

To Geo Stewart Esq. with Mr Kerr's compl's 4.

IN MEMORIAM.

THE ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT GARFIELD,

JULY 2nd. DIED SEPTEMBER 19th, 1881.

A SERMON

PREACHED IN

THE CHAPEL OF THE HOLY TRINITY, QUEBEC,

BY THE

REVEREND ROBERT KER,

SUNDAY EVENING, SEPT. 25th, 1881.

QUEBEC:

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1881.

DEDICATED

WITH FEELINGS OF THE MOST PROFOUND SYMPATHY

TO

MRS. L. GARFIELD,

BY SORROWING FRIENDS IN THE "ANCIENT
CAPITAL," WHO ARE BEYOND EXPRESSION
TOUCHED AT THE DEPTH OF HER UNSPEAK-
ABLE LOSS, AND WHO DESIRE TO JOIN THEIR
TRIBUTE OF LOVE AND GOOD WILL TO THE
UNIVERSAL HOMAGE WHICH IS BEING PAID
TO THE MEMORY OF HER NOBLE AND ILLUS-
TRIOUS HUSBAND.

QUEBEC,

SEPTEMBER 25TH, 1881.

IN MEMORIAM.

II. Samuel, iii. pt., 38 v.—Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?

MY BRETHREN,—You will, no doubt, recollect, that the dazzling panorama of the vision presented to the Seer of Patmos is significantly interrupted on the opening of “the Seventh Seal” by an unexpected incident. A great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stand before the Throne, and before the Lamb clothed with white robes and palms in their hands. Filled, apparently, with the unspeakable emotion of Redeemed Souls, purchased by the precious blood of Jesus, this innumerable host bursts forth into the sweet song of Salvation to their God: the Angels that stand round the Throne, in the outer circle, and the Elders and the Four Beasts catch up the strains of this mighty Anthem, which swelling into one celestial crescendo rolls and rolls around the seat of Jesus, until the heavens are “jubilant with song.” But just as this point is reached there is a sudden pause—the singers cease, and the triumphant refrain of “Salvation to the Lamb” is lost in the opening of the Seventh Seal, when for the space of half an hour there is absolute “silence in heaven.” The active agencies of the skies are for the moment hushed into celestial stillness, and all is—PEACE. It is not necessary that we should ask this silent, voiceless “half hour” to give up its secret to men like ourselves. Let it suffice us, that in the humanity of your life and mine, there are to each of us heaven-given periods of Silence, when by the spirit of our better-selves inbreathing the purer atmosphere of “joy and peace in

believing ;" there falls upon us, as upon the Patriarch of old, not merely the deep sleep of a covenant relationship, but "an horror of great darkness." We become spiritually conscious of His presence for He dwelleth "in the thick darkness," or as the Psalmist saith, "clouds and darkness are round about Him." But, surely, if there are such mysterious incidents—such periods of "awful silence" in our individual lives, there must be similar periods—nay there are such, deeply graven upon the human aggregation of families and of nations. You pause at that heavily craped door—no sacrificial blood on the lintels and door posts is visible to guarantee the inhabitants against the fate appointed unto all men—We are present with the shadow of a great sorrow, for within there lies in the unyielding embrace of death the loved one who has carried into the Great Loneland the sunshine of our lives, and a "great silence" becomes for the moment a necessity. Why is this? Why do we move so stealthily in the presence of death? Is it not that some impalpable but ever present potency claims the domain as its own and Samuel-like rebukes "the foot intrusive" with the startling spirit world inquiry—"Why hast thou disquieted me?" But, well indeed, will it be for such a family, if amid the gathering darkness they can detect the presence of Him who saith—"It is I, be not afraid"—All such visitations are manifestly intended to prove that here we have no continuing city, that at best our life is a weary pilgrimage, "a tale told," "a dream"—disturbed and frequently painful, "a weaver's shuttle" or water spilt on the ground. These figures indicate the transitory character of human life and human hopes depending upon that life: so that we shall have entirely misapprehended the beneficent intentions of our merciful and loving Father, if we fail to recognize, in our greatest

loss, our greatest gain. Death is but the portal to an inheritance "eternal in the heavens," so that the monologue of Death is:—

