and the maintenance of Thy true religion and virtue. And to those unhappy beings who shall at any time be here imprisoned for their offences, do Thou give unfeigned repentance for the errors of their life passed, that they may turn to Thee in true penitence and faith, and have their pardon sealed in heaven, before they go hence and be no more seen. Finally, O Lord, may Thy people never forget, that Thou desirest the prevention of crime, rather than the punishment of offenders. Prosper the efforts that are made in our day to

Copy  
of Prayer of  
Rev. E. A. Dewar  
on laying the corner  
stone of new jail  
at Sandwich  
May 24<sup>th</sup> 1855

DANIEL IV., 17. "The Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will."

It needs not the meridian splendor of the Christian Revelation to teach us the lesson which the Prophet deduced from the fearful dream of Nebuchadnezzar, that "the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men." The man is not a Christian, is not a believer in any religious dispensation, could scarcely be deemed to credit the existence of a God, who will not see the finger of the Almighty in the rise and fall of empires, in the prosperity and calamity of nations, in the peace, and wealth and security, or the desolation, ruin and decay of communities. The history of ancient nations lays before the eye of posterity some terrible examples of the just judgments of Almighty God. Recall to your memories the splendor, riches, and population of those mighty empires which, in their turn, played so distinguished a part upon the theatre of the world. I need but remind you of the vast domains of the capital of Assyria; I need but recall to you the glory of the haughty Nebuchadnezzar, the voluptuous court of the soft Belsazzar; that when, in the height of joy and merriment, the spirits flushed with wine, he lifted himself up against the Lord of Heaven, the fingers of a man's hand wrote on the wall these emphatic words, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN: "God has numbered thy kingdom and finished it; thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting; thy kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians." And before that very night had run her course, his city, surprized by the invading enemy, was deluged with blood and death, and so utterly

demolished that, in the progress of years, the smallest traces of its existence were not to be found; the place where it stood was unknown; the wild beasts of the field had therein their dwelling place.

Or shall I remind you of Jerusalem; Jerusalem that so often was threatened, so often spared, so often chastized! Jerusalem, to which so many prophets were sent! Jerusalem, over which our Saviour wept, and would have saved her from the Divine vengeance impending over her! And her inhabitants heard not the warning; they disregarded the chastisements, and sadly and fearfully was the threatened punishment accomplished in the siege which was her final overthrow; a siege, the horrors of which have never, perhaps, been equalled; when the prophecy made against her was literally fulfilled; when the tender and delicate woman amongst them, which would not venture to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness, did secretly eat the children which she bore; when not one stone of her glorious temple was left upon another; when above a million of the Jewish nation were slaughtered without mercy by the victorious Romans, and the miserable remnant were scattered over every quarter of the globe, where, until this day, they have remained, a despised and rejected people.

I need not adduce any further instances, though the concurrent testimony of history, both sacred and profane, both ancient and modern, bears witness to the fact I have stated; that the fate of nations, the prosperous events that raise, and the calamitous events which afflict them, come directly from Almighty God, to encourage or to warn, to try or to correct, to chastize or to bless.

Individuals are not always punished in the present life, because a future state of retribution is reserved for us; but nations, since they have no existence beyond time, seem to be peculiarly liable to temporal rewards and chastisements, and can only be warned and corrected by temporal afflictions. The occasion of this day's solemnity leads us to think of our own beloved fatherland. Do we believe that England stands foremost among the nations, because her commercial resources are inexhaustible, her agriculture unprecedented, her institutions the best which the world ever saw? because her navy is a power such as no other empire ever possessed? because her armies are covered with untarnished laurels, and

