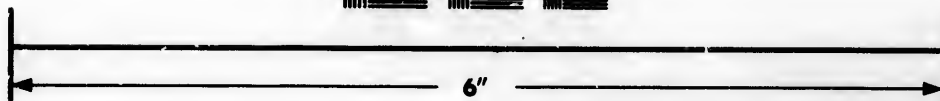
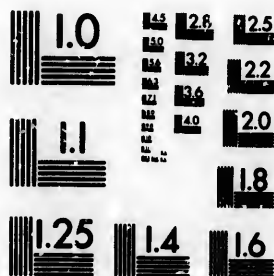


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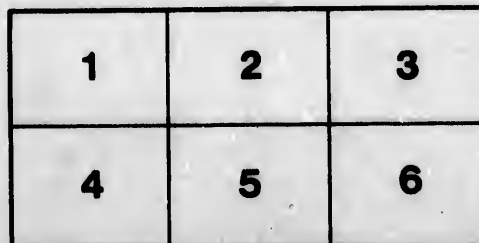
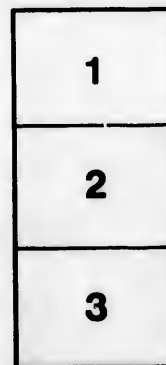
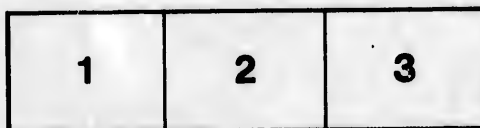
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S E R M O N

PREACHED AFTER THE

DRUMMOND COLLIERY EXPLOSION

OF MAY 13TH, 1873,

AT ST. COLUMBA, HOPEWELL,

On May 25th, 1873.

BY REV. D. MACRAE, A. M.,

*E. & W. Branches of the E. River of Pictou.*

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PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

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HALIFAX, N. S.

PRINTED BY JAMES BOWES & SONS, BEDFORD ROW.

1873.