" I take all sorrows from the sorrowful,
 And teach the joyful what it is to joy ;
 I gather in my land-locked harbor's clasp
 The shattered vessels of a vexed world ;
 And even the tiniest ripple upon life
 Is to my sublime calm, as tropic storm
 When other leechcraft fails the breaking brain
 I only, own the anodyne to still
 Its eddies into visionless repose
 The face distorted with life's latest pang
 I smooth, in passing, with an angel wing
 And from beneath the quiet eyelids steal
 The hidden glory of the eyes, to give
 A new and noble beauty to the rest.
 Belie me not. The plagues that walk the earth—
 The wasting pain, the sudden agony
 Famine, and war, and pestilence, and all
 The terrors that have darkened round my name—
 These are the plagues of life—they are not mine,
 Vex while I tarry, vanish when I come
 Instantly melting into perfect peace,
 As at his word, whose master-spirit I am
 The troubled waters sleep on Galilee
 * * * * *
 Tender, I am,—not cruel : when I take
 The shape most hard to human eyes, and pluck
 The little baby blossom yet unblown
 'Tis but to graft it on a kindlier stem,
 And leaping o'er the perilous years of growth,
 Unswept of sorrow, and unscathed of wrong,
 Clothe it at once with rich maturity.
 'Tis I that give a soul to memory ;
 For round the follies of the bad I throw
 The mantle of a kind forgetfulness ;
 While canonized in dear Love's calendar
 I sanctify the good for evermore.

Miscall me not ! my generous fulness lends
 Home to the homeless ; the friendless friends
 To the starved babe, the mother's tender breast
 Wealth to the poor, and to the restless—REST."

Looking at the matter in this way we can confidently ask—full of assured hope—"O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory?" It is to be deeply regretted that Christians have not always that personal consciousness of God's presence that they ought to have, and which it is their high privilege to enjoy; we appear to forget what Christ intended when he declared, "My father worketh hitherto and I work!" It is the consciousness—the personal, experimental consciousness of an ever abiding Presence,—not in this religious ordinance or in that, but in the Believer's heart which gives vitality and potency to our Christian life. "Lo, I am with you always" is the Divine promise; therefore, in the very intimacy of the relationship we are transformed into the same image from glory to glory. The operation is distinctly spiritual, and the mature Christian reads a divinity on every incident, and he sees all things working together for ultimate good. So that in the darkest and most mysterious dispensation we can say:—

"Through waves, and clouds, and storms
 He gently clears thy way
 Wait thou this time, so shall this night
 Soon end in joyous day."

Modern unbelief afraid, sometimes, to avow itself openly puts the matter half apologetically somewhat in this fashion,—“Well, we have been *taught* that such things are wisely ordered” So much is said, but what remains unsaid is that *we*—the men of wisdom don't believe it. In this emergency they fall down and worship the Gods—"Blind

Chance" or "Fixed Fate," and this is modern scientific faith, on what is termed "a philosophic basis." We are content to read the mysteries of redemption in the page of Revelation, and the mysteries of wisdom, of goodness and eternal mercy in the wide spread pages of nature and of Providence. The best and wisest of the sons of men have borne witness to the truth, that the Lord reigneth be the people never so impatient, and thanks be unto God who giveth us the victory, such evidence is not wanting even in those trying times in which our lot has been cast. Just now, we have reached a period of the deepest silence,—a period of which it would be figuratively true in the future historian, were he to describe it in the very language of Apocalypse and say, "there was silence in the earth about the space of half an hour." Do we ask what are the causes of this unprecedented gloom? Why are the marts of commerce deserted? Instead of business topics, men without any particular volition of their own talk "Death." It is not with the value of stocks, but the value of lives—nay the value of *one* life, that the world is at present concerned. The great cities of civilization have put on the habiliments of mourning. The fleet messengers of commerce stand still. Sudden paralysis has fallen upon the world of pleasure. Justice takes the blind from off her eyes to witness humanity in mourning—Meteor stars mark the strange event, and angel bands take note of the deep sighs that swell from loving hearts, and heaven itself must be touched to its eternal depths by such a marvellous manifestation of human sympathy and human sorrow—No need to ask the cause—"Know ye not that there is a Prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?"

