

*Dedicated to
The 152d General Assembly
Meeting at
Rochester, N.Y.*

FAITH IN GOD

**Dr. GURLEY'S SERMON
AT THE
FUNERAL OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN**

From the Original Manuscript

**PHILADELPHIA
Department of History
of the Office of the General Assembly
of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.**

1940

PREFACE

IN ALL probability one of the least known but none the less interesting collections of Lincolniana is that of the sermons and orations delivered on the occasion of the assassination of the President, the 75th anniversary of which occurred on April 14th of the present year of our Lord, nineteen hundred and forty. It is the good fortune of the Presbyterian Historical Society to possess one of the largest of these collections, consisting of some hundred and twenty volumes containing over two hundred such sermons and addresses; but the document which they prize most highly is the manuscript of the sermon delivered by the Rev. Phineas D. Gurley at the funeral of the President in the White House, April 19, 1865. This manuscript is endorsed by Dr. Gurley's own hand as follows: "Faith in God: A Sermon Delivered in the East Room of the Executive Mansion, Wednesday, April 19th, 1865, At the Funeral of Abraham Lincoln, President of the U. States, By the Rev. P. D. Gurley, D.D., Pastor of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, Washington, D.C."

Dr. Gurley had been the President's pastor for four years, and as a contemporary has stated: "His opportunities for knowing Mr. Lincoln were exceedingly favorable; and as he is a minister of calm judgment and large experience, not liable to be unduly influenced by enthusiasm, great weight may be attached to the view taken by him of our honored

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President, who fell by the hand of an assassin." He was one of the small group that watched through the night in the room where the dying President lay. At twenty-two minutes after seven on the morning of April 15th, his pulse ceased beating; Secretary Stanton said, "Now he belongs to the ages;" and Dr. Gurley kneeled in prayer.

The scene of the funeral service is set for us by another contemporary hand: "The discourse was delivered by Rev. Dr. Gurley at one o'clock, noon, in the east room of the Presidential Mansion, April 19, 1865, standing at the end of the coffin on a step of the catafalque, around which stood the President of the United States, Andrew Johnson, inaugurated four days previously, and the cabinet, Chief Justice Chase and other judges of the Supreme Court, Lieutenant General Grant and his staff, Rear Admiral Farragut of the United States Navy, and other officers, United States Senators and Members of Congress, the Governors of several States, Foreign Ambassadors and their suites, numerous clergymen and State deputations, forming a funeral assemblage and a scene more solemn and impressive than we have ever seen before."

Dr. Gurley's sermon was printed several times either in full or in part in contemporary periodicals and collections; but it has never been published separately until the present edition, which we offer as our humble tribute at the shrine of America's "most conspicuous defender, its wisest and most fondly-trusted friend."

THOS. C. PEARS, JR.

PHILADELPHIA, PA.

APRIL 19, 1940.

Faith in God:
A Sermon
Delivered in the East Room of the Executive Mansion,
Wednesday, April 19th, 1865,
At
The Funeral of Abraham Lincoln, President of the U. States
By
The Rev. P. D. Gurley, D. D.,
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Washington,
D. C.

Manuscript of Dr. Gurley's Sermon, in possession of the
Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, Pa.

Mark 11 : 22

“Have faith in God.”

*AS WE STAND HERE TODAY, MOURNERS
AROUND THIS COFFIN AND AROUND
THE LIFELESS REMAINS OF OUR BE-
LOVED CHIEF MAGISTRATE, WE RECOGNIZE
AND WE ADORE THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD.*

His throne is in the heavens, and His kingdom ruleth over all. He hath done, and He hath permitted to be done, whatsoever He pleased. "Clouds and darkness are round about Him; righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne." His way is in the sea, and His path in the great waters, and His footsteps are not known. "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? Deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea. If He cut off, and shut up, or gather together, then who can hinder Him? For He knoweth vain men; He seeth wickedness also; will He not then consider it?"—We bow before His infinite majesty. We bow, we weep, we worship.