THE HISTORY

OF THE

ROYAL SOCIETY

AND THE

ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

IN GREAT BRITAIN

AND IRELAND

FROM THE

FOUNDATION

TO THE

PRESENT

STATE

# S E R M O N

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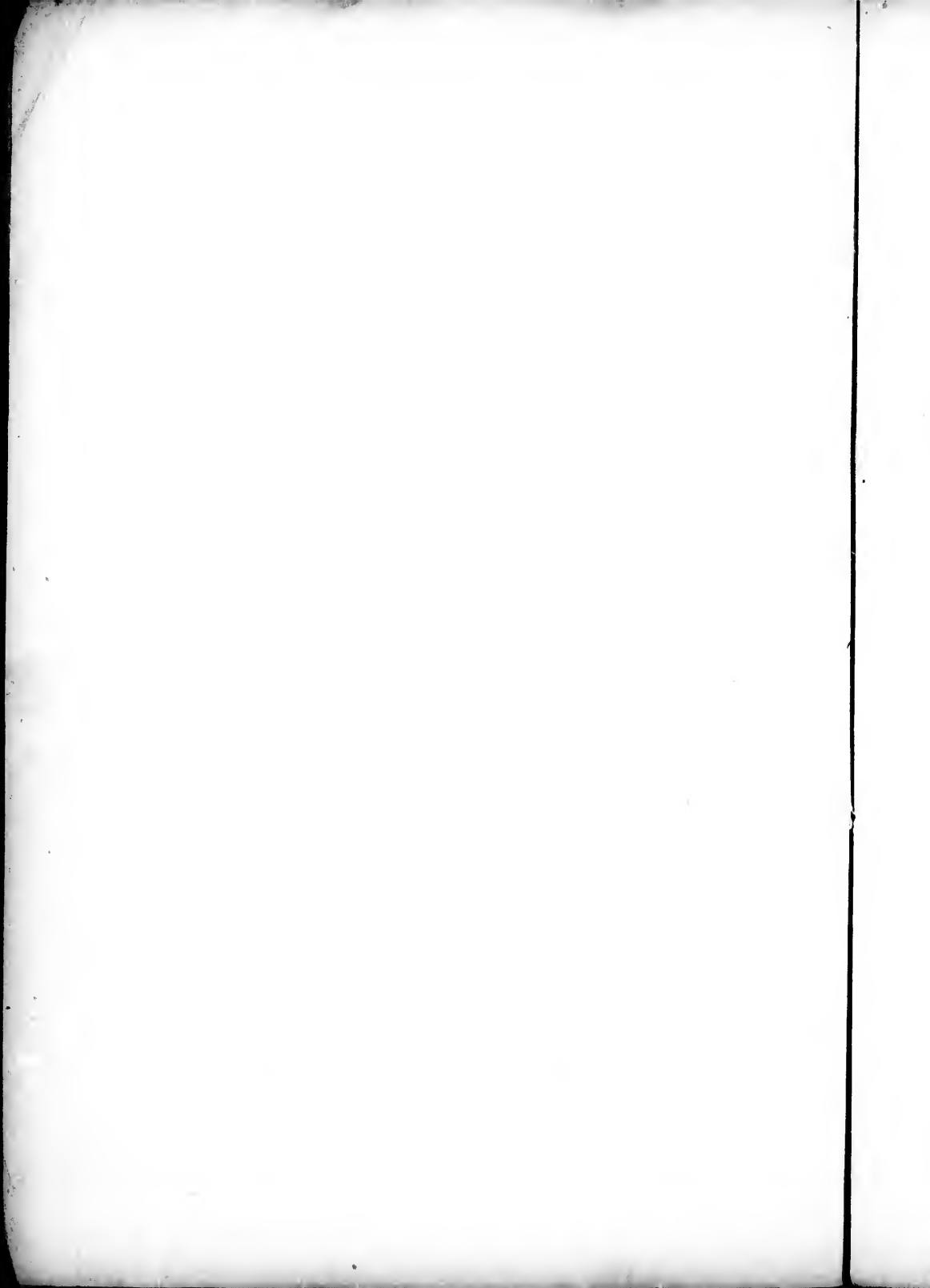
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1873.





## SERMON.

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"Shall there be evil in a City, and the Lord hath not done it?" — Amos iii. 6.

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THE remembrance of the horror which occurred, since last we met for worship in this place, is already waxing faint in some minds. For, in these days we live fast; the ends of the earth are being brought together; every day, fresh tidings come under our notice from one or other quarter. The effect is as if events followed each other more rapidly in the province of our own immediate experience; and hardly have we time to meditate for a little on one, before the next claims attention. And so impressions enjoy less opportunity of being rivetted, than was the case in days when information was received more scantily.

It cannot be, however, that the Westville tragedy can be readily forgotten, or that the shudder it occasioned has utterly ceased, as yet, to vibrate through our being. It was too awful in itself. It concerned many of us too closely; and, in some cases, it opened wounds hardly to be healed until time shall be no more. When the sky was darkened by that vast cloud of smoke which was seen for miles around, men's hearts everywhere sunk within them for fear. Instantly it seemed as if the air was filled with the wail of widows bemoaning husbands,—of children lamenting fathers,—of mothers, like Rachel of old, weeping for their sons,—not to be comforted, because they were not.

The disaster was too sudden for its full burden of calamity to be realised at once. But when some of us hastened to

where "the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace," and saw with our own eyes the hungry flames leaping from the mouths of the pits, and knew that beneath lay the charred and mangled frames of some sixty to eighty souls—frames, a few hours before instinct with life and strength, defaced, and dead, and blackened, and felt that all hope of saving even one had vanished in an instant, then our tongues clave to the roofs of our mouths,—our thoughts were voiceless,—we were "dumb, we opened not our lips, because He had done it." Whither could we turn for topics of consolation? What urge in mitigation of the blow? It was too complete. It was not possible in the first hours of grief, to distinguish between soul and body. It was not possible to realise that from those dark depths the spirits could escape,—that the men were not there,—only the outer tabernacle, the tenement of clay. It was not possible for a mother's heart to feel that the manly form of him she called her son, was only a form,—that the hand was but an instrument, and the voice an organ,—and that the soul, the reality, the man, was independent of all these,—"that the spirit had returned to God who gave it."

