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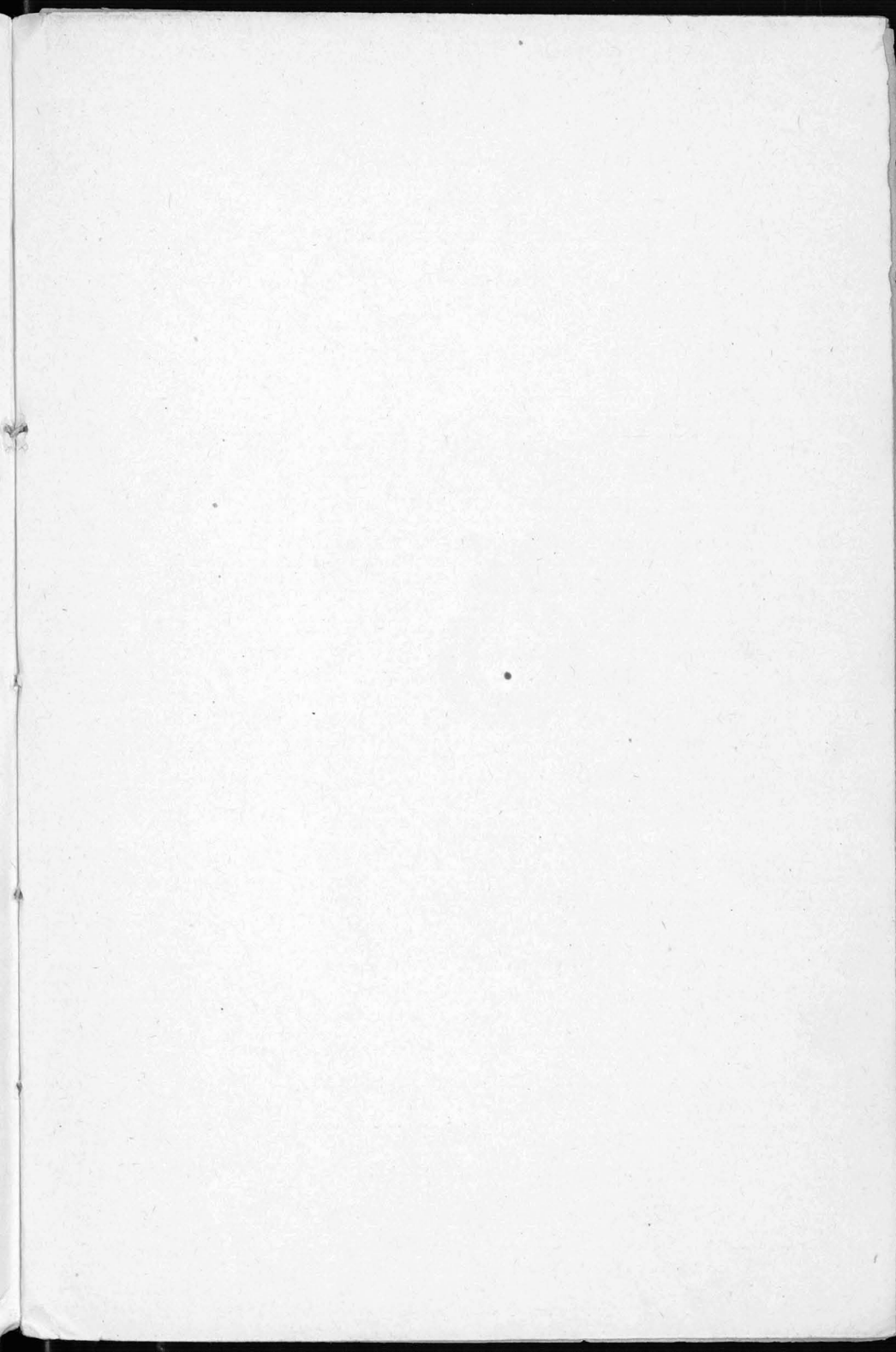
Lincoln

