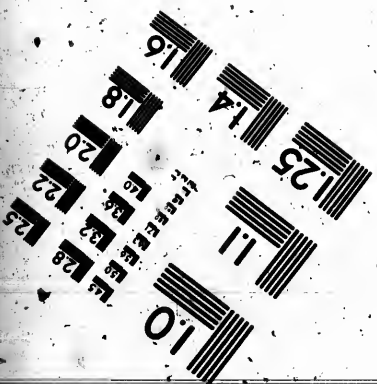
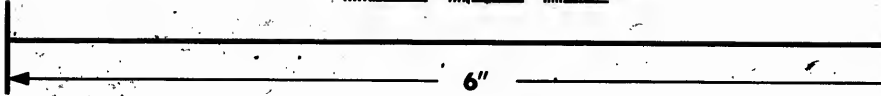
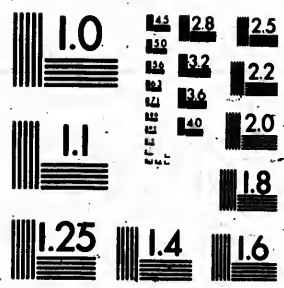


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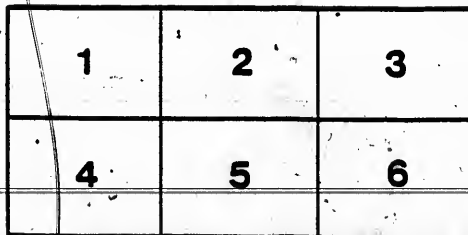
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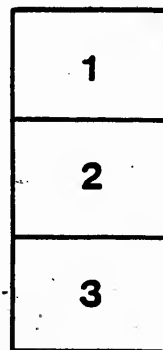
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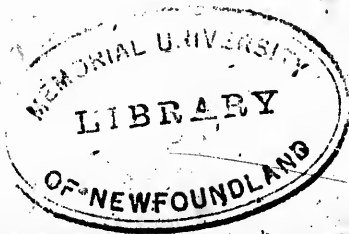


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The Lessons of Calamity.

by

Rev. Moses Harvey



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The Lessons of Calamity.

HAGGAI 1. 6.—“Ye have sown much and bring in little; ye eat but ye have not enough; ye drink but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages, earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. Thus saith the Lord of Hosts consider your ways.”

Thus spoke one of the brave old Hebrew prophets—one of the faithful and fearless ones who of old stood up for God and righteousness, rebuked iniquity, and called to repentance. The calling of the prophet was far from being an enviable one. He had often to tell men bitter, unpalatable truths; to hold up their sins before their eyes; to denounce fashionable respectable wickedness, in high places, and to warn men of coming judgments. And those who were disturbed in their pleasant pursuits by the voice of the prophet, speaking in thunder-tones, loved him not. He was despised, hated persecuted, sometimes stoned. Too often, the only wages of the preacher of righteousness and the rebuker of sin were exile, the dungeon, or the scaffold. Yet did these heroic men front the people in the name of the living God, and addressing alike the king and the subject, the rich and the poor, told them of their sins, not in wrath or hatred, but in pity and love. They spoke because the inward fire burned—because behind them was consciously the Awful Presence,—because the word of the Lord was as “a fire within their bones,” and would not let them rest. They looked far hence for their reward, and were content to get their heavy task accomplished. All who are sent by God to do the prophet's work still, must be satisfied with the prophet's wages.