But now that with somewhat of calmness we look back, and review the event, lessons are suggested by it which it would be well for us to gather up. It is well for us to "hear what God the Lord doth speak." With our Bible in our hands, to gather up some of these lessons ought not to be difficult. For the Bible, under one aspect, is a record of human sorrows. From the 3rd chapter of Genesis onwards, it is the history of a sorrowful race. It is full of tears,—from those of Eve over murdered Abel, to those of Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus,—a roll of "lamentations, and mourning, and woe."

I. Opening my Bible, and pondering its teaching on human sorrow, I remark that this evil is of the Lord; and

there is comfort in that. It is of the Lord, I say. It might be—by all accounts it was—of man's misdoing; but, none the less is it God's doing. Take the greatest crime ever perpetrated by the hands of men—the murder of Jesus—it was done “by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.” It was God's doing. “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall to the ground without your heavenly Father.” “Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it.”

Now, the word, evil, is used in two senses. And between these we must carefully distinguish. There is evil in the sense of sin, and evil in the sense of calamity, and between these, though there be a connection, yet is there no necessary connection. Evil, in the sense of sin, is never traced to God as its author. On the contrary, he hates it, abhors it. All his redemptive providence is devised for its overthrow and destruction. He permits it, indeed, bears patiently with its commission; but, in every shape, it is repugnant to his nature.

It is evil in the sense of calamity, that is meant in the text,—that was meant by Job when he cried, “Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil?” and it is good for us to know that evil, in this sense, is from him. It is under his government and control. It is no result of chance or fate. It is by the permission, and in obedience to the will and dictation of God. And God is good. No calamity, therefore, however awful in itself, is an unmitigated evil. Good is in it somehow, however impossible it may be for us to show, in any particular instance, the particular good designed,—good, mercy, whether we can point out the lines and traces of love, or not. That evil in the sense of calamity has no necessary connection with,—or, anyhow, is no necessary mark of evil in the sense of sin,

is evident from this. Many of the best who have ever lived have been among the greatest sufferers. See Paul lingering in his dungeon, while Nero is fiddling in his palace. See Pilate washing his dainty hands, while Jesus is being led forth to be crucified. Were, then, the one the mark of the other, we should be compelled to pronounce many of the best and greatest, up to our Lord himself—the man of sorrows—among the greatest criminals.

But it is not so. Crime is one thing, calamity another. “Those eighteen,” asks Christ, “on whom the tower in Siloam fell and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwell in Jerusalem? I tell you nay!” Thank God for that nay, uttered by the gracious lips of him who “spake as never man spake.” Let it lighten our hearts. Let it mitigate our sorrows. Let it help us to consider our calamity with calmer souls. . . . And before Christ came, what was the sublimest spectacle exhibited on the platform of human history? Is it not that of Job? But let us turn to the chapter and read. (Here was read from the book of Job, the 1st chapter, the passage from verse 13th to 22d.)

I believe that the meaning of human sorrow is, perhaps, never clearly revealed in the present life. It cannot be fully understood for the simple reason that the present is only a part, and the smallest part of existence. It is only the threshold of eternity. But I am sure that its meaning will, one day, be unfolded. I am sure of it, just because it is of the Lord, and, therefore, my first counsel to the broken in heart is a counsel of patience. Oh! There are gray hairs here, which shall go down with sorrow to the grave. There are wounds in hearts here, which shall be open, till these bodies of ours shall be consigned to the tomb. But, as God is in the heavens, I believe that, one day, he will show by

manifold proofs, that, without this calamity, a note of sweetness would have been lacking in the songs of eternity.

