



SUNDAY READING

MORNING SERVICE.

MORNING.

Seek the Lord while He may be found, and call upon him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord and He will have mercy upon him, and to our God for He will abundantly pardon. How great is the loving kindness of the Lord our God, and His compassion unto all such as turn unto Him. The Lord is good to all, and there is no wrong in Him.

A Prayer.

O God who art peace everlasting, whose chosen reward is the gift of peace, and who hast taught us that peace-makers are Thy children; pour Thy peace into our souls, that everything discordant may utterly vanish and all that makes for peace be sweet to us forever. Amen.

HYMN.

Father supreme: Thou high and holy One, To Thee we bow; Now, when the service of the day is done, Devoutly now.

From age to age unchanging, still the same, O good Thou art; Allowed forever be Thy holy name In every heart.

When the glad morn upon the hills was spread, Thy smile was there; Now, as the darkness gathers overhead, We feel Thy care.

Night spreads her shade upon another day, For ever past; So o'er our faults, Thy love, we humbly pray, A veil may cast.

Thou, through the dark, wilt watch above our sleep With eyes of love; And Thou wilt wake us when the sunbeams leap The hills above.

O may each heart its gratitude express As life expands, And find the triumph of its happiness In Thy commands.

SERMON.

The Great and Good.

By Rev. LYMAN ABBOTT, D.D., Preached in Plymouth church, Sunday morning, June 21st—the Sunday before the unveiling of the Henry Ward Beecher monument in City Hall park, Brooklyn.

"Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.—Heb. xii, 1."

The magnificent series of pictures, a part of which we have read together this morning in the twelfth chapter of Hebrews, closes with this practical counsel, "let us run with patience the race that is set before us." Before us the artist puts Abel with the smoke of his sacrifice going up unto God under the blue sky; Noah turning aside from his avocation to give himself to the work of building an ark long before there is any gathering darkness in the western horizon; Abraham turning his back upon his country and going in a quest after God; Moses choosing not to be a prince in Egypt, but putting himself at the head of an utterly ignoble race of slaves that he may make free men of them. We can do none of these things. No altar stands before us on which we are to offer incense and sacrifice; no voice calls us to any shipbuilding; no message bids us become self-exiled that we may find our God in some unknown country; no choice is laid upon us between the palace and the wilderness. But looking on these lives, we are to learn how to run our race, do our duty, fill our place, render our services. This is the message. They are witnesses. What does that mean? In the first place they are witnesses to a divine, invisible, eternal life; witnesses to something that many of us do not see at all, to something that most of us see only vaguely, dimly, occasionally. They are witnesses to a great truth in the faith of which they walk, by which they were inspired, which, perhaps, we fail to see, or see only at special times and on special occasions. Walking along the street, you see a group of men standing, looking up into the heavens; and you are pretty sure they see something, and wonder what it is, and stop and look where they are looking. So we see men gathered in monasteries, gathered in cloisters, gathered in houses of worship, drawn together by a vision, looking up into the heavens at something invisible to most of us in the dust and darkness of life. And because these men are looking we are sure there is something they see. It is but for a moment, and then they separated, we might think differently. If it were one group of men of idealistic temperament, or dominated by one creed or one priesthood, we might call it superstition. But they are Protestants and Catholics, Episcopalians and Congregationalists, Calvinists and Arminians—men joined together and men setting themselves in solitary places and for solitary meditation. By their attitude, still more by their words and deeds, they bear witness to a something they do. Gettysburg and Antietam and Donaldson and Vicksburg are witnesses to the reality of a great patriotism. If one had no patriotism in his own heart, if his soul was never stirred by a love of liberty or a love of his fellow man, if the Stars and Stripes meant nothing to him, if he cared not whether the nation were one or divided, still it would be impossible that he should look upon this great, great army created by the roll of the drum summoned by the sound of the trumpet, turning back upon home and friends, entering into a life of service and pain and anguish, without being sure that there is something in their life of service and pain that inspired, directed, controlled them to this great consecrating act. A man without any love of music may come into a concert room and the music which is sounding out from the platform may mean nothing to him, but surely he cannot look upon this audience rapt in attention and not know there is something in music, whether he appreciates it or not? So it is impossible for any man to look out upon