"Where reason fails, with all her powers,
There faith prevails, and love adores."

It was a cruel, cruel hand, that dark hand of the assassin, which smote our honored, wise, and noble President, and filled the land with sorrow. But above and beyond that hand there is another which we must see and acknowledge. It is the chastening hand of a wise and a faithful Father. He

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gives us this bitter cup. And the cup that our Father hath given us, shall we not drink it?

“God of the just, Thou gavest us the cup:
We yield to thy behest, and drink it up.”

“Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth.” O how these blessed words have cheered and strengthened and sustained us through all these long and weary years of civil strife, while our friends and brothers on so many ensanguined fields were falling and dying for the cause of Liberty and Union! Let them cheer, and strengthen, and sustain us to-day. True, this new sorrow and chastening has come in such an hour and in such a way as we thought not, and it bears the impress of a rod that is very heavy, and of a mystery that is very deep. That such a life should be sacrificed, at such a time, by such a foul and diabolical agency; that the man at the head of the nation, whom the people had learned to trust with a confiding and a loving confidence, and upon whom more than upon any other were centred, under God, our best hopes for the true and speedy pacification of the country, the restoration of the Union, and the return of harmony and love; that he should be taken from us, and taken just as the prospect of peace was brightly opening upon our torn and bleeding country, and just as he was beginning to be animated and gladdened with the hope of ere long enjoying with the people the blessed fruit and reward of his and their toil, and care, and patience, and self-sacrificing devotion to the interests of Liberty and the Union—O it is a mysterious and a most afflicting visitation! But it is our Father in heaven, the God of our fathers, and our God, who permits us to be so suddenly and sorely smitten; and we know that His judgments are right, and that in faithfulness He has

DEATH-BED OF LINCOLN

Painted by

JOHN H. LITTLEFIELD

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	Sec.	Gov.	Gen.	Judge	Speaker	P. M. Gen.	Surg.	Maj.	Surg.	Sen.	Att. Gen.	Sec.	Gen.	Gen.
	McCulloch	Oglesby	Farnsworth	Otto	Collfax	Dennison	C. A. Leale	Jno. Hay	C.S. Taft	Sumner	Speed	Usher	Auger	Meigs
Gov.	Sec.		Vice-Pres.		Dr.		Pres. Lincoln	Robert	Dr. Barnes,	Dr.	Rev.	Gen.	Sec.	
Farwell	Welles		Johnson		Stone		Mrs. Lincoln	Lincoln	Surg. Gen.	Crane	Dr. Gurley	Halleck	Stanton	

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afflicted us. In the midst of our rejoicings we needed this stroke, this dealing, this discipline; and therefore He has sent it. Let us remember, our affliction has not come forth out of the dust, and our trouble has not sprung out of the ground. Through and beyond all second causes let us look, and see the sovereign permissive agency of the great First Cause. It is His prerogative to bring light out of darkness and good out of evil. Surely the wrath of man shall praise Him, and the remainder of wrath He will restrain. In the light of a clearer day we may yet see that the wrath which planned and perpetrated the death of the President, was overruled by Him whose judgments are unsearchable, and His ways past finding out, for the highest welfare of all those interests which are so dear to the Christian patriot and philanthropist, and for which a loyal people have made such an unexampled sacrifice of treasure and of blood. Let us not be faithless, but believing.

“Blind unbelief is prone to err,
And scan His work in vain;
God is his own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.”