The name of President Garfield shall stand conspicuous on the brightest bead-roll of human excellence and human

greatness. Not alone shall it remain embalmed in the heart of a great nation, but the wise and good of all lands will claim a royalty in the inheritance. The Lustre of martial glory, even where most resplendent pales into a dim light in the presence of simple *christian* worth. Garfield's assassination was more than a crime. How true to say that he—

“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
 And pity, like a naked newborn babe
 Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubin, hors'd
 Upon the sightless couriers of the air
 Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye
 That tears shall drown the wind.” * * * * *

The assassination of President Garfield will stand unique in the annals of cruel and altogether meaningless crimes. But our just indignation must not be permitted to carry us beyond the dictates of a sober judgment. We have an abiding conviction that the good sense of the American people will restrain the few wild spirits that would usurp the throne of offended justice, instead of waiting for the calm and dispassionate administration of the criminal laws of the country.

And now as we crowd around the open grave, and in company with countless thousands of his countrymen, pay our tribute of respect to the great spirit that has gone, there is a voiceless eloquence from his tomb that ought to stimulate us to deeds whose record shall remain when we, too, shall have passed from among the sons of men. To young men, the history of the late President is beyond measure instructive. There are not a few young men born to wealth, even on this continent, where ancestral wealth is not so

highly valued as elsewhere. In this respect James Abram Garfield was not among the favored ones. First of all it may be said of him that he was eminently American: he saw difficulties in the way, but he was never frightened at them; he simply set himself resolutely to overcome them, and with a constant dependence upon God he, in the end, succeeded. "Gentlemen," said he to the authorities of Hiram College, "I want an education, and would like the privilege of making the fires and sweeping the floors of the building to pay part of my expenses." Need it be said that he ultimately graduated with distinguished honors, and in the end held high rank as a Public Instructor. Let me say just this in passing—how many young men in this city with the halls of such an admirable institution as "Morris College" at their very doors, might become great and illustrious if only half the time devoted to the saloon and billiard tables was spent in useful study. We may be well assured it was not spending his time in bar-rooms or his nights upon the street corners that made him President of the United States. Such lessons as these may be learned from his life. Ours is rather the duty of apprehending the christian testimony of him who has gone to his rest. He strikes the key note at a very early period in his life. Selecting his college he says:—"I am the son of Disciple parents; am one myself, and have but little acquaintance with people of other views; and, having always lived in the West, I think it will make me more Liberal both in my religious and general views and sentiments to go into a new circle." So wrote Garfield when selecting his college, and few will doubt the wisdom of his course. He was pre-eminently wise in steering clear of "religious bigotry"—that fierce, godless and unchrist-like worship of our systems, which damns the river of charity at its source, and

leaves the souls for whom Christ died to perish through lack of food. A Bigot is rarely a good man and never a Christian ; and, therefore, when I say that President Garfield was both a good man and a true christian, I say very distinctly that his provision against falling into the snare of bigotry was attended with the happiest results. Well would it be for America, well would it be for the church, and well would it be for the world if we had many such as he was among the ranks of professing christians.

And here, I must draw your attention to an incident which transpired upon the assassination of that other illustrious martyr to duty—President Lincoln.* It was the morning after the assassination in the city of New York. Placards in great black letters were issued calling upon the citizens to assemble at the Wall Street Exchange and give expression to their sentiments. It was a moment of supreme peril. The wrath of the people was something terrible. Not less than fifty thousand people, we are told, were packed around the building. By this time, says one writer, the wave of popular indignation had swelled to its crest. In an adjoining street two men lay bleeding—the one dead, the other dying. A shout of “vengeance” arose like the sound of a great hurricane. The people were drunk with fury. Just then, at this juncture, a man stepped forward with a small flag in his hand and beckoned to the crowd—“Another telegram from Washington.” And then, in the awful stillness of the crisis, taking advantage of the hesitation of the crowd, whose steps had been

* For a detailed account of this extraordinary incident, *vide* Mr. Edmund Kirke's admirable “Life of James A. Garfield.” Franklin Square Library, Harper & Brothers, New York, 1880.