the great worshipping congregations of all ages and all times, seeing men stirred not only with a momentary passion, a temporary enthusiasm, but lifted up and not feel sure that there is a truth, a reality, in spiritual life. It is a significant fact that the same word means "martyr" and "witness." The martyrs were primarily not sufferers, but witnesses, and in the ancient literature the word martyr was applied sometimes to men who did not suffer at all, but going before courts and kings with an expectation of suffering, bore their witness, and then went out from the courts unscathed. They were martyrs to the truth; that is witness to the truth. The surest witness is the witness borne by great suffering, and the martyrs receive their name, not chiefly because they suffered, but chiefly because, by reason of their suffering, they bore testimony to a reality, a divine and invisible reality. So the men and women that have walked under the shadow of a great sorrow, and yet with radiant faces, they that have walked in life with a great enthusiasm and a great patience of courage; they that aforesaid were of the earth, earthy, but now are lifted up and filled full of a great divine life of hope and faith and love; they who have served and dared and suffered for invisible truth—are by their very lives witnesses to the divine and invisible truth which was in them.

But, beyond this, in the great and good there is a witness to a divine presence and power in them, yet not of them. They are witnesses to what God can make out of common men and women. In the sculptor's studio you see the form shaped by his skillful hands, and your heart is touched, your soul is lifted up, you receive through the clay, but not from the clay, a new thought or a new emotion. You see what a great sculptor can make out of common clay. Now the great men of the world are witnesses to what God can make out of such stuff as you and I are made of. Moses and Abraham and Paul and Luther and Wesley and Calvin and William of Orange and Cromwell and Lincoln, they are all witnesses to the possibilities of human nature when God gets hold of it and undertakes to do something with it. And you never can tell what God can make out of a man when you see him unformed, any more than you can tell what the sculptor is going to make out of the clay when it lies a wet and soggy lump in his hand. To hear men talk cynically of a knowledge of human nature, as if "Vanity Fair" was a looking glass and truly represented human nature. Was not Moses human nature as well as Becky Sharp? Human nature is sordid and mean and base; and human nature is grand and heroic and sublime. And the history of the mean men of the world shows you how bad you and I can be, without trying very hard. And the history of the great and the heroic and the divine men shows what you and I might become if we would let God have His way with us. Put a violin into the hands of a poor player, and you will put your fingers into your ears to keep out the dissonance. Put the same instrument in the hands of a skillful player, and you will feel the soul breathing through the instrument. It is the player that makes the difference. Look all along the line of human history, and you may see what kind of figures God can make out of clay like yours; you may hear what kind of music He can play on instruments such as you are. The great and good men of the world are witnesses to the power, not ourselves, and yet that is in ourselves—to the poor that makes men great.

But in still a third sense great and good men are witnesses. The men who by their lives bear witness to the truth and light in which they walked, the men whose lives were more than human and bear witness to the divine that was in them look down upon us and watch us; they were witnesses to the truth, they were witnesses to God, and now they are witnesses of us. The writing-master sits down at the desk, and says to the child: "See how I hold my pen," and he shows his pupil how to place the fingers on the penholder, and with that freedom and flexibility, and yet with what steadiness, the letters are formed; and then he says, "Now you sit down and try." And the boy sits down and takes the pen, and the teacher stands and looks over his shoulder to see how well he has learned his lesson. So the sainted father or mother or pastor or friend sits down at our side and says, "I will show you what life means." Or, rather, God in them sits before us, saying, "I will show you what life means." And then, having given us a momentary glimpse of life, they step on one side, and look over our shoulder, to see whether we have learned the lesson well or not. In the great Coliseum in Rome eighty thousand spectators lined the galleries, while a score or more of combatants engaged in gladiatorial contests on the ground below. In something such a Coliseum is the human race, only the audience in the galleries is made up for the most part of those who were beforehand on the floor; they have fought their battles with the beasts, or with one another; they have run their race with patience; and they have gone out of the arena into the gallery, and you and I have come, taking their places, and they are watching to see how we have learned the lesson which their lives taught us. There is Abel looking down on this worshipping congregation to see whether your prayers are going up as real incense unto God, or whether you have come as Cain came, not caring for God; and there is Noah looking down to see, not whether you are building an ark, but whether you have hands and feet consecrated to God's service, doing His work in His world in your own time. And there is Moses watching this young man hesitating between the palace with dishonor on one side and poverty with honor on the other. If he will only smirch his soul with reputable dishonesty, conscience protests, pre-