We will wait for his interpretation, and we will wait in faith, nothing doubting. He who has led us so well, and defended and prospered us so wonderfully, during the last four years of toil, and struggle, and sorrow, will not forsake us now. He may chasten, but He will not destroy. He may purify us more and more in the furnace of trial, but He will not consume us. No, no! He has chosen us as He did his people of old in the furnace of affliction, and He has said of us as He said of them, “This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth My praise.” Let our principal

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anxiety now be that this new sorrow may be a sanctified sorrow; that it may lead us to deeper repentance, to a more humbling sense of our dependence upon God, and to the more unreserved consecration of ourselves and all that we have to the cause of truth and justice, of law and order, of Liberty and good government, of pure and undefiled religion. Then, though weeping may endure for a night, joy will come in the morning. Blessed be God! despite of this great and sudden and temporary darkness, the morning has begun to dawn—the morning of a bright and glorious day, such as our country has never seen. That day will come and not tarry, and the death of an hundred Presidents and their Cabinets can never, never prevent it. While we are thus hopeful, however, let us also be humble. The occasion calls us to prayerful and tearful humiliation. It demands of us that we lie low, very low, before Him who has smitten us for our sins. O that all our rulers and all our people may bow in the dust to-day beneath the chastening hand of God! and may their voices go up to Him as one voice, and their hearts go up to Him as one heart, pleading with Him for mercy, for grace to sanctify our great and sore bereavement, and for wisdom to guide us in this our time of need. Such a united cry and pleading will not be in vain. It will enter into the ear and heart of Him who sits upon the throne, and He will say to us, as to His ancient Israel, “In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment: but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy upon thee, saith the Lord, thy Redeemer.”

I have said that the people confided in the late lamented President with a full and a loving confidence. Probably no man since the days of Washington was ever so deeply and firmly embedded and enshrined in the very hearts of the people as Abraham Lincoln. Nor was it a mistaken confi-

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dence and love. He deserved it—deserved it well—deserved it all. He merited it by his character, by his acts, and by the whole tenor, and tone, and spirit of his life. He was simple and sincere, plain and honest, truthful and just, benevolent and kind. His perceptions were quick and clear, his judgments were calm and accurate, and his purposes were good and pure beyond a question. Always and everywhere he aimed and endeavored to *be* right and to *do* right. His integrity was thorough, all-pervading, all-controlling, and incorruptible. It was the same in every place and relation, in the consideration and the control of matters great or small, the same firm and steady principle of power and beauty that shed a clear and crowning lustre upon all his other excellencies of mind and heart, and recommended him to his fellow citizens as *the* man, who, in a time of unexampled peril, when the very life of the nation was at stake, should be chosen to occupy, in the country and for the country, its highest post of power and responsibility. How wisely and well, how purely and faithfully, how firmly and steadily, how justly and successfully he did occupy that post and meet its grave demands in circumstances of surpassing trial and difficulty, is known to you all, known to the country and the world. He comprehended from the first the perils to which treason had exposed the freest and best Government on the earth, the vast interests of Liberty and humanity that were to be saved or lost forever in the urgent impending conflict; he rose to the dignity and momentousness of the occasion, saw his duty as the Chief Magistrate of a great and imperilled people, and he determined to do his duty, and his whole duty, seeking the guidance and leaning upon the arm of Him of whom it is written, “He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might He in-

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creaseth strength." Yes, he leaned upon His arm. He recognized and received the truth that the "kingdom is the Lord's, and He is the governor among the nations." He remembered that "God is in history," and he felt that nowhere had His hand and His mercy been so marvelously conspicuous as in the history of this nation. He hoped and he prayed that that same hand would continue to guide us, and that same mercy continue to abound to us in the time of our greatest need. I speak what I know, and testify what I have often heard him say, when I affirm that that guidance and mercy were the props on which he humbly and habitually leaned; they were the best hope he had for himself and for his country. Hence, when he was leaving his home in Illinois, and coming to this city to take his seat in the executive chair of a disturbed and troubled nation, he said to the old and tried friends who gathered tearfully around him and bade him farewell, "I leave you with this request: *pray for me.*" They did pray for him; and millions of other people prayed for him; nor did they pray in vain. Their prayer was heard, and the answer appears in all his subsequent history; it shines forth with a heavenly radiance in the whole course and tenor of his administration, from its commencement to its close. God raised him up for a great and glorious mission, furnished him for his work, and aided him in its accomplishment. Nor was it merely by strength of mind, and honesty of heart, and purity and pertinacity of purpose, that He furnished him; in addition to these things, He gave him a calm and abiding confidence in the overruling providence of God and in the ultimate triumph of truth and righteousness through the power and the blessing of God. This confidence strengthened him in all his hours of anxiety and toil, and inspired him with calm and cheering hope when