II. "Shall there be evil, etc." How frail, my *second* inference is, how uncertain are the storehouses of earthly riches. Twelve days ago, Drummond Colliery was a mine of wealth, present and prospective. It furnished one, and not the least of the reasons why we spoke of our county with pride. Men talked of "our boundless resources." "Were there but enterprise," the cry was, "our county should be rich, populous, attractive,"—God not in all, perchance, not in any of our thoughts on these matters. One short hour and what a change is yonder! A single spark, and the deed is done. A calamity unexampled in the history of this colony—almost unprecedented for violence, it is said, in the annals of mining, caused by a single spark. With what a quiet, swift, and then appalling and terrific suddenness and unexpectedness it happened. The little flash, leaping, as it were in play, from seam to seam, and vault to vault, advancing thus towards the outlets of escape about to be closed forever,—a moment's pause, and then a rush and roar,—and above is the smoke of a furnace, and beneath are three-score corpses.

It is a lesson continually being renewed, and as continually forgotten. Why is it being taught? Why will not God let us alone? Surely there is mercy in the disturbing causes by which our worldly slumbers are broken. "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven." Who inclines voluntarily to deposit his money in this bank? Who is willing cheerfully to wait for the getting of its interest? Its dividend-day is too remote, we think, too uncertain. Or, it will be time enough to deposit there by and bye. Go then, and survey the ruins of yonder mine. Recall those swift explosions. See how all is brought into desolation as in a moment. Be

persuaded by the voice of God that, if this world is good, heaven is better; if wealth here is good, wealth there is better; be persuaded by him if not by the lips of man, that all here is dark, dread uncertainty,—that nothing is sure but heaven.

“Shall there be evil, etc.,” and, therefore, *thirdly*, we cannot violate any divine law with impunity. Nor, *fourthly*, shall human greed, which is ever one principal motive prompting to the violation of those laws, go unpunished. There is no doubt whatever, I believe, that the dread Westville disaster was due to human folly. It was of man’s misdoing. It is traceable to the running a known and awful risk for the sake of gain. I am not competent to speak (1) of the merits or demerits of the strike by which it was preceded; or (2) of the condition of foulness, into which it is alleged, as a partial consequence, the mine was suffered to fall; or (3) of the propriety or impropriety of the use of gunpowder in works of this nature; or (4) how far the right, or the reverse of right was on the part of those refusing a higher wage, and permitting the use of the dread explosive instead, or on the part of those demanding either a higher wage, or permission to use explosive materials. All these and similar points lie beyond my province,—beyond my power to determine. But it is within my province to denounce human greed,—to declare that men cannot serve God and Mammon; and to proclaim that when Mammon in any form becomes man’s idol, then that God who, for his own glory and for man’s good, is a jealous God, is near to vindicate his own glory, and that, at times, by most swift and dread penalties. And thus, it seems plain and undeniable, it was here.

How does mammon operate for the punishment of its votaries? Just by repeating the old, primitive temptation, whereby Adam fell. “Ye shall not surely die,” it says,

“ye may run this and that risk.” But first it dazzles the eye by holding before it the golden apple. Fascinated by that, the pursuit becomes eager. Nothing is seen but that, —nothing is cared for but that. Life is counted cheap in comparison with that. God is forgotten. Money against man. Gold instead of God. But God reigns all the while, and none the less that he is forgotten. And his laws are operating steadily, albeit they are neglected. And whether it be the winds and currents of ocean, or gas and its explosive qualities in mines, or the conditions of health, and their neglect in cities, none of the difficulties created by these are got rid of, or surmounted by being forgotten. And so it comes to pass, in all departments of our being, that sooner or later whether we believe it or not, we may be sure, “Our sin will find us out.”

Human greed, that cold and murderous spirit! By it our shores are strewn with wrecks; by it our newspapers are filled with details of destructive fires; by it our jails are stocked with criminals, and our hospitals with fevered victims; and by it our mines are ever and anon transformed into fiery tombs. For God lives: His laws are fixed: broken, they take vengeance—and the catastrophes caused by their transgression remind us continually of the ancient prophet’s question: “Shall there be evil in a city and the Lord hath not done it.”