ferment is proffered to him. On the other hand is the path that leads along the sterile desert, with rock and waterless sand; and here is Moses looking on to see young man, what kind of choice you make, and how you have learned the lesson of Moses's life. So they kind of witnesses. Oh, if our eyes could but open to see these witnesses. If this father, immersed in worldly affairs and still having love for the little child that he left him, could see how the little child is tugging at those strings that bind the father's heart to his. If the husband could but see how the wife is looking down upon him now, to watch and know whether he is living up to her own wifely ideals, which, perhaps, were all that held him to high honor while she lived with him. If this child could but know that the mother is watching over her with patience and with love greater than she ever knew on earth—for God has filled her with His own patience. If this great congregation could but know that the pastor who rarely was able to enter your houses while he walked on the earth, now comes into them to see how Plymouth church lives up to the teaching of its pastor. If we could but know, would not our lives be better than they are? So is the great cloud of witnesses about us: men who have witnesses to the eternal and the invisible by their lives: men who by their lives have witnesses to the God within them: men who are looking to see how we live, how we have learned the lessons which they taught. What then? What is the issue and result of it all? "Wherefore, seeing we are compassed by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us run with patience the race that is set before us." Not forget them and let them drift into an oblivion of the past; nor stand and gaze at them and think we honor them, by simply looking at the record of their lives.

Do you remember how, when Christ ascended into the heavens and departed from the apostles, and they stood looking, the angel said unto them, "Why stand you here gazing all day long?" Not by looking after Jesus, but by following Him and doing His service, they were to honor Him. Nor do we honor them by imitating them—that is, by attempting to do over again what they did—and by keeping untouched what their touch made sacred while they lived. Who would think that we honor our boys in blue by going once a year to Gettysburg and fighting a sham battle where they fought a real one?

Who would think that we honor our Revolutionary fathers by going once a year into Valley Forge, and living for a month in a sham camp, because they suffered in a real one there in the winter snows? Yet many imagine that they honor Calvin by repeating over what Calvin said centuries ago. Men imagine that they honor Luther by debating the same issues Luther debated, and which have been settled long, long since. Men imagine that they honor Wesley by promising that they will preach only what they find in Wesley's sermons. It is not by fighting pretended battles on the fields our fathers fought, it is not by putting ourselves in pretended privations where our fathers suffered real ones; it is not by doing over again what they did that we honor them, but by imitating that which was in their hearts, and running with patience our race, as they ran theirs.

I am sure you are quick-thoughted enough to know what suggested this thought to me, and to what I have been leading you up. This week there is to be unveiled the statue of one whom I count, and we count, the greatest preacher of righteousness the world has seen since the days of Paul; one whom I believe, and you believe, witnessed to that righteousness by his life no less than by his lips; one who knew what it was to have the blessing of Him who said: "Blessed are ye when men shall persecute you, and revile you, and speak evil of you falsely for My name's sake." I believe, and you believe, that monument as long as it shall endure, will stand as a witness to the truth of one utterance, of that chant which we sang this morning, "God knoweth the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish."

How shall we honor his memory? Fifty years ago the young entered into active life. He found men manacled by their old-school theology, with its doctrine that man is not a free moral agent, and cannot help himself, has no power even to choose the right; and he drew his sword, and flung himself into the battle against that hard, repressive theology. And not that the manacles are cut, are we to go on preaching the crucifix that he has completed? We should dishonor him by doing it, as though we said he had not done the work, and it must be done since his time; we should dishonor him by repeating the methods which he himself later disused, and which no longer fit our time and our changed conditions? He honored his father-noble, and heroic soul as Lyman Beecher was.

How? By entering into the battle against drinking as Lyman Beecher did? No. By seeing that the battle of his own time was the battle against slavery, and by carrying into that battle courage like that which the father had carried into the battle against Puritan drinking. He came east; was first to see that a church was not a mere meeting house, as the Puritans thought it was, but must be the centre of a great social life, and the first to bring the kitchen and the parlor and the improved Sunday school room into the service of the church; I believe the first, certainly among the first.

How can we honor him save grasping his conceptions, and then saying, in his faith: "We will make this church the centre of a larger, better social life than has ever known in the past, with larger, better equipment, and larger, better means for carrying out the work which he did but begin." For God's work is never more than begun. At a time when singing was done for congregations by a choir, and no man or woman outside the choir was taught to read the notes, he created the first congregational hymn book, which other churches subsequently imitated. Should we honor him by keeping in perpetual use the book which he made? Nay; rather by imitating the spirit of him who was a prophet in his time, by holding sacred all that he made sacred by his use, and bringing into the sanctuary all that great experience which he made possible by his ministry. We do not honor the great and good by merely looking at their lives; we do not honor them by leaving untouched what their hand hath made sacred; we honor them by catching their spirit, receiving their inspiration, being imbued with their

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