have conquered the conquerors of the world? Far be such vainglorious boasting from us! She is the first of the nations, not *because* she enjoys these advantages; but Providence has given to her all these means of extensive and commanding influence; has blessed her for many years with all this glory, and prosperity, and power over the nations; has enabled her to rule them with a rod of iron; has broken them beneath her feet like the shivers of a potter's vessel,—because she has been, and that she may continue to be, the candlestick of His Church to the benighted world; because her irresistible armies have conquered countless provinces, and spread commerce and cultivation over trackless continents, not for vainglory, nor plunder; not for lust of dominion nor of wealth; but to uphold the cause of justice and of truth; to curb the madness of the oppressor; to support the oppressed; to diffuse over all the wide earth the blessings of true religion, and moral knowledge, and civilization, and peace. Such has been England's policy, and may it continue such to be; for so long, we may hope, she will not cease to be under the immediate protection and favour of God. But so soon as it is otherwise; so soon as she neglects to fulfil the great purpose for which this mighty power has been committed into her hands, and seeks the gratification of her own desires and her own ambition; so soon must we expect that the red right hand of the Avenger will shake His rod over all the sources of her wealth and honour; that the dismemberment of her vast empire in the east, the ruin of all her oriental riches and splendour, will at once prove and chastise the sordid and unjust motives of her policy; that her own sons, who have left her teeming shores to hew out for her a new dominion on this western continent, will throw off their allegiance and turn their eyes elsewhere for help and protection; that the glory and empire, the wealth and commerce, the huge fabric of our wonderful country, will shrink beneath the chilling spasm of epidemic ungodliness,—her gigantic strength become weakness, her pride sunk in contempt, her sun set for ever! “And many nations shall pass by, and they shall say, every man to his neighbour, Wherefore hath the Lord done this to this great city? Because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord their God.”

Such, my brethren, as surely as God ruleth in the kingdom of men,



will be the fate of England, if she forsakes His covenant; and such is from the beginning unto the end, the rule of His just government. Those that honour me, saith the Lord, I will honour. The nation or the city, which remembers the Lord her God, which remembers Him in her public acts, in her public acknowledgment of His providence, in her public encouragement of His worship, of her we may say with a good assurance, that she will be remembered, and will enjoy the favour of Him, who directeth and governeth all things, who "saith to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be inhabited, and to the cities of Judah, ye shall be built, and I will raise up the decayed cities thereof. The labour of Egypt, and the merchandize of Ethiopia and of the Sabeans shall come over unto thee, and they shall be thine."

For this reason it must be no small satisfaction to every one who believes in the over-ruling providence of God, and who is at the same time a loyal subject of our much-beloved Sovereign, and fondly attached to the memory of that dear land, where are the graves of our fathers, that by the observance of this day we have made a public acknowledgment of a national faith in the truth for which I have been contending. It is no small comfort to know that the whole population of this portion of the British Empire, following the example given by the mother-country just four weeks since, do with one voice and with one heart humble themselves beneath the Almighty hand of God, acknowledging that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and confessing that the calamities which they have suffered are His most righteous judgment, and praying for succour and relief from Him, with whom only there is help.

But, my brethren, a nation, after all, consists but of a number of individuals; and a national repentance is but the repentance of the whole or a large part of the individuals who make up the nation. Let us then look to ourselves, and see in the calamities which have befallen us a merciful warning, designed to recall our wandering hearts to the love, the service, and the worship of God. The rulers of the State have done their part in recommending an outward humiliation and repentance; it is for us alone to give virtue and efficacy to it, by letting it be, by God's grace, an inward and real repentance.

Whatever uncertainty may exist with regard to the interpretation of

unaccomplished prophecies, the darkness which veils particular objects, and hides from us exact dates and minute details, is assuredly not intended to conceal the great outline of God's future dealings with mankind. It is perfectly clear that while yet the generations of men are alive upon this earth, the day of the Lord, that day which is great and very terrible, will come; but so come, as a thief in the night, so silently, so unexpectedly, so fearfully. Upon that day will be accomplished the most dreadful retribution upon the unbelieving world. When these things shall begin to come to pass, there will be, as at all other periods, a large proportion of weak and wavering believers, neither prepared to take up their cross and follow the Lord, nor willing to renounce their hope of sharing in His final triumph; neither good soldiers of Jesus Christ, nor yet open deserters from His standard to the part of the rebellious world.