The sting is, that, so continually, righteous and wicked are involved in the same calamity. Abraham’s question comes back to us. Abraham’s expostulation we feel tempted to repeat: “Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? That be far from thee. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” Oh! yes. He does right. There is no doubt about that. But yet, righteous and wicked, believer and unbeliever, so far as appearances indicate,

are continually involved, by violations of his laws, in one common doom. And were this life our all, I do not see how we could vindicate the righteousness of God. Were, I say, this life our all. For, however a Paul might be bitten by a venomous serpent, and yet feel no harm, there are no such favorite children of heaven in this world now. And, however a Peter might walk on the stormy waters, with a Master's hand near to hold him up, when he began to sink, no such interpositions are vouchsafed now. And, however it was promised to the early disciples that, should they drink any deadly thing it would not hurt them, it is not so now. There are no charmed beings who can put their hands on cockatrice dens with impunity, or catch the revolving saw, or pass through the fire unscathed. Piety affords no cloak of protection against fever's infection, or the volcano's explosive violence. No. So far as appearances warrant, righteous and wicked are liable to common dangers, and involved, at times, in a common doom.

What then? Raise the curtain. Look within the veil. Lazarus dies: Dives dies: both die. Look beyond. See piety vindicating itself. Both chaff and wheat pass through the winnowing fan. Is it to the same purpose? See the wheat—every grain of it—gathered into the garner, and the chaff—only the chaff—burned with fire unquenchable.

This is our consolation. Was there a Christian in that mine! Ah! I hope there were many; but was there only one? That one is not lost. Aye, was there one who had there time and thought to offer the publican's prayer, or turn like the thief on the cross, to Christ? That prayer, that work, is not lost. Of such dead we say, they are not dead; they are living. They are not yonder, charred, blackened, smouldering, calcined in the horrible pit. No; they are risen,—saved so as by fire. Ours only is the horror of thought.



Theirs is the joy of rescue and of rest. To our imagination the death was unspeakably awful. To them the sudden death was only the transition to sudden glory.

“ Shall there be evil, etc.?” We see, *fifthly*, with what ease the judgment fire may do its work. We go about the world and its duties, and plan and purpose for years to come; and who thinks that the earth beneath his feet is mined—the solid earth—and that at any moment the whole may be shattered and shivered, suddenly, swiftly, as was that Drummond Coal-field? Almost we smile in our hours of ease and seeming safety at the Scriptural declaration that the earth and the works that are therein shall be burnt up. The statement has, no doubt, often been laughed to scorn. What! The solid earth, men say, consumed! absurd. The solid earth. Go then and view yonder scene of desolation. Recall that cloud darkening the heavens, caused by a single spark. Visit, next, in thought, some volcanic region, where burning mountains, sometimes by fits and starts, and sometimes perpetually vomit forth their fiery contents. Descend into the bowels of the earth, and behold that molten sea of fire of which its centre is by many believed to be composed. Take the telescope, and view in the heavens, attached to the same solar system of which our earth is a member, and at no great comparative distance from ourselves, what astronomers believe to be the wrecks of a once considerable planet. Think how small a change in the composition or elementary adjustments of the air we breathe and of the water we drink, would render these substances explosive like the gas of yonder ruined colliery. Ah! our earth is vast in our eyes. Its destruction seems impossible of accomplishment. But to the universe of God it is no more than is a leaf to the forest; its destruction would cause a blank only as the shrivelling of a leaf. \*

\* \* \* \* \* There are quiet times

when religion tends to formality and sentiment. The right words are used, and the right forms observed in a grave and quiet and decorous manner. But there is no life, no reality. Then God, if he has not forsaken a land, wakes it up, sometimes by terrible judgments; by breaking up the fountains of the great deep,—by floods and fires and pestilences and famines. These are his scourges. With these he consumes—strips off masks. Men are taught that the words they are idly using have a meaning. These judgments are the hurricanes that purify the atmosphere. They summon our attention to the “still small voice.” Yes, as we read of that dread flame leaping along the vaults of the mine, and hear the hoarse cry ringing through the “bords,” “Escape for thy life,” the thought comes home with power, “Our God is a consuming fire.” We seem to hear afresh that calm, dread utterance, “Be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh.”