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others were inclining to despondency and gloom. Never shall I forget the emphasis and the deep emotion with which he said in this very room, to a company of clergymen and others, who called to pay him their respects in the darkest days of our civil conflict: "Gentlemen, my hope of success in this great and terrible struggle rests on that immutable foundation, the justice and goodness of God. And when events are very threatening, and prospects very dark, I still hope that in some way which man can not see all will be well in the end, because our cause is just, and God is on our side." Such was his sublime and holy faith, and it was an anchor to his soul, both sure and steadfast. It made him firm and strong. It emboldened him in the pathway of duty, however rugged and perilous it might be. It made him valiant for the right; for the cause of God and humanity, and it held him in a steady, patient, and unswerving adherence to a policy of administration which he thought, and which we all now think, both God and humanity required him to adopt. We admired and loved him on many accounts—for strong and various reasons: we admired his childlike simplicity, his freedom from guile and deceit, his staunch and sterling integrity, his kind and forgiving temper, his industry and patience, his persistent, self-sacrificing devotion to all the duties of his eminent position, from the least to the greatest; his readiness to hear and consider the cause of the poor and humble, the suffering and the oppressed; his charity toward those who questioned the correctness of his opinions and the wisdom of his policy; his wonderful skill in reconciling differences among the friends of the Union, leading them away from abstractions, and inducing them to work together and harmoniously for the common weal; his true and enlarged philanthropy, that knew no distinction of color or race, but

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regarded all men as brethren, and endowed alike by their Creator "with certain inalienable rights, among which are life, Liberty, and the pursuit of happiness;" his inflexible purpose that what freedom had gained in our terrible civil strife should never be lost, and that the end of the war should be the end of slavery, and, as a consequence, of rebellion; his readiness to spend and be spent for the attainment of such a triumph—a triumph, the blessed fruits of which shall be as widespreading as the earth and as enduring as the sun:—all these things commanded and fixed our admiration, and the admiration of the world, and stamped upon his character and life the unmistakable impress of *greatness*. But more sublime than any or all of these, more holy and influential, more beautiful, and strong, and sustaining, *was his abiding confidence in God and in the final triumph of truth and righteousness through Him and for His sake*. This was his noblest virtue, his grandest principle, the secret alike of his strength, his patience, and his success. And this, it seems to me, after being near him steadily, and with him often, for more than four years, is the principle by which, more than by any other, "he, being dead, yet speaketh." Yes; by his steady enduring confidence in God, and in the complete ultimate success of the cause of God, which is the cause of humanity, more than by any other way, does he now speak to us and to the nation he loved and served so well. By this he speaks to his successor in office, and charges him to "have faith in God." By this he speaks to the members of his cabinet, the men with whom he counselled so often and was associated so long, and he charges them to "have faith in God." By this he speaks to the officers and men of our noble army and navy, and, as they stand at their posts of duty and peril, he charges them to "have faith in God." By this he

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speaks to all who occupy positions of influence and authority in these sad and troublous times, and he charges them all to "have faith in God." By this he speaks to this great people as they sit in sackcloth to-day, and weep for him with a bitter wailing, and refuse to be comforted, and he charges them to "have faith in God." And by this he *will* speak through the ages and to all rulers and peoples in every land, and his message to them will be, "Cling to Liberty and right; battle for them; bleed for them; die for them, if need be; and have confidence in God." O that the voice of this testimony may sink down into our hearts to-day and every day, and into the heart of the nation, and exert its appropriate influence upon our feelings, our faith, our patience, and our devotion to the cause of freedom and humanity—a cause dearer to us now than ever before, because consecrated by the blood of its most conspicuous defender, its wisest and most fondly-trusted friend.

