

How to Renew our National Strength.

A SERMON

PREACHED IN

Christ Church, Savannah,

On Friday, November 15th, 1861,

BEING THE DAY OF

HUMILIATION, FASTING, AND PRAYER,

APPOINTED BY

THE PRESIDENT OF THE CONFEDERATE STATES.

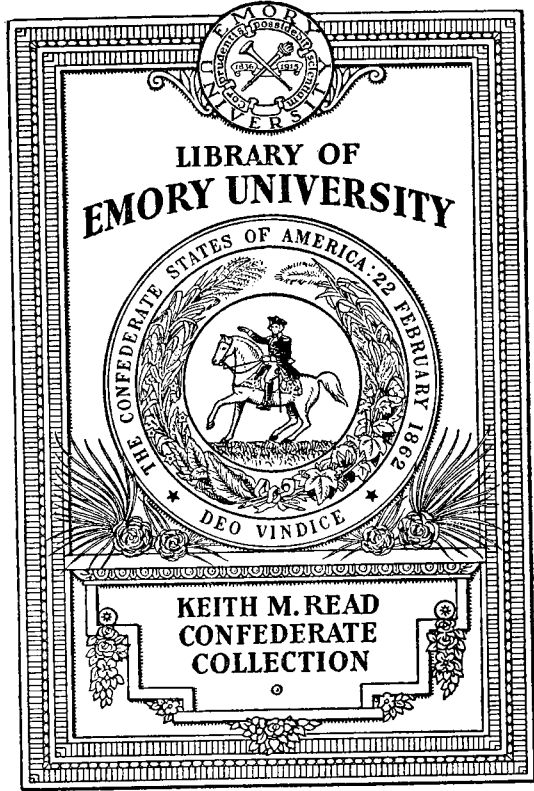
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— ISAIAH XL: 31.

SAVANNAH:

STEAM POWER PRESS OF JOHN M. COOPER & CO.

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To the Clergy of the Diocese of Georgia.

The President of the Confederate States having issued his proclamation appointing Friday, Nov. 15th, as a Day of Fasting, Humiliation and Prayer, and inviting all the citizens of the Confederate States to unite on that day in imploring the blessings of Almighty God upon our arms, that He may give us victory over our enemies, and preserve our homes and altars from pollution, and secure to us the restoration of peace and prosperity—

Now, therefore, I, STEPHEN ELLIOTT, Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Georgia, do direct the clergy of said Diocese to assemble their congregations upon that day, and to keep the Fast in all humility of mind and spirit.

Upon the occasion of the Fast the clergy will use the following service :

Morning prayer as usual to the Psalter.

Psalms for the day—27th, 77th, 130th.

1st Lesson—Isaiah, chapter XL.

2d Lesson—Romans, chapter XII.

Use the Lesser Litany.

Immediately before the General Thanksgiving introduce the confession which precedes the Epistle in the service for Ash Wednesday, and the following Prayer :

“O Lord God, that dwellest in the Heavens and who reignest over all the kingdoms of men, we praise and bless Thy name that, in our troubles and perils, Thou hast stood on our side and pleaded for us against them that rose up against us. It was Thy hand, O Lord, and the help of Thy mercy that relieved us. Thou, O Lord, didst blast the designs of our enemies with the breath of Thy displeasure, and to Thee we ascribe the praise and honor of our present safety. Perpetuate Thy mercies to us; let a guard of Holy Angels stand round about us and about all Thy people, like the hills, for our defence and safety, that we may be inaccessible by all the attempts of our enemies. Let us receive the blessings which our Lord Jesus Christ left unto His Church, even the peace of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, to whom be all honor and glory, now and forever.” Amen.

Given under my hand, this November 11th, A. D. 1861.

STEPHEN ELLIOTT,

Bishop of the Diocese of Georgia.

A Sermon.

ISAIAH XL: 31.—“*But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint.*”

We are realizing more and more every day, my beloved hearers, that we are engaged in a conflict which will demand all our strength, and will severely try our fortitude. We did not enter upon it without long forbearance, and earnest consideration. We postponed the evil day from year to year, hoping that there might be some change in the national policy, or some remembrance of what was due from brethren to brethren. Long years ago we were forced to calculate the value of the Union, but even when we had decided, that in an economical point of view, it was worth but little to us, we yet clung to it with feelings which rose above all calculation—feelings of reverence for the past, and of devotion to the cause of constitutional liberty. Although our statesmen and especially He, whose understanding seemed to have been endowed by God with almost the grasp of a prophetic spirit, had warned us to prepare for the consequences which have now come upon us, we could but slowly bring ourselves to believe that such a glorious fabric of Government would be sacrificed upon the altars of avarice and fanaticism. It was not until we clearly perceived that our choice lay between an armed contest for our liberties, and an inevitable destruction of the whole framework of our social life, that we determined to meet the steadily approaching danger, and to leave to our children the memory, at least, of our struggles, and of our sacrifices. We counted the cost deliberately; we discussed for years the elements of power which would be found upon the one side and the other; we weighed in the balances of a severe

judgment, the evils which threatened us on either hand, and with a full understanding of what was before us, of the deep solemnity of the act, of our responsibilities to God as well as to man, of the terrible struggle we should have to wage, of the sacrifices we should be called upon to endure—sacrifices of affection far more dreadful than those of interest—we committed ourselves to Him who ruleth righteously, and assumed our place among the nations of the earth. This thing was not done hastily, nor in a corner; it should have come unexpectedly to no man. For twenty years have the feelings which have at last brought it about, been intensifying and the purposes maturing. It could not have been prevented, save by such a miraculous intervention as God neither vouchsafes in these later days, nor did the Union deserve. The evil day might have been postponed; but such postponement would have been fatal to us. When we saw clearly that it must be done, then our welfare consisted in its being quickly done.

But although quickly done, and decidedly done, it was the execution of an act long deliberated upon and well matured. The determination was as great upon the one side as the other—the determination of a majority to over-ride all constitutional barriers, in order to grasp permanent power—the determination of a minority to preserve its constitutional rights, or to perish in the attempt. And this long deliberation, together with the mighty interests involved in this struggle, satisfies me that we are only at the beginning of a long and bloody conflict, and that it is the duty of every one to consider it so and to prepare himself for such a contingency. A hasty quarrel may easily be settled, but a quarrel which has been festering for a quarter of a century, must be fought out. Passion is very different from hatred and malice; the one may be satisfied with a momentary struggle, the other will continue their work of evil until they have glutted their vengeance, or have been utterly defeated. I can see no room for hope of any early or decided settlement of this question. National exhaustion, foreign interference, commercial necessities, can none of them be counted upon as successful mediators. They may become important elements in the question at some dis-

tant period, but not now. We must first pass through what we have deliberately said, as a sovereign power, that we anticipated and as solemnly announced that we were prepared for. No new or strange thing has come upon us. The assertion of national rights against irresponsible power has always produced long wars, because the one party is striving to regain a prestige which it has lost, while the other is battling for right, for conscience, for its altars and its firesides. The recollection of our revolutionary war should teach us what to expect in a struggle of this sort. Nothing was more foolish than the continuance of that war, nothing more hopeless than any successful issue for England, and yet, from wounded pride, from unwillingness to give up the brightest jewels of the British crown, it was protracted for seven long years. And so will it be with this; success will be alternate, but never decisive. Hope will be buoyed up by partial victories, until at last, wearied and exhausted, peace will be wrung from our enemies through sheer necessity. But that is far off, and ere we reach that point, we shall have been disciplined by much sorrow and purified in the furnace of affliction.

It is, I have no doubt, from such a view of the question as this, that the wise Statesman, whom we have placed at the head of our affairs, has decided upon the defensive policy which he is pursuing. An ambitious man, or a rash man, would have adopted a more brilliant and dashing career, but would have risked every thing by his movements. Defeat would have been almost irretrievable, and even success would have exhausted us if bought with the sacrifice of our best blood. Wars must be conducted according to their purposes. Wars of conquest, such as those of Alexander, or Cæsar, or Napoleon, demand a perpetual advance from victory to victory, but wars maintained for national independence, must be, necessarily, defensive. The stronger party must be forced to break his power against the barriers of nature, or the intrenchments of art. Space had more to do with the final overthrow of Napoleon than all his enemies combined. And this was Washington's policy during our revolution, and Wellington's

policy for the deliverance of Portugal and Spain. It is not a popular mode of warfare, but it is a wise one, and demands a high degree of moral courage to pursue and maintain. And one of those sins for which we should humble ourselves before God this day, is the murmuring in which we have been indulging because we have been restrained from aggression, and a waste of human life. Not satisfied with having maintained our whole ground—with having repulsed our enemies in successive battles—with having confined him, when he has been victorious, to islands and deserts—with having received from God the most signal manifestations of His presence and favor, we have been tempted to pursue the wretched policy of our enemies, and to force upon our Statesmen and Generals, a line of conduct which has been rejected by their mature judgment and superior knowledge of all the circumstances of the case. What greater mortification could we have inflicted upon our enemy, than we have inflicted, by confining all his movements to a given line, and whipping him whenever he dared to cross it? What more depressing influence could we bring to bear upon the people of the Government against which we are contending, than the forced inactivity of their Generals and armies? It is already producing its effect among them, and their constant change of commanding officers, proves their dissatisfaction and their restlessness. And we must do the same thing here and every where; confine our enemies to the narrowest possible limits, and force them to war against all the natural defences of the country, as well as the artificial ones. They will soon be tired of such a warfare, for they must carry it on at an enormous expense, liable to all the contingencies of the ocean, with nothing but a desert around them, while we shall be in the midst of all our resources, suffering only the inconveniences which may arise from the abandonment of a limited line of coast, and the interruption of our foreign commerce. By this defensive policy, we equalize ourselves with our enemies, superior as they are in numbers and equipments. Our defences neutralize their arms, and the preservation of our men from slaughter will give us very soon, under the strict discipline of the camps, an

army of veterans along our whole line, which will be irresistible when it is called upon to move. Our danger, in a contest with a population so much larger than our own, is that we shall have no reserve, if we too rapidly exhaust our men. But by caring for ever man's life, by considering it a sacred trust given to the Republic, and not to be expended except for necessity sake, we shall have enough and more than enough of whole hearted and whole souled men to carry us successfully through the conflict. Nothing is so disastrous to us, at this juncture, as the destruction of confidence, among the people, in those who have been set over us by our own deliberate choice. Let us, as a nation, repent this day of this sin; for the divisions of Reuben, let there be great searchings of heart; let us all learn a new lesson under this our new Government, and endeavor to regain a virtue almost lost in this western world—the virtue of reverence—and the lesson of respecting, obeying, and honoring authority, for authority's sake.

But besides this evil of discord which has lifted its head among us, and which we pray may be exorcised by this day's humiliation, we have been manifesting, as a consequence of our repeated victories, a spirit of presumption, which is very much akin to the sin of saying—"My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this victory" Immediately after our great and signal victory at Manassas, God was in all our thoughts; we praised Him, we magnified Him, we glorified Him, we gave thanks to His most glorious Majesty for His wonderful interposition in our behalf; but as time has rolled on, the arm of flesh has been gradually taking the place, in our language at least, if not in our thoughts, of the power of God. We have been hearing, of late, a great deal more about the skill of our Generals, about the valor of our troops, about the cowardice of our foes, than about God as our shield and defence. We have talked as if all that was necessary to victory, was that our troops should be let loose upon our enemies, and as if He, who ruleth in all the armies of the sky, had nothing to do with success or defeat. No spirit can be more fatal to us than this, for while it is especi-

ally hateful to God, it is the very worst policy in the world to despise one's enemies. We should have proper confidence in ourselves; we should go into battle praying and trusting that we may be victorious, but the moment that we consider victory as necessarily chained to our chariot wheels, we are in imminent danger both from God and man—from God, because He will not have His glory given to another, and from man, "because pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall." If we cherish this vain glorious temper, God will assuredly lay His hand upon those very things of which we make our boast—will take away our brave and skilful commanders by the edge of the sword, or will set them at discord among themselves, or will render them incompetent in the field—will blow the breath of His anger upon our gallant soldiers, and fill them with a fear unknown to them before, because supernatural and divine. He is jealous of his glory, and especially jealous when he has taken a people, with their rulers and armies, so manifestly under His own guidance, as he has this people. He is leading us by His own way to our independence and rest, and we must learn to feel, as well as to acknowledge, the song of thanksgiving which David sang before the Lord in the hour of his prosperity: "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as Head above all."

And what shall I say of those more private sins which are disfiguring the fair face of our great national structure, and which will bring destruction with them if they continue to increase, the sins of intemperance, of profaneness, of irreligion, of extortion. In the first burst of enthusiasm, when with the most solemn feelings, we were entering upon this our great work, religion seemed to hold paramount sway. Every body turned to God in Christ as his refuge and help; every body was lifted above low vices by the sublimity of the cause, and the greatness of the work which he had undertaken to do. It was a glorious moral spectacle which these sovereign States

presented, when in prayer and with fasting, they placed themselves in the hands of God and committed themselves to His keeping. And cannot that state of things continue? Must God's blessing and goodness forever work ingratitude and irreligion? Must the very success he has vouchsafed us turn our heads and hearts, and deliver us over to ourselves again? Must the noble virtues of temperance, of sobriety, of self-denial, always die out with the necessities which have produced them? Must the graces of prayer and of supplication be laid aside the moment that God has given us the victory and fulfilled our heart's desire? God forbid! Let us rise up to the height of this great argument, and put beneath our feet every thing that may lower and degrade it. We are moving in the light of God's countenance, and the waving of His hand and the flashing of His eye are almost visible to us. And shall we, in such a presence, forget our dignity and the sublimity of our cause, and prove ourselves unworthy to be His agents and His instruments? No man should presume to touch this ark of our liberty with unhallowed hands and with unclean lips, and until he proves that he can control himself, should have no part nor lot in this great enterprise. What we need in this sacred conflict, is deep earnestness, religious enthusiasm, a solemn sense of responsibility, a devotedness to the right and the true. The time is past for levity, for dissipation, for a trifling with God's holy name, for a disregard of sacred things. We have now entered upon work which demands all man's self-possession and woman's self-sacrifice, which will separate the wheat from the chaff, the pure gold from the worthless dross.

But there is a sin which should, more than all, humiliate us this day, and cause us to blush for very shame—the sin of Faithlessness. God has rebuked us for it so lovingly in the last day or two by heaping new mercies upon us, and turning the silver lining of the cloud towards us, that we can only bow ourselves down to the dust in sadness, and confess our unworthiness of His care. Alas for poor, weak human nature! How it is tied down to flesh and sense! How it trusts only in what it can see, and find support only in the visible

and the perishable! Sad and perpetual memento of the fall, manifested under every religious dispensation, and clearly seen among ourselves at this very moment! If a special Providence can be proved to a people, it has been proved to us; it has followed us in every step of our national life; it has been seen by land and by sea, in sunshine and in storm, upon the battle field and in the council chamber. We may strive to put it from us, but it comes in some new shape, more striking than the last, until proud unbelief is silenced, if not convinced. And when these signal fires of His presence are lighted all around us, can we still doubt and distrust? Why so faithless, my beloved people? Why so unwilling to acknowledge God's presence and God's love? Why so loth to receive Him as Emmanuel—God with us? Is it that you fear to think He is so near you, that you shrink from contact with so holy a Being? O ye of little Faith! When will you make God yours by reciprocating His love, and receiving Him as your very present help in every time of trouble?

Because of these sins, my beloved people, and the weakness which they have produced in the national life, our chief magistrate has exhorted us to wait upon the Lord, that we may renew our strength. Thanks be to God that he seems to know where a nation's weakness can be repaired, and that he leads his people to the altars of the church, and not to the broken cisterns of the world, for the renewal of their vigor. "Happy is the people that is in such a case; for they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint." Man looks for a renewal of strength, in the increase of troops, in the arrival of arms, in the arrangement of defences, and these, as secondary causes of victory, are of the very highest importance, but of what good are they all unless, at the same time, we wait upon the Lord, and supplicate Him to revive the Heart? The value of troops, of arms, of fortifications, depends upon the courage of those who use them; upon the strength of Heart which is behind them—and that comes from God. He can encourage, and He can make afraid! In His power are the hearts of the very bravest, and from Him do they derive

their energy, their endurance, their fortitude. Many a man who does not pray himself, is sustained by the prayers of God's people, who are behind him, supplicating the Lord and crying for His help. When the brave and youthful Joshua went out to battle against Amalek, Israel prevailed in the battle so long as Moses held up his hand toward God; but when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. Let us believe, my beloved people, what is indicated by this scriptural example, and whenever we find our armies or ourselves fainting in spirit, or weary in sacrifice, let us lift up our hands afresh to the Lord and renew our strength at the throne of Grace. "He giveth power to the faint: and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint."

But not only is it for our armies that a constant renewal of strength will be required, but for the whole nation engaged in this solemn controversy. As I said in the beginning of my sermon, we entered into this conflict after having counted the cost, and after repeated public declarations that we were ready to do and to suffer all things for the cause in which we were engaged. But the sternness of reality is often very much beyond the anticipation or the expectation. And when that reality first comes home to us, we are tempted to faint and grow weary, and to be despondent beyond the necessities of the occasion. We imagine that our individual sufferings are the sufferings of the whole nation; that our personal sacrifices are felt alike by all, and that our cause is waning before the irresistible weight of power and resources. But that is only, my beloved people, because our minds, or our imaginations, are filled with those things which are immediately about us, to the exclusion of other parts of the field, just as an object which is very near the eye absorbs the whole vision, and destroys for the time the ability to see beyond. We are fainting and growing weary; our hearts are longing for the flesh pots of Egypt, for the times when peace and quiet were around us,

when trade and commerce flourished, when the golden harvest was gathered without hindrance or alarm. Not, for a single moment, that any one of us would really prefer that inglorious condition of colonial vassalage to even the sternest severities of the conflict, but that the temptation intrudes itself upon the weakness of human nature, and upon the weariness of the body and the spirit. Our support, my beloved people, in such moments, is in God; He must and He will renew our strength. "When my soul fainted within me," said Jonah, "I remembered the Lord: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy Temple, for salvation is of the Lord." And, surely, if in answer to our prayers, God did no more than bring back to our remembrance all His mercies of old, they would be enough to give us confidence in the darkest hour which might come upon us. A year has elapsed since we commenced this conflict—commenced it in uncertainty, in weakness, without union, seemingly without the means of carrying it on for any long period of time. Compare our condition now, and see whether there is anything in the aspect of affairs to cause your hearts to faint. What progress has the enemy made? He has taken one post upon the barren sands of the Atlantic, which the winds and the waves are forcing him to abandon, and with a mighty armament—the largest, perhaps, of the century—fitted out at an enormous expense, he is preparing to ravage our coasts. He cannot advance into the interior unless we cease to pray to God, and thus permit our hearts to faint within us, and our strength to fail. Meanwhile we are fighting and conquering in the enemy's country, at least upon debatable land, and are driving him back whenever and wherever he advances. We have an abundance of food. God is dropping arms into our hands, as if from the skies, and our finances are not disordered. Every foreign enterprise which we have undertaken has succeeded, and Europe is fast getting to sympathize with us in our conflict. If, under these circumstances, we faint or grow weary, we shall not be worthy of our ancestry. It is time to talk of such things when, like Washington, we shall be reduced to a handful of soldiers, treading the snows barefoot, half-clad, without arms, without

powder, and retreating, almost the last hope of our liberties, before a victorious army; or, like Marion, are driven to the swamps to feed upon the roots of the earth. We seem to forget, at times, that we are a mighty nation, organized, equipped, with our armies in the field, and our manufactories at work, dependent upon nobody for our success, but upon God! We are stronger this day than the enemy is—stronger in our union, in the skill of our generals, in the determination of our troops, in the cause in which we are engaged. We are stronger in the permanence of our resources, and in our ability to carry on a protracted warfare. All we require, is a constant renewal of our strength through Faith, and a looking towards God; is such a spiritual intercourse with Him as shall keep Him on our side, for truly is He our strength and our salvation. “If God be for us, who can be against us?” And that He is for us, He tells us every day—tells us so plainly that unless we believe him, we must count him a liar. And if for us now, why should He turn against us? He will turn against us only if we forsake or neglect Him—only if we are presumptuous enough to say, “My hand and the might of my power,”—only if we put our trust in man, or in the son of man, and forget the Lord our God—only if we drive Him from our camps, by those sins which He abhors. While our officers are training their men in discipline, in arms, in movement, if they would also impress upon them the great necessity of a high moral tone, we should soon be beyond all danger from our enemies. It is a great mistake to neglect moral power, while we are cultivating physical power; to forget all that strength which is derived from God and His spirit, the strength which comes from prayer, from sobriety, from godliness, from holiness. It was those things which made the armies of Cromwell irresistible; which enabled the apprentices of London and the artizans of the towns to overcome the disciplined royalists, and the cavaliers of Prince Rupert. Could I but see a high moral tone pervading our armies, descending from the officers to the men, I should be satisfied. But if it becomes fashionable, in the army or the navy, to despise religion, to confound it with hypocrisy, or with weakness, our strength will be gone; for

in this conflict it will need constant renewal, and the way to renew it is to wait upon the Lord.

Believe me, my beloved hearers, that one day of fasting and prayer is worth more to us than a hundred ship loads of arms, if it be kept in spirit and in truth—that one day of earnest humiliation will give us more strength than any reinforcements. Man may grow weary, but God never. “Hast thou not known; hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?” “Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint.”