“Be ye also ready. Behold the Judge standeth at the door.” My young friends, young men, for you especially the warning seems written here. For months the deaths occurring among us were almost exclusively of the old. Some seven in succession were taken who had exceeded even the four score years. Almost you may have begun to think, religion is for age, for sickness, for the weak and effeminate. Death does not concern himself with us who are in the prime of our years. Is it so? Look into yonder pit. Who were they who fell in vault or shaft or slope,—some within a foot or two of the surface? Young men, I believe, nearly all. All men in the prime and vigour of their powers; the hale, the healthy, the strong. And they are gone. One whiff of pestilential vapour, one tick of the pendulum, one thunderous volley; and they are gone. “What is your life? It is even as a vapour,” &c.

“Be ye also ready.” I have no hope, indeed, of frightening men into Godliness. I would rather, at any time I endeavor, as a rule, to appeal to nobler principles in human nature. And of the nobler man the gospel is expressly adapted to lay hold. It ought to come home with peculiar force to youthful minds. It was wrought out by one who laid down his life in the prime of his years. It was first preached by young men. Paul was a young man when he was converted. Surely his was a manly life. Would that I could persuade my young men that true manliness is to be Christ-like; my young women that true womanliness is to be Christ-like. See what composure Christ-likeness bestows. The tempest rises on Galilee’s lake. The disciples tremble. Death stares them in the face. They look for the Master. He is asleep. Yes, let evil come. It would be “the Lord’s doing.” Let the thunder volley. It is “my father’s voice.” \* \* \* \* But if ye will hear it, there are “terrors of the Lord.” There is a “wrath to come.” And it may come suddenly. They who do not use God’s time cannot expect him to await their time. His smouldering fires, how easily, swiftly may they break forth! “Like a thief in the night.”

“Shall there be evil,” &c. But there was good in it—thank God—good in it, then and there. Thank God, no evil is done by him, but we may see “the bright light in the cloud.” His fires of destruction are also fires of purification. See this (1) in the heroism that the catastrophe called forth; and (2) in the far-reaching sympathy to which it gave birth. (1) Heroism, I say,—yes, noble, heroic, daring,—not less noble, not less heroic than that evinced by the soldier on the battle-field, or leading the forlorn hope to the fortress’s capture. Honour to the brave, who, hearing of danger begun, paused not to think of safety, bowed at once to the dictates

of duty, and rushed, hoping to be of use, hoping to stand, with Aaron of old, "between the living and the dead, and stay the plague." Honour to the brave, who would be where duty and danger summoned, and who, with a calm disregard of self, fell at their post, enriching the sacrifice of human victims with the incense of human devotion. And honour, yet more, to those volunteers who would have saved, were it possible, the lives of neighbours,—not brothers, not friends, simply neighbours, and so trying, lost their own. Such deeds show that the stuff of which martyrs are made still exists in humanity. Man's primitive dignity, as created in the image of God, however defaced, is not destroyed. Ever and anon it leaps to life. It asserts its existence. It manifests its power. It vindicates man's birth-right and original heritage. It declares that man is the child of God.

