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ADDRESS

ON THE DAY OF

FASTING AND PRAYER

APPOINTED BY THE

PRESIDENT OF THE CONFEDERATE STATES,

June 13, 1861.

DELIVERED IN

ST. GEORGE'S CHURCH, FREDERICKSBURG, VA.,

BY

REV. A. M. RANDOLPH.

FREDERICKSBURG:
PRINTED AT THE RECORDER JOB OFFICE.
1861.

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CORRESPONDENCE.

FREDERICKSBURG, June 15th, 1861.

REV A. M. RANDOLPH,
Rector of St. George's Church.

Dear Sir—We, the undersigned, having heard with much pleasure the discourse delivered by you on Thursday, the 13th inst., set apart as a day of fasting, humiliation, and prayer, and heartily approving and endorsing it, respectfully request that you will furnish us a copy of the same for publication and distribution.

Very truly, your friends,

M. SLAUGHTER,
JOHN TAYLOE LOMAX,
D. H. GORDON,
T. B. BARTON,
WM. ALLEN,
J. H. WALLACE,
WM. K. GORDON,
JNO. COAKLEY,

F. M. BRAXTON,
JOHN F. SCOTT,
WM. H. FITZHUGH,
R. C. L. MONCURE,
CHARLES HERNDON,
H. T. MINOR,
THOMAS F. KNOX,
WM. T. HART.

FREDERICKSBURG, June 17th, 1861.

Gentlemen—I thank you for your approval of my address and for the kind terms in which you request a copy of it for publication. If you think that good may result from its publication, I cheerfully place it at your disposal.

Very respectfully and truly,

A. M. RANDOLPH.

To Messrs. M. Slaughter, John Tayloe Lomax, D. H. Gordon,
and others.

ADDRESS.

IN obedience to the summons of our chief magistrate, and from a sense of the appropriateness of the observance to the circumstances which surround us, we have come up to-day to the house of prayer.—From the spirit which pervades the proclamation itself, as well as from our knowledge of the sources from which it has emanated, we have reason to conclude that it proceeds from christian principle and a sincere conviction of personal and national dependence upon God, and not from deference to official routine, or decent respect for ancient usage. In coming here to-day we, as a people, are supposed to be prompted by the same principle, and animated by genuine religious feelings. And yet if it is true, that a strong and spontaneous impulse of religious emotion has brought us together, and that rulers and people are constrained to this observance by religious principle—if the simple conviction has taken an earnest hold upon the conscience of this nation, that God is indeed our ruler, that his Providence guides our destiny, that plans are ours, but their prospering or overthrow is with him—if the Searcher of hearts and the Hearer of prayer sees in our observance of this day, a genuine humiliation and a sincere devotion, then we have reason to be both thankful and hopeful. Thankful to God whose spirit has moved the nation thus to do homage to his authority and to invoke his guidance; for it is from the inspiration of his Holy Spirit that all good counsels and all holy desires proceed. To his direction we owe that marvellous wis-

dom, which has presided over the organization and administration of our government, and the moderation, dignity, and purity, which have characterized our national statesmanship. To his merciful Providence are due the successes, which have so far crowned our efforts to defend our homes, and preserve our political liberties, and more directly still, from God our Father comes the blessing of this national observance of fasting and prayer. The suggestion originated with God and not with our rulers. "The powers that be are ordained of God," and hence rulers, when they fulfil their mission, serve as his agents, and the channels of communication between him and the people they represent. They are, or ought to be, a band of brave-hearted, consecrated men, who care more for the worship of God than for the applause of men, or the emoluments of office—who hold no parley with selfish schemes—who make no compromise with corruption—who will take no price for conscience—whose purity cannot be seduced by the whisperings of ambition—who use the sanctions of government as sacred trusts, committed to their keeping by the Supreme Lawgiver—who dispense the offices and manage the machinery of the State, as under God's eye, and not for the purposes of party drill, or the promotion of individual interests—men who go up from closets of prayer to their council chambers, and who, in every perplexity of statesmanship, fall back upon the oracles of scripture, and the laws of Jehovah. Such is the ideal of character, which belongs to the civil magistrate, and thus the State through him becomes the subject of a divine government, and its institutions and offices are loyal to the heavenly supremacy. Hence we may believe, that it is the voice of an over-ruling Providence, speaking to us through the chief magistrate, which has called us to the observance of this day. As God has ordained the Sabbath to afford us an opportunity for spiritual cul-

ture, to be a day set apart from all worldly cares, and consecrated to the soul's communion with Heaven and the realities of the world to come, so, as a mean to some great good, he has given us this day of fasting, humiliation, and prayer. It may be, that he has attached to its sincere observance a national blessing, greater than we look for, and certainly far greater than we deserve. Prayer is the channel through which he pours out his Spirit and dispenses his blessings, the hand which lays hold on his omnipotence, and appropriates his promises, and secures his help. It is a terrible judgment of an angry God upon individuals and upon nations, when, leaving the heart unvisited and unhumiliated by the inspiration of prayer, he gives it over to the spirit of self-dependence, and self-congratulation, and vain-glory.