The man who uttered the words of the text, was one of those courageous preachers of the righteousness to a people who needed it sorely. The Jews, on their return from the Babylonish Captivity, after all their experience of God's mercy and favour, turned aside, in selfish indolence, from the high and glorious work God had given them,—that of rebuilding the House of the Lord, and making Jerusalem once more a “praise in the whole earth.”—They forgot God and his work, and went after selfish enjoyments,

and worldly gains, and slothful indulgences; and consumed the rich bounties of God's earth on their lusts and pleasures.— And then God in judgment, and yet in mercy, taught them that the earth was not their servant but His; and that all the labour of their hands, unblessed by Him, would come to nothing. The heavens above became as brass and the earth as iron. The fertilizing dews and rains ceased; and the drought blighted the corn and the oil and the wine, and man's labour was vain. When thus humbled, God sent His prophet to tell them the meaning of these calamities, and to point out the method of their removal. The prophet points out to them the cause of their blighted hopes, and their want of prosperity. They had forgotten God, and the high mission he had entrusted to their hands; and for low and selfish ends had been hastening to be rich; and therefore God blighted their prosperity—their labours brought no return—"They sowed much and reaped little"—they ate but had not enough; they drank but were unsatisfied—they earned wages, and the wages were put "into a bag with holes;" they disappeared and want and poverty came. But all this was in mercy as truly as in judgment. These calamities were designed to arrest them in their ruinous career, and save them from far heavier disasters. The burden of the prophet's exhortation was, "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts consider your ways"—and the promise was given that if they repented and turned from their evil ways, and returned to God's work, then the calamity would be removed, the kindly earth would yield her increase, and the smile of Heaven would gladden them.

In the condition of the Jewish nation, and in God's dealings with them, we may see, as in a mirror, our own circumstances, and God's ways with ourselves. My brethren, we have assembled this day, at the call of our Gracious Sovereign's Representative, for special humiliation and prayer, in reference to those heavy calamities that are now pressing on the people of this colony. Of the wisdom of such a course there can be but one opinion among earnest, christian men, who believe in a superintending Providence, and a God who hears and answers prayer. As a people, our sufferings are at this moment great. A crisis of the gravest significance has arrived. Year after year, our fisheries, on which the people are dependent for their daily bread, and on which our prosperity rests, have failed to furnish the usual returns to our labours. Want, with all its attendant evils, has invaded large classes of the community; many hundreds are at this moment in absolute destitution, and dependent

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on public charity, for their daily bread. Many more are enduring
sore privations and hardships in silence, rather than make known
their wants; and those, once in affluent or comfortable circumstances,
have a hard battle to "provide things honest in the sight of all
men." The rich as well as the poor; the employer as well as the
employed, feel the pressure. The men who have "sown much,"—
made large investment of their capital—"bring in little," and the
labourers earn wages and "put it into a bag with holes." The fact
that between a third and a half of the entire revenue of the country
has, during the last year, been expended in pauper relief, shows the
extent and severity of the prevalent distress. Pauperism, like a
plague, is spreading in the community, destroying manly energy and
self-reliance; paralyzing industry; degrading and demoralizing
those to whom God has given health and strength to provide for their
wants. The heart aches to see the numbers in our streets and at
our doors who are asking for a morsel of bread, and these, in
many instances, not the aged and infirm, but the young and robust.
And when we remember that all around us, there are homes where
bold encamps itself in the empty fire-place, and blows, in our
cutting blasts, through the broken door, and paralyzes the naked
limbs, and where hunger takes the strong man by the throat, and
blights the life of childhood; and where apathy and blank despair
chill the heart or drive men to drown their sorrows in drunken
stupor—when we think of all this, is it wonderful that we
should look to the future with sad and anxious hearts? It is time,
that, as a people, we turned to God, confessed our sins, and cried for
mercy and deliverance. It is time that we "considered our ways,"
so as to discover wherein we have done amiss and what we are to
repent of. The present crisis is a loud call to every man to pause,
and to inquire and consider why, as a people, we are suffering thus.
And finding how sinful we have been, let us turn to the Lord with
genuine repentance and sorrow, with humbled and sincere confession
of our sins, and earnest prayer for forgiveness and grace through
Jesus Christ. But that repentance cannot be sincere unless we are
really willing to look into the truth of things. We must not try to
shut our eyes to what conscience pronounces wrong—to delude our-
selves with flimsy excuses of expediency or necessity. We must
return to God with a spirit of honest determination to "cease to
do evil and to learn to do well." We must be willing to correct
what is wrong, to abandon what is unjust, to do all that is lawful
and right, whatever be the contempt we incur or the sacrifice we

must make. If we do not turn to the Lord thus, and "Consider our ways," our prayers will be but a solemn mockery, and our humiliation a mere "bodily service that profiteth little."