Out of this inexpressibly noble heroism I gather a hint, and more than a hint of man's immortality. Man's immortality, I say. There is something dearer to him than life. It is honour. There is something in comparison with which life is as the small dust in the balance. It is duty. There is something, to compass which life is parted with as unconsciously as the breath goeth forth from the nostrils. It is to obey the behests of love. For man is immortal. The dead live. And therefore the living,—the truly living—are always ready to die. Is a "cup of cold water" remembered for ever? Shall the "breaking of an alabaster-box" be made mention of while the gospel continues to be preached? And shall God forget—shall the pulpit disdain to refer to those rough, ready miners, who counted not their lives dear to them—who brake, not an alabaster-box, but were themselves broken,—shivered on the desperate attempt to save brothermen? Oh! God seeth not as man seeth. I believe that these men's heroism is recorded in the book of remembrance for ever.

Once more. Thank God for the wide-spread sympathy evinced on behalf of the widows and orphans,—sympathy assuming to so great an extent a practical form,—sympathy manifested by those in the business pursuits of life, large, liberal, spontaneous. In this way, also, if the Lord does evil, he evokes good out of the evil. Along with the heroism already referred to, this constitutes one of the strongest proofs, in my belief, that God lives and reigns,—that he has not forsaken the world,—that his spirit is operating, mightily, in unexpected ways, in unexpected quarters. Perhaps so to touch our hearts is one of the main reasons why evil, in such forms as that referred to, is permitted.

Till we think of it, we can hardly estimate how much of our nature would lack cultivation—would become barren and unfruitful, were it not ploughed and harrowed by the tales of distress that ever and anon come to our ears. If all went well with us, and all around us, if there were no calamities, no poor, no bereaved, no sufferers, how would the good that is in us be kept alive? We should sink down into hardness, selfishness, be the victims of “pride, and fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness,” be wrapped up in sloth and sensuality, till, like Dives, we should die, and like him “in hell open our eyes.” But God sends one Lazarus or another to our gates,—reminders that “it is more blessed to give than to receive.” Do we accept them? The blessing is ours. We are linked in bonds of living sympathy with Christ. God asks us to “look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.” Do we “let this mind be in us?” Honour to those in places near and remote whose liberality has been evinced on behalf of the fatherless, the widow, the bereaved. “God is not unrighteous to forget their work and labour of love.”

And now, finally, God has spoken loudly, terribly. Let

God's word set forth the application of the whole. "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that speaks on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven; whose voice then shook the earth, but now he hath promised, saying: "Yet once more, I shake, not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we, receiving a Kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and Godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire."

The first part of the document is a letter from the Secretary of the State to the President, dated the 1st of January, 1800. It contains a report on the state of the Union, and a list of the names of the members of the Senate and House of Representatives. The second part is a report on the state of the Union, dated the 1st of January, 1800. It contains a list of the names of the members of the Senate and House of Representatives, and a list of the names of the members of the Executive Council. The third part is a report on the state of the Union, dated the 1st of January, 1800. It contains a list of the names of the members of the Senate and House of Representatives, and a list of the names of the members of the Executive Council. The fourth part is a report on the state of the Union, dated the 1st of January, 1800. It contains a list of the names of the members of the Senate and House of Representatives, and a list of the names of the members of the Executive Council. The fifth part is a report on the state of the Union, dated the 1st of January, 1800. It contains a list of the names of the members of the Senate and House of Representatives, and a list of the names of the members of the Executive Council. The sixth part is a report on the state of the Union, dated the 1st of January, 1800. It contains a list of the names of the members of the Senate and House of Representatives, and a list of the names of the members of the Executive Council. The seventh part is a report on the state of the Union, dated the 1st of January, 1800. It contains a list of the names of the members of the Senate and House of Representatives, and a list of the names of the members of the Executive Council. The eighth part is a report on the state of the Union, dated the 1st of January, 1800. It contains a list of the names of the members of the Senate and House of Representatives, and a list of the names of the members of the Executive Council. The ninth part is a report on the state of the Union, dated the 1st of January, 1800. It contains a list of the names of the members of the Senate and House of Representatives, and a list of the names of the members of the Executive Council. The tenth part is a report on the state of the Union, dated the 1st of January, 1800. It contains a list of the names of the members of the Senate and House of Representatives, and a list of the names of the members of the Executive Council.