An ungodly government may seem to succeed for a time, but whilst it is boasting of its material progress, and trusting in the strength of its own arm, the Providence of God is only raising it to a more conspicuous post, in order to render more widely instructive the mockery of its triumph and the story of its fall. But when he brings a nation to its knees—when he calls people and rulers to come up to his temple, and bend before his mercy-seat and acknowledge him “King of kings and Lord of lords,” he means it as a promise of his help, and an earnest of his favor.

We thank God, then, that he has turned the hearts of this people to himself in fasting and prayer—that he has thus brought us to feel our weakness, and to lean upon his strength—that he has humbled our human pride, and inspired the nation's heart with christian faith. If this be so, and these manifestations be real and not a sanctimonious pageant—if the result of this national trial has been to turn us devoutly and earnestly to the living God, then we have already gained a greater victory than any which the

history of this struggle can record. A people whose God is the Lord, who, believing themselves in the right, appeal to the justice of heaven to sustain them, who bring their faith in God to nerve their arms, and inspire their efforts in behalf of a cause which they regard as sacred—who kneel down to pray on their battle fields, and acknowledge him for their leader, who alone is the giver of all victory—such a people cannot be conquered, because the feelings which animate them and the principles which support them, are from their very nature *unconquerable*. Governments, which have tried other means, and appealed to lower principles to secure for themselves an immunity against evil, and to organize their institutions upon a basis of permanency, have succumbed in the hour of national trial, and marched down to ruin as men travel to their graves.

Selfishness may amass wealth and build up an outward show of prosperity, but it cannot sustain itself through the ordeal of suffering, for suffering demands sacrifice. Tyranny may triumph to-day, but to-morrow it is tried in the crucible of adversity, and found wanting. When the tide of success begins to ebb, conscience makes it cowardly, and turns its boasting into shame and confusion. In the furrows of usurpation and unjust conquest a nation sows the seeds of its own dissolution. Ambition grows weary of glory, and like the kingdoms of old, loosens its hold upon conquered provinces, and leaving its broad empire to rot, it sinks enervated into the lap of luxury and national corruption. The flames of fanaticism must sooner or later burn out, and leave in a nation's heart the bitter ashes of disappointment and shame. The zeal inspired by the falsehoods of corrupt party leaders is destined to a terrible recoil, and the wrath of a deceived and bankrupt people returns upon a selfish ruler to crush him with its execrations, and to blot his name and memory from the pages of

its history. A false principle, a fanatical cry can never bear up under the self-denials and disasters of war. Men cannot march up and look danger and death face to face, unless conscience goes with them. Nothing but convictions of truth, and devotion to right ever yet gave, in the long run, victory to a nation or an individual. Leaving out of the question the mere power by which it is supported, falsehood contains the elements of its own dissolution. You may fortify and surround it with armies and artillery, but from its intrinsic weakness it will fall at last. Wherever a nation has perished, it has been the weight of its falsehood, and secret corruption, which has dragged it down to ruin. It was so when the ghostly hand wrote Belshazzar's doom upon the palace wall — "Thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting." It was not an arbitrary sentence of wrath, but the witness of secret corruption, and the proclamation of the law that God will bring nations to the bar of trial, where they must be purified or they must perish. It was not the battle-axe of Hun and Vandal that shook the fabric of the Roman empire until it crumbled, but it was corruption within which blasted it at the core. And so all along the course of human history, governments have grown prosperous only to grow weak by corruption, and die the death of suicides. Thus history is a prolonged vindication of a moral law, that a thing which is false in principle can never succeed, though every external advantage may combine for its support, because the wrong in it is all the time sapping the foundations of its stability. The success of a cause depends in a great degree upon the strength of the motives with which it inspires its advocates, and the real strength of motive power is always in proportion to the truth and the justice of its principles. It has never happened in the history of mankind that ambition, or fanaticism or thirst for conquest have furnished mo-