It would be a very erroneous conclusion—one entirely unwarranted by Scripture—did we suppose that those suffering the heaviest share of our calamity are alone or chiefly guilty. We are seldom if ever permitted to interpret calamity as a mark of individual guilt. The New Testament warns us against this. The eighteen upon whom the Tower of Siloam fell, and the victims "whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices," were not sinners above all others. But it is no less true that when a calamity falls upon a nation or a community, it is a proof that as a nation or as a community they have been violating, in some form, the Divine laws; and the punishment is designed to arouse them to a sense of their sin and to arrest their transgression. There can be no national suffering but a law of God has been broken somewhere. By the decree of God, sin and misery are linked together. It is in the nature of every public sin, that it must have a double retribution: first, that which falls upon the individual that commits it; and second, that which undermines and destroys the common-wealth itself. There is a private judgment and a public judgment. The soul of ruler or citizen, law-maker, law-keeper, or law-breaker, must render up an account of its personal stewardship; and likewise the collective body called the nation, whose great organized sin is made up of those personal contributions, has to be reckoned with according to the laws of the Eternal Providence, by its loss or its progress, its ruin or its glory. And how fearfully does it augment the responsibility of public conduct, that the downfall of a nation drags with it, into the common wreck, such hosts of sufferers, the guiltless with the guilty. Just as surely then as the individual wrong-doer is punished, so surely will the country or community that persists in oppression, injustice, cruelty, or any public wrong, stand at last before the judgment-seat and be weighed in those bright balances that never rust, nor swerve, nor break.

As a community then we have sinned, and though judgment has been long delayed and long threatened, yet has it come at last, certain as doom. Just to the extent that every one of us has transgressed, to that extent are we responsible for the public calamity. Let every one look into his own conscience and reckon up the amount. And the Almighty God, who reads all hearts, knows how appalling the iniquity we, as a people, ought this day to confess

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before Him! What forgetfulness of God!—what ingratitude to-
wards the Bountiful Giver who has conferred so many mercies upon
us! What reckless waste and extravagance in regard to the
bounties of His Providence, among all classes! What a feignful
amount of drunkenness—what profanity—what abuses of the day
God has given us for rest and worship! How have we made gold
our god; pursuing "the lust of gain in the spirit of Cain." Eager
to be rich, we have forgotten justice and mercy: we have failed to
remember our duties while we have been eager enough about our
rights. And on the other hand, indolence, extravagance and dis-
honest selfish greed have abounded among those who had to earn
their bread by the sweat of their brow. And now God is taking
away from us that on which we had set our hearts, and for which
we were living. Our money "put into a bag with holes" disap-
pears, and when we look for it it is gone. His wind blows, and there
is a blight upon all the labours of our hands. The iron hand of
poverty grasps us. We would not, by deeds of love and mercy,
build up our people as living stones in His spiritual house, and win
them to the service of God; and now we must build for them poor
houses, or find them the necessaries of life in their own dwellings.
May God have mercy upon us as a people, and "pardon our iniquity
for it is great."—Our own souls are blighted with spiritual drought
too, as well as our outward circumstances. We have forgotten
God, and the heavenly rains and dews have been suspended.