for a moment arrested, a right arm was lifted towards heaven, and a voice clear and steady, loud and distinct, spoke out: "Fellow citizens—clouds and darkness are round about him! His pavilion is dark waters and thick clouds of the skies. Justice and judgment are the establishment of his throne! Mercy and truth shall go before His face! Fellow citizens—God reigns, and the Government at Washington still lives." The effect was tremendous. The crowd stood riveted to the ground in awe, gazing at the motionless orator, and thinking of God and his Providence over the government and the nation. As the boiling waves subside and settle to the sea when strong winds beat them back, so the tumult of the people sank and became still. As the rod draws the electricity from the air, and conducts it safely to the ground, so this man had drawn the fury from that frantic crowd, and guided it to more tranquil thoughts than those of "vengeance." It was a heaven inspired burst of eloquence which exorcised the foul demons of revenge and misguided fury. This is the orator whose towering column lies broken to-day almost at its base. This the man, who emerging from obscurity taught the world that there are great and noble lives to be found among all ranks of a free people. The name of "Garfield" will shed an undying lustre on the Presidential chair, for he brought to it the very highest consecrated form of American manhood. The splendour of his position was only second to the splendour of his own worth. Amid the storms with which he battled for eighty days, he himself sat in all the majesty of a conscious calm, and while the world held its breath in suspense and wonder, the mighty conflict proceeded without the slightest abatement of courage. It was a conscious fight against tremendous odds—it was literally a death struggle, and

right nobly was it maintained until nature itself fell broken in the contest.

And now, in the dim religious light, so appropriate to a scene like this—what forms are those which, with stately step and reverent mien bow themselves around the simple bier of Columbia's chief magistrate? These are men who wear imperial crowns as old as history itself—not now in the trappings of regal pomp, but in the far more courtly garments of members of the common brotherhood of humanity. Imperialist and Republican, Autocrat and Democrat, Whig and Tory, Pope and Presbyter, Cardinal and Elder, High Church and Low Church, men who believe in Apostolic Succession, and men who believe it to be a myth; the red-hot Anglican and the sturdy Puritan; the pious Bishop and the no less pious Disciple, all pay homage to this spirit of departed worth, making one long for the time when “man to man the world o'er shall brothers be,” and when on the ruins of the present discordant existence there shall be built, upon the firm basis of freedom, harmony and love, a society dominated by a Christian proletariat in which there shall be a race of such men as Garfield.

Neighbours as we are, and intimately connected with the States by ties of commerce and friendship, it is natural that we should “weep with those that weep,” and that the voice of our sympathy should be wafted to them upon every passing breeze. Right too, and graceful, that this Ancient Capital, once the scene of painful events, interesting to both countries, should capitulate under the pressure of this universal sorrow, and that love, sympathy and freedom should now unite to weave a garland with which to bind the mourning standards in a covenant of everlasting peace and amity. And as we troop the colors at the grave

we all pray, and so pray we all—"So mote it be." From a thousand parish Churches in England, whose walls were hoary with history before Columbus was born, there peals forth the solemn sounds which bespeak a great loss. People of other lands and different tongues are moved as by a mighty impulse, and the great wave of human sympathy rolls across the Atlantic until it breaks in fragments of incense upon the American shore. Hereafter "Plymouth Rock" must give place to a holier and more universal idea of brotherhood; for the "Mayflower," with all her glowing memories, was never freighted with anything half so holy, half so potential for good, as the simple, sisterly and unaffected message received by Mrs. Garfield on the first morning of her widowed loneliness:

"Words cannot express the deep sympathy I feel with you. May God support and comfort you as he alone can."—THE QUEEN, *Balmoral Castle*.

This is not the Empress of the greatest nation upon earth. This is not the Royal Lady whose ancestry flourished even amid the conflicting interests of the heptarchy. No, this is "Queen Victoria," the true woman, whose simple married life put to shame the dissolute Courts of Europe. No, this is the faithful wife, whose constant love for her husband has been stronger even than death. In the deep depths of her own unspeakable sorrow, she reads what her sister must have endured all those long, weary days and nights of watching; the hard struggle it must have been to restrain the unbidden tears, as day by day she watched each change, and until finally the scene is closed in the majesty of death. She too, sat beside the death-bed of a husband, and she, alas, only knows too well, that all the pomp and pageantry of her crown cannot fill the void. But more

than this, she bears noble testimony to the fact that with the God of the widow and the fatherless there is comfort and support. We say—God bless our good Queen for her words of sympathy, and God bless too, and comfort the widow who is even now passing her last night by the mortal remains of her well and worthily loved husband. What shall the voice from the great silence be? We hear that voice unchanged make answer :

“ Far better they should sleep awhile,
 Within the Church’s shade,
 Nor wake, until new heaven, new earth
 Meet for their new immortal birth,
 For their abiding place be made,
 Than wander back to life, and lean
 On our frail love once more,
 ’Tis sweet, as year by year we lose
 Friends out of sight, in faith to muse
 How grows in Paradise our store.”