tives sufficient to impel a people to fight and toil and die year after year and generation after generation, but when the cause of liberty and the defence of sacred rights have called men to the field of duty, the pages of history are crowded with examples of self-sacrifice, and patient suffering, and individual heroism. It needs the support of principle and the sense of duty to enable men to suffer for a cause, and to wait patiently for its postponed victory. Let me illustrate it by an example taken from our own history. The darkest hour of our Revolutionary contest, was during that memorable winter when the little army of Washington crouched naked and starving upon the bleak snows of Valley Forge. There was nothing to hold that little band together but the bond of fidelity and devotion to principle that absorbed all personal considerations. They would have welcomed the drum-beat to summon them to conflict and warm them with the hope of victory, but instead they heard only the winter's wind rattling through the bare trees, and gazed upon a cheerless landscape and a leaden sky, without a bow of promise, and yet they stood unflinching at their posts, believing it was their duty to stand there, and feeling that in some way, they knew not how, God would give triumph to the right. Such examples teach us that it is the righteousness of a cause which in the end must decide every contest between individuals and nations, no matter what may be the disparity in numbers and external resources. God has so ordered our human natures as to render it impossible for us to sustain ourselves in wrong in the face of opposition and trial. The character of perseverance and unconquerable ardor, which grows with disaster and revives out of defeat, belongs only to truth. How otherwise are we to account for the rise and progress of Christianity as contrasted with the unprogressive character of every other religion?

False religions are paralyzed by the uncertainty and consciousness of error with which they are held, and consequently we see none with martyrs and missionaries. They lack that aggressive energy which springs from certain belief, and thus they have stood still for ages. But when the Gospel was revealed to man, it at once inspired a spirit of self-sacrifice and missionary zeal which was new in the history of the world. Its disciples proclaimed it in tones of certainty, as men who felt that they had a reality for which they were willing to suffer, and, if need be, to die. Their language was, "I know in whom I have believed," "We speak that we do know and testify that we have seen," and so they went forth homeless and friendless to plant their Lord's banner amid the wastes of heathendom. They were calm and confident before rulers and kings, or when they were led out to martyrdom, because they knew that what they proclaimed was truth, and truth has the power to take hold upon human nature, and nerve it to endure and suffer patiently in its behalf.

The Gospel of Christ has waged a warfare for eighteen centuries, against worldliness and idolatry, steadily conquering its adversaries and widening the boundaries of its fold, infusing each successive generation with a missionary zeal which no opposition could affright, and no discouragements dampen. It is thus with all truth, and justice, and righteousness. God has endued these principles with a power over human nature which renders men incapable of cowardice and invincible in their defence.

If we analyze patriotism we find that it is nothing more or less than loyalty to these principles. When not a mere blind instinct, it is an outgrowth of religion and a part of our faith in God; for what is it but a self-sacrificing devotion to justice, and the protection of rights, embodied in the organization of the government, and carried out by rulers and subjects in

its practical administration. Patriotism, according to this definition, cannot be an allegiance to a government as against conscience and convictions of truth. Indeed, that can be no true fealty which is emptied of the heart, and opposed to a sense of right. The oath which is extorted by violence is only a solemn trifling with the dignity of the soul and a mockery to God, unless it be that words are the only realities, and truth a figment, and conscience a dream of metaphysicians. Centuries ago it was customary to burn men at the stake or to stretch their bodies on the rack in order to change their religious beliefs, but after ages of persecution and martyrdom it began to dawn upon the world that the employment of force to produce conviction is a manifest absurdity—that flames for example cannot reach the conscience—that the rack can never make a man believe in the doctrine of the Trinity, and that if it make him say he believes it when he does not, all that the torture does is to make him a liar and a hypocrite in addition to his being still a heretic. Thus slowly and by painful steps the principle of toleration came to be recognized, and persecution and proscription for opinion's sake were regarded as exploded relics of a barbarous and unthinking age. But error, which is apparently dead and consigned to darkness, sometimes revives after the lapse of centuries and breathes again through some new form, and adapts itself to altered circumstances—nevertheless, it is the old error which lives again—whether we behold it in the age of Nero, when the flames of Christian martyrdom lit up by night the emperor's palace-gardens, or in the *auto da fe* of Philip of Spain, or in free (?) America, in the city of New York, where peaceable men and women are threatened by fanatical mobs because they choose to think that the government may not be infallible, in each it is the same principle of intolerance, the denial of the right of private judgment

which lies at the foundation of all despotism. To call this patriotism is to transform Satan into an angel of light. Patriotism is not the support of what we believe to be wrong, though it is done in the name and by the power of the government; it is not loyalty to usurpation: nor is treason a protest against violations of the Constitution. The widespread delusion which has seized upon the northern mind, is embodied in the popular cry, emanating in some instances from great and good men, we must support our rulers right or wrong, as if the highest duty of citizens to the State be not to preserve its laws and its liberties inviolate, even though the blow is inflicted by the hand of its constituted authorities. But this fanaticism would say, we must cease to trouble ourselves about violation of law, we must throw to the winds the great principles organized in our Constitution, we must submit to the overthrow of our liberties, and the righteous foundations of the government, for the sake of the government itself. The fearful error is, that it is the machinery of the government rather than its principles which must be preserved—that the forms and emblems and functionaries are all the good of a government apart from the spirit which animates them and the principles which they represent. Patriotism is not attachment to the parchment of a Constitution, to the insignia of authority, or to a strip of painted cloth; nor is it reverence for the persons of rulers, or affection for the emoluments of office, or enthusiasm for a national air. Like the Gospel it is spiritual and not formal—it is a reality of the soul and not an external badge—it is the child of religion, because it is the love of justice and the protection of rights, which are the foundations of God's moral government, and which find their highest expression in the divine character. It is hallowed by trust, and sanctified by prayer, and inspired by faith—a faith that believes that truth is

stronger than money or talents or policy or numbers, which cannot let go its confidence in the final success of righteousness, because its hope is in a righteous God.

A nation bends here to-day before the judge of all the earth, and through the stillness of this hour sends up its solemn appeal to Heaven.

We come to the church not to hear a sermon, but to adore the Lord of Hosts and to supplicate light. We bring our patriotism to a throne of grace to test its sincerity by the fervour of its intercessions. We may be deceived in our estimates of ourselves and of others by outward manifestations; we may mistake selfish feelings of anxiety for our imperilled personal interests for love of country, and hatred towards our enemies for patriotic zeal, but when we draw near to God either in public or private devotion, if our suffering country finds no place in our prayers, do we deserve the name of patriot? Year after year we are called together, by the executive or ecclesiastical authorities, to observe days set apart for thanksgiving, or fasting and prayer. I fear that the spirit which should animate such observances has oftentimes been wanting, and that in many instances it has been a respect for time-honored usage harder to disregard than to observe, more than the spontaneous impulse of a whole people, which has led to the appointment of such occasions. But the present circumstances of real need and exigency, so new to us as a people, and so dark, because our past has been so bright, must, if any thing ever will, shake us out of religious formalism. The solemnity of our position should save us from the frivolity of empty devotion. With a mighty cloud gathering around and overshadowing us, and a burden of suspense upon our hearts, we cannot keep earnestness out of our prayers. God, in mercy to our sinful indifference to religious obligations, has granted to us the privilege

of a day of prayer. In this hour of solemn stillness, before the shock of battle sends a wail of bereavement through the land and fills the air with "farewells to the dying and mournings for the dead," it is meet that the nation should be here pleading that if it be possible this cup may pass from it, but nevertheless God's will be done, his justice triumph, and his glory be manifested before all nations. It is an observance that meets the wants of our tenderest relations and sympathies. It is natural that the mother's heart should bend in this christian temple and ask the Father, who encircles all in his Providential care, to remember her boy in camp and on the battle field. It is right that brothers and sisters, children and parents should seal their dearest ties in prayers for blessings on the absent ones, gone to defend the purity of Home and the sacredness of political liberty. There is touching pathos in these hours of devotion which we have spent together—we know not what will be on the morrow. The future from its untried depths throws a gloomy shadow on our present—the heart least anxious now may be the first to bend beneath this dispensation of God, and the happiest home-circle in our midst may at any moment feel the desolation of bereavement. The common danger should draw our hearts closer in love and mutual sympathy; above all it should lead us to lean on the Saviour, who has borne all our experiences of pain, and is more than friend or brother. It should subdue our frivolities of thought and character, and plant in us the resolve, to repent of our vain and worldly past and henceforth to live nearer to the peaceful realities of our holy faith, since there alone is security in the midst of all change and the "hope that maketh not ashamed." It is a time for vital religion to show its triumph, because worldliness is feeling and owning its vanity. It is a time for all to begin anew in the life of religious earnestness now

that Providence is shaking us away from our idols. Let all hypocrisy and insincerity be banished from our religion—let the spirit of slander, and harshness, and personal enmities, be driven out of our hearts, and let us clasp hands as brethren in a cause which demands of us common sacrifices and united efforts. Let a calm confidence in the justice of God take the place of vain boasting, and the excitement of idle rumors. Let humbleness for our personal and national sins renew our strength for national and personal trials. Let us go from our closets to our posts of duty, and make our patriotism pure and fervent by prayer. It is an inspiring sentence which opens the book of our national history, this day of fasting and supplication. Like the first morning prayer before the toil and the temptation of the day; like the baptism of the child into the christian soldier-ship “against sin, the world and the devil,” so we bring our new born nation to the temple of Jehovah to baptize it to-day with our christian faith, to consecrate it to Christ and his cause, to truth, liberty and justice, and to invoke upon its rulers, its people, and its Constitution, the benediction of the King of kings.

May God Almighty, the God of our fathers, the God of our beloved country, the God of our hallowed temples and our sacred homes nerve our arms for this conflict, and strengthen our hearts with an unconquerable devotion to principle and love of freedom, and “cover our heads in this our hour of battle.”