But when on this day of special humiliation, we are obeying the
Divine injunction to "Consider our ways," we should inquire
whether there is any special sin which our punishment points to,
and is designed forcibly to press upon our attention. We should
not be satisfied with mere generalities—with common confessions,—
but consider specific cases of wrong which bring down God's dis-
pleasure. There is no-it has long seemed that there was something
radically wrong—something on which God could not smile, in the
system on which the great business of this country is conducted;
and I feel that I should be unfaithful did I not refer to it, on this
solemn occasion, when we are in God's presence, considering our
ways. I refer, of course, to what is known here as "the credit sys-
tem"—which all honest, right-thinking men confess to be thoroughly
bad in principle and ruinous in practice to all involved in it. That
is really the plague-spot; the blight on our industry, the worm at
the root of our prosperity. Many of you know this better than I

do; and many of you have confessed to me that you were groaning under it, as the cursed of our land, and in vain longing for deliverance. Till it is abolished, I do not see how we can look for permanent prosperity, or expect God's blessing on our business. For what is the effect of the system to which I refer?—First of all, it establishes a false, vicious relation between capital and labour—between the employer and the employed; it makes the one to a certain extent the slave of the other. And just as slavery is ruinous to the master as well as to the slave, so the man who has acquired undue power over another, by making advances to him on his future labours, is injured thereby himself. If there be abjectness and servility, on the one side, there is as likely to be tyranny and hardness on the other. But there are far more serious evils than this. When the general business of a country, as here, is conducted on the principle that the labourer mortgages his future industry to the capitalist, who makes advances to him in the necessaries of life, the borrower in such a case has, as a matter of course, to pay a heavy interest on his loan, so as to cover the risks which the lender has to run. Payment turns on the uncertain returns of the season's labours. High charges must protect the supplier. The system is such that the poor man pays an exorbitant price for his goods, and the capitalist is compelled to make such charges as his conscience must secretly disapprove of; otherwise he would speedily be a ruined man. The system which drives men to such practices—violating conscience on the one side, and grinding and oppressing the poor on the other, must be thoroughly wrong. But the evil does not end here; weak, ignorant and thoughtless men are thus strongly tempted to extravagance, indolence and dishonesty; and the result is to undermine the moral character of the labouring population—to destroy forethought, manly independence, industrious habits, and too often common honesty. The honest, industrious man is fearfully taxed to make up for the defalcations of the indolent and dishonest. A premium is held out to roguery; activity and thrift are punished. How could a community thrive where a system like this prevails? It is quite sufficient to demoralize and destroy any people, and to counteract all the efforts of educationists and religious teachers to elevate them. The weeds growing up in such soil would naturally choke the growth of religion. And then, mark how the Divine laws are self-avenging—no one, in the long run profits by such a system. The capitalist finds himself, at length;

without return expected to make even the poor laws are never

These returns are many nobles right and just. But the natives as I have described startling disclosure in this system existence. It handed down effects have present suffering long since. from it at once not be abolished retribution, if thing is imposed conducted with ought to do work it is "the best themselves to aside selfishness wrong, a different men, by no means but they are their successors the poor and who would steady honest, truth-telling system has so conscience are evils. Here is eating practice hearted men of action? More no good cause brethren, will

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even the poor return in such a case of profits is denied him. God's
laws are never broken with impunity.