But, brethren, let us cast into the open grave our sprig of evergreen—true emblem of the soul’s immortality. We plant it in the unquenchable hope of a grander life hereafter. We sow this mortal flesh in weakness, but it shall be raised in power; we sow it in corruption, but it shall be raised in incorruption; we sow it a natural body, but it shall be raised a spiritual body. These are the hopes whose undimmed glory lights up the entire valley of the shadow of death. The echo of “earth to earth,” as it falls upon the coffin, is, “I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.” But, in the meantime, let us read to ourselves the lessons of his life :

“ Still achieving, still pursuing,
 “ Learn to labor and to wait.”

Our deceased brother was a true master, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed ; examine his labors carefully by all the instruments of your craft, and you will find that it bears the mark of finished workmanship. Such work in fact as is needed at the great Spiritual Temple now in course of erection, for, "ye are," as the Apostle saith, "God's Building." And, notwithstanding all his qualifications, his column, as we have already said, has been broken almost at its base, and he himself called from labor to rest before high noon. This is not the first unusual incident that has occurred among the workmen at the Temple, and, therefore, we take it to be a distinct warning not alone to the negligent craftsman, but to the skilled workmen to be ready at a moment's notice to present specimens of their work at the gates of the Upper Sanctum.

Builders in a greater than Solomon's Temple ; this is a startling alarm at the outer court ! If you would ascertain the cause, you will find that it is no cowan voice which answers :

For the structure that we raise
Time is with materials filled ;
Our to-days and yesterdays,
Are the blocks with which we build
Let us do our work as well,
Both the unseen and the seen ;
Make the house where Gods may dwell,
Beautiful, entire, and clean.

St. Paul, one of the Great Master Builders, cautions us in these words,—“Let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ—”

Let us go manfully to work and beneath the rubbish of human weakness and error seek for the lost word “Charity,”

and having found it, make it the Key-stone of the fabric of our lives, and at the same time draw as knights, valiant for the truth, the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. I think I may fittingly close by adopting the late President's own words when speaking of the assassination of Lincoln :

“ Divinely gifted man,
 Whose life in low estate began,
 And on a simple village green,
 Who breaks his birth's invidious bars,
 And grasps the skirts of happy chance,
 And breasts the blows of circumstance,
 And grapples with his evil stars :
 Who makes by force his merit known,
 And lives to clutch the golden keys
 To mould a mighty state's decrees,
 And shape the whisper of the throne :
 And moving up from high to higher,
 Becomes on Fortune's crowning slope,
 The pillar of a people's hope,
 The centre of a world's desire.”

Such a life and character will be treasured forever as the sacred possession of the American people and of mankind. * * * There are times in the history of men and nations when they stand so near the veil that separates mortals and immortals, time from eternity, and men from their God, that they can almost hear the breathings, and feel the pulsations of the heart of the Infinite. Such a time is the present.

It remains for us, consecrated by that great event, and under that covenant with God, to keep the faith, to go forward in the great work until it shall be completed. Following the lead of that great man, and obeying the high behests of God, let us remember

“ He has sounded forth his trumpet that shall never call retreat ;
He is sifting out the hearts of men before his Judgment-seat ;
Be swift, my soul, to answer Him ; be jubilant, my feet,
For God is marching on.”

And thus we strew our deceased brother's grave, not with the dead flowers of the Finite, but with the luxuriant foliage of the Infinite. We stand in the mystic circle of immortal hope, and with the eye of faith we penetrate into the land of rest—the habitation of the Saints of the Most High, who dwelleth in the light that is unapproachable. It is a land without shadows. The burnished gold of the streets of the New Jerusalem shall never be dimmed by a falling tear. No weary feet shall pass within the pearly gates. The sorrows and sighing and death of this nether world shall be swallowed up in the unspeakable glory to be revealed hereafter. Sleep on then and rest, thou man of worthy memory ; thy ashes—wet by a nation's tears—shall be cherished in the Sacred Urn of a world-wide sympathy, and the lives of men and women yet unborn shall be lighted to the performance of great deeds by the moral heroism of James Abram Garfield and his hardly less heroic wife.