To such feeble and still not abandoned professors there are many merciful calls interspersed throughout those prophetic Scriptures, which denounce the terrible wrath of the Almighty against the enemies of His kingdom. More touching yet, perhaps, and more powerful, are the visible and terrible judgments with which He sometimes visits the earth, in compassion to weak man, who is so much more apt to walk by sight than by faith. We are, it is true, often disposed to endue with an exaggerated importance the occurrences of our own times, and the events which fall under our own observation. But on the other hand, it is at least equally certain, that the impression which these events produce upon our hearts and lives, is often far too slight and transitory. We are excited beyond the bounds of moderation for a moment; we fall back into the routine of worldly cares and worldly pleasures, and into the drowsiness of practical infidelity, as soon as the excitement is passed. Yet who can look back upon the occurrences of the past year, and not read in them the voice of God, calling us to repentance? The appalling loss of life through accidents (as men call them), by sea and by land, whereby thousands, without a moment's warning, have been hurried into eternity; the dread pestilence which stalked over the earth, and carried off its countless victims, and snatched the young, and the strong, and the fair from the embrace of loving friends;—do not, brethren, do not call these things chance; do not blaspheme God, by either doubting His power to restrain

these natural evils, or His love, that He would suffer us to be afflicted without a purpose. They are, it is true, the consequence of sin; but be assured they are designed also to be its remedy. They are designed to be the faint images, as it were, and to shadow forth more fearful vengeance, more extreme sufferings, more grievous punishment. They are designed especially to remind the waverers, the doubting, the hesitating, that, "verily there is a God which judgeth the earth."

But why need I dwell upon these limited warnings? The very purpose of our being here assembled appeals more powerfully still to the same truth. Carry yourselves back in imagination but a few months. Little more than a year ago, and peace smiled over all the earth. A glorious vision of universal brotherhood dawned upon the minds of men; the gentle bonds of common interests and common wants seemed to draw nations together; and the only occupation of their rulers was to develop their resources, to encourage their peaceful pursuits, to foster the arts and sciences, and to elevate the minds of the people by the diffusion of useful knowledge, and the ordinances of religion. Then arose the small cloud in the East, no larger than a man's hand, which quickly spread over and darkened the whole horizon. And now four of the mightiest nations of the world are arrayed in arms; the fate of Europe is trembling in the balance; and even at this moment, it may be, the torch of war has been lighted afresh; that torch which, once kindled, will not be extinguished until it has been quenched in the blood of millions of our fellow creatures. Who does not remember the strong feelings of enthusiasm and confidence with which England entered upon the war? Who does not recall the sailing of that matchless fleet beneath whose fire the granite fortresses of the Baltic were to crumble into dust? Who did not dwell upon the details of the departure of our gallant troops, in all the flush of health and strength, in all the pride and pomp of martial array? Not a doubt overshadowed the general exultation; not a passing cloud obscured the nation's confidence. But, my brethren, was this entirely the right spirit in which a Christian nation ought to enter upon a great, though just and necessary war? Was there not too much reliance on the arm of flesh? Did we not trust too much in our own strength, and think too little of that Almighty Being, who ruleth in the

kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will? A few weeks, a few months passed away; then came tidings, each sadder than the last; tidings of heroic victories, of fearful losses, of misery, want, disease, and suffering in its most awful forms; whole regiments swept away by the bitter storms of a Crimean winter; whole battalions disappearing under the continued assaults of toil and hardship. And then there came a change over the heart of the nation. Then the voice of wailing was heard in many a homestead, and sorrow darkened many a once happy home. But then also, we are assured, the nation began to remember, that there is a God who alone ordereth the affairs of men, and to turn to Him for help and strength. Then the churches began to be crowded with earnest worshippers, and many a careless daughter of the world was driven, by the peril of those whom she best loved, to humble herself under the mighty hand of God, and to pour forth soul-felt petitions for their safety, from lips which had been but little used to pray. And who can tell how much these prayers may have availed? Who shall withdraw the veil that hides the counsels of the Almighty, and tell how on that dark November morning, when the Sabbath sun was shrouded in thickest gloom, and eight thousand British warriors endured for five long hours the fierce assault of the mighty Russian host,—who shall tell of what avail may have been the prayers which, even at that hour, from ten thousand village churches, through all the length and breadth of the British Isles, were winging their way to the throne of Grace! This is intended to be the effect of calamity upon nations and upon individuals. Well is it for them if it has this effect. Well, if it arrests the careless in their career, convinces the proud and self-confident of the insecurity of earthly strength, and teaches all to submit themselves unrepiningly to the supreme decrees of an over-ruling Providence. In England, I am glad to believe, this effect has been produced. Never, it has been remarked by careful observers, did the entire nation manifest such an earnest, manly, and yet temperate spirit; free alike from that self-confidence which displayed itself a year ago, and from that despair which would indicate distrust of their cause, or of the justice of God. Never was there such unanimity, such concord, such loyalty in the nation. Never were men so willing to expend their treasure or to peril their lives

for their country's good. No other war has ever so united the sympathies of all parties and all classes, and so called forth the offerings of the most distant colonies and dependencies of the British Empire. No other war has ever produced such instances of patient endurance and heroic self-devotion. What annals of our history can show so bright a page, as that which records the mission of those noble women, who have left all the delights and luxuries of life, to tend the wounded sufferers in a distant land, and pass the long watches of the winter's night in the pestilential atmosphere of crowded hospitals?

All these, my brethren, are, I think, indications, happy indications we may call them, that grievous as are the afflictions which God in his wisdom has allowed to befall us, those afflictions have not been without a purpose, and that purpose, we trust, has partly at least been accomplished. We have, let us hope, become more humble, more distrustful of our own strength, more firm in our reliance upon the help and strength of Him, who is the giver of all victory.

And, my brethren, as I have already observed, a nation is composed of individuals, and we, though more distant from the scene of conflict, and although we are most of us, relieved from that intense anxiety, which broods over so many homes in England,—we too are part of the British nation; it is our pride and our joy that we are. Let us then bear our part in the hour of a nation's sorrow; let us bow low our hearts before the footstool of God's throne; let us acknowledge the guilt, the forgetfulness of Him and of His loving kindness, the irreverence and contempt for His sacred Name, His holy Day, His Word, His Ordinances, His Sacraments, which have often been conspicuous in the national character, and which, I fear, are nowhere more conspicuous than in that portion of the Empire of which we are citizens. Let us strive to correct and amend these things; to amend them first, each in himself, and then by his example among all whom his influence can reach. Thus shall we fulfil the design of Almighty God in placing us in our high position: and fulfilling shall be blessed with his continual favor. And the pure light of the Gospel, kindled at our zeal, shall shine throughout the world, and prove to the farthest climes that God hath called us to be His peculiar people, not more distinguished for empire and renown, for art and arms, for all that the world

holds in honor, than for our return of grateful attachment to Him, who has so richly crowned us with blessings.

And then may we hope for the temporal blessings which God once promised to a righteous people: /

“That our sons may grow up as the young plants, and our daughters be as the polished corners of the temple. That our garner may be full and plenteous with all manner of store; that our sheep may bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our streets. That our oxen may be strong to labor, that there be no decay, no leading into captivity, and no complaining in our streets. Happy are the people that are in such a case; yea, blessed are the people who have the Lord for their God.”

Sermon

Rev. E. H. Dewar

18<sup>th</sup> April 1855

Day set apart for

Fasting & Prayer

By Gov. Proclamation