These remarks apply to the system as a whole. I know there
are many noble exceptions in its working—many instances in which
right and justice rule in the transactions between man and man.
But the native tendency and general results of the system are such
as I have described. Were its history written, it would unfold some
startling disclosures. I am well aware that those who are involved
in this system did not create it, and are not accountable for its
existence. It is the creation of years and generations. It has been
handed down from those who have gone before us. Its pernicious
effects have gone on accumulating for long years, and in our
present sufferings we are reaping the bitter fruits of seeds sown
long since. Neither can an individual, if so disposed, free himself
from it at once. Like slavery, it has many ramifications, and can-
not be abolished in a day. But if we hope to escape the divine
retribution, it must be abandoned. I know many will cry out "the
thing is impossible: The business of the country could not be
conducted without it." This I, for one, deny. Whatever we
ought to do we can do. Whatever is right is also practicable—nay
it is "the best policy." And if honest, religious men were to set
themselves to devise a remedy for this crying evil, and laying
aside selfishness, were sincerely to set about rectifying what is
wrong, a different system would speedily prevail. Our business
men, by no fault of theirs, are the victims of a vicious system;
but they are accountable for continuing and transmitting it to
their successors. From them the remedy must come—not from
the poor and ignorant. He would be a benefactor to his country
who would strike a death-blow to the system. Would to God that
honest, truth-loving men would speak out on this subject; for the
system has so worked itself into our business transactions that our
consciences are deadened, and we are unconscious of its deadly
evils. Here is a theme for the pulpit and the press, in incul-
cating practical righteousness. Will not our generous, kind-
hearted men of business take the matter into serious consider-
ation? More charitable, generous men are no where to be found;
no good cause appeals to them in vain. In kindness to their poor
Brethren, will they not help to free them from a system that is

working woe, and of which, to-day, we see the dire results? Nay, in mercy to themselves, will they not wash their hands of a method of business upon which they cannot feel that the approbation of Heaven is resting? God is calling us to "consider our ways," in the stern language of calamitous events. If we do not "hear the rod" now, repent and turn to the Lord, we may well dread more direful calamities in the days to come.

On this day of our humiliation, we come into God's presence as humble suppliants, to confess our sins and ask Him to remove the judgments that are now pressing on us, as a people. But do we ask Him to work miracles in our behalf;—to suspend or alter those great laws which regulate the universe, and on the regularity of which its well-being depends? Do we implore Him to reverse His moral laws, and to let us go on in wrong-doing with impunity? Not so.—The laws that regulate our fisheries are just as fixed and invariable as those which determine the movements of the planet, or watch over the comet in its flight through space. Prayer does not contemplate the abrogation of nature's laws, or the suspension of the moral conditions under which we live. It does not imply that means are to be dispensed with; but that we are to associate with prayer the right use of the right means. We are to pray for our daily bread, but we are also to work for it. We are to pray for health, but also to obey the Divine conditions on which alone health is given. If we neglect the right means, our prayers will be inefficacious. So far from implying an interference with the secondary conditions on which the universe is governed, prayer implies a right attention, to them, and when sincere, induces and enables the soul to act rightly in relation to God's ordinances. God can hear and answer prayer, in a thousand ways, without interfering with the order of his universe. For example—the answer to our prayers this day, may come in God's suggesting to our minds what are the best means to employ for the removal of our troubles. When we come this day into God's light, "we may see light clearly;" the mists of sin and of the world may be removed. We come, by prayer, into contact with "the Father of Light"—the source of all intelligence. We are in communion with the Spirit, who understands the cause of all things. Is it not then reasonable to suppose that our minds should receive impressions as to the true causes of our afflictions, and the right means for their removal? In this way the best answer to our prayers may come,

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h, to-day, we see the dire results? Nay, will they not wash their hands of a method they cannot feel that the approbation of God is calling us to "consider our ways," calamitous events. If we do not "hear and obey," turn to the Lord, we may well dread more calamities to come.

In our humiliation, we come into God's presence and confess our sins and ask Him to remove the burden now pressing on us, as a people. But do not plead miracles in our behalf;—to suspend or alter the laws that regulate the universe, and on the regularity of which depends? Do we implore Him to remove the burden and let us go on in wrong-doing with impunity? The laws that regulate our fisheries are just as those which determine the movements of the comet in its flight through space. We cannot contemplate the abrogation of nature's laws, or the suspension of moral conditions under which we live. It is not that laws are to be dispensed with; but that we may use the right use of the right means. We are to work for our daily bread, but we are also to work for our health, but also to obey the Divine conditions which are given. If we neglect the right means, our prayers are inefficacious. So far from implying that we are to alter the conditions on which the universe is sustained, we are to give a right attention to them, and when sinners are to act rightly in relation to God's law, we are to answer prayer, in a thousand ways, according to the order of his universe. For example—when a calamity this day, may come in God's providence, we are to use the best means to employ for the removal of the calamity. We come this day into God's light, "we are to be delivered from the mists of sin and of the world may be removed by prayer, into contact with "the Father of all things," into communion with His intelligence. We are in communion with Him, who is the cause of all things. Is it not then that our minds should receive impressions of His will, and our affections, and the right means for the removal of our afflictions, and the best answer to our prayers may come,

in perfect accordance with the established order of things; and who would, in such a case, dare to say that there was not a real answer to prayer; or that prayer did not then "move the hand that moves the world?" Moreover, no means could avail unless God rendered them efficacious. If then, in deep contrition and godly sorrow for sin, we bow down before God, and then go forth to act out the conviction of duty which we receive this day in prayer, happy shall we be, and blessed shall be the arrangement which brought us together. Then, indeed, our prayers will pierce the heavens, and draw down the blessing. But if we leave behind us, in our sanctuaries, the impressions the Spirit of God awakens when there, and return to our old ways and our old sins, there will be no answer to our prayers; they will pass off in the smoke of mere sentiment. May the Hearer of Prayer then shed His Divine light into all our souls, and give us hearts inclined to obey His righteous laws. May He breathe into our hearts a spirit of justice, mercy and love, and, while this day we obey the voice of God in His Word, as well as the divinest instinct of our own souls, in "calling upon God in the day of trouble," may He who is "a very present help in time of trouble" hear and deliver us.

Let me say a word or two as to the condition of the poor at our own doors. We profess to take the Bible as our guide through life; and in that holy book there is no duty more frequently or emphatically insisted on than kindness to the poor. If those of us, whom God has blessed with abundance, do not manifest practically our sympathy with our destitute and suffering brothers, by relieving their wants, our prayers this day cannot rise to Heaven with acceptance. Hear the divine words:—"Is not this the fast that I have chosen, to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily." "But whose hath this world's goods, and sees his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" Give then, my brethren, as God has prospered you; that is the true test of liberality,—not the sums you subscribe, but the means you possess. The widow's mite may be more in proportion to her means than the large donation of the wealthy man. What-

ever any man gives "let him give not grudgingly, for the Lord loveth a cheerful giver." Let him give with a genial look and a kind heart, and that will double the gift, and stir up gratitude. Remember that the poor children of want, gaunt and squalid, are your brothers—children of the same Heavenly Father, possessors of the same nature, heirs of the same immortality. Ask not what is their creed or race—enough that they are in woe and want. Have they been vicious, and are sin's dark traces but too discernible? they need your pity and help the more. In this figure, steeped in wretchedness, see the form of a brother; and in the deepest tones of poverty recognize a brother's voice. Doubtless the best of all charity is that which helps the poor to help themselves; but where this is impossible, immediate duty is clear—mercy to the poor—food for the starving. From the abodes of poverty, from beds of straw, from the depths of starvation, the cry of the poor pierces the heavens and reaches the ear of God. Let it also reach our hearts and move to practical kindness. I well know with what generous liberality the poor are now, by many, relieved day after day. Still it is needful to be reminded, on this day, of the divine precepts which bear on our duties to the poor.

Finally, brethren,—in the midst of our sufferings God is "remembering mercy." If many of our people are in want, no deadly disease is at work among them. If money is scarce, the necessaries of life are unusually low in price. There is no disorder or turbulence. Privation and sufferings are borne quietly and patiently,—in many instances with true christian resignation and noble fortitude. If we are suffering, the pain is sent in mercy, to drive us back to the path of obedience. With the rich bounties of Providence around us, with a whole island almost uncultivated, there must be something fearfully amiss if hale men are starving. God would not have multitudes of His creatures living in degradation and sinking in the scale of being; and therefore He sends the sharp stroke of calamity to arouse us. May we "hear the rod and Him who hath appointed it."