He is dead; but the God in whom he trusted lives, and He can guide and strengthen his successor, as He guided and strengthened him. He is dead; but the memory of his virtues, of his wise and patriotic counsels and labors, of his calm and steady faith in God lives, is precious, and will be a power for good in the country quite down to the end of time. He is dead; but the cause he so ardently loved, so ably, patiently, faithfully represented and defended—not for himself only, not for us only, but for all people in all their coming generations, till time shall be no more—that cause survives his fall, and will survive it. The light of its brightening prospects flashes cheerily to-day athwart the gloom occasioned by his death, and the language of God's united providences is telling us that, though the friends of Liberty die, Liberty itself is immortal. There is no assassin strong enough and no

weapon deadly enough to quench its inextinguishable life, or arrest its onward march to the conquest and empire of the world. This is our confidence, and this is our consolation, as we weep and mourn to-day. Though our beloved President is slain, our beloved country is saved. And so we sing of mercy as well as of judgment. Tears of gratitude mingle with those of sorrow. While there is darkness, there is also the dawning of a brighter, happier day upon our stricken and weary land. God be praised that our fallen Chief lived long enough to see the day dawn and the daystar of joy and peace arise upon the nation. He saw it, and he was glad. Alas! alas! He only saw the *dawn*. When the *sun* has risen, full-orbed and glorious, and a happy reunited people are rejoicing in its light,—alas! alas! it will shine upon his grave. But that grave will be a precious and a consecrated spot. The friends of Liberty and of the Union will repair to it in years and ages to come, to pronounce the memory of its occupant blessed, and, gathering from his very ashes, and from the rehearsal of his deeds and virtues, fresh incentives to patriotism, they will there renew their vows of fidelity to their country and their God.

And now I know not that I can more appropriately conclude this discourse, which is but a sincere and simple utterance of the heart, than by addressing to our departed President, with some slight modification, the language which Tacitus, in his life of Agricola, addresses to his venerable and departed father-in-law: "With you we may now congratulate; you are blessed, not only because your life was a career of glory, but because you were released, when, your country safe, it was happiness to die. We have lost a parent, and, in our distress, it is now an addition to our heartfelt sorrow that we had it not in our power to commune with

you on the bed of languishing, and receive your last embrace. Your dying words would have been ever dear to us; your commands we should have treasured up, and graved them on our hearts. This sad comfort we have lost, and the wound for that reason, pierces deeper. From the world of spirits behold your disconsolate family and people; exalt our minds from fond regret and unavailing grief to contemplation of your virtues. Those we must not lament; it were impiety to sully them with a tear. To cherish their memory, to embalm them with our praises, and, so far as we can, to emulate your bright example, will be the truest mark of our respect, the best tribute we can offer. Your wife will thus preserve the memory of the best of husbands, and thus your children will prove their filial piety. By dwelling constantly on your words and actions, they will have an illustrious character before their eyes, and, not content with the bare image of your mortal frame, they will have what is more valuable—the form and features of your mind. Busts and statues, like their originals, are frail and perishable. The soul is formed of finer elements, and its inward form is not to be expressed by the hand of an artist with unconscious matter—our manners and our morals may in some degree trace the resemblance. All of you that gained our love and raised our admiration still subsists, and will ever subsist, preserved in the minds of men, the register of ages, and the records of fame. Others, who had figured on the stage of life and were the worthies of a former day, will sink, for want of a faithful historian, into the common lot of oblivion, inglorious and unremembered; but you, our lamented friend and head, delineated with truth, and fairly consigned to posterity, will survive yourself, and triumph over the injuries of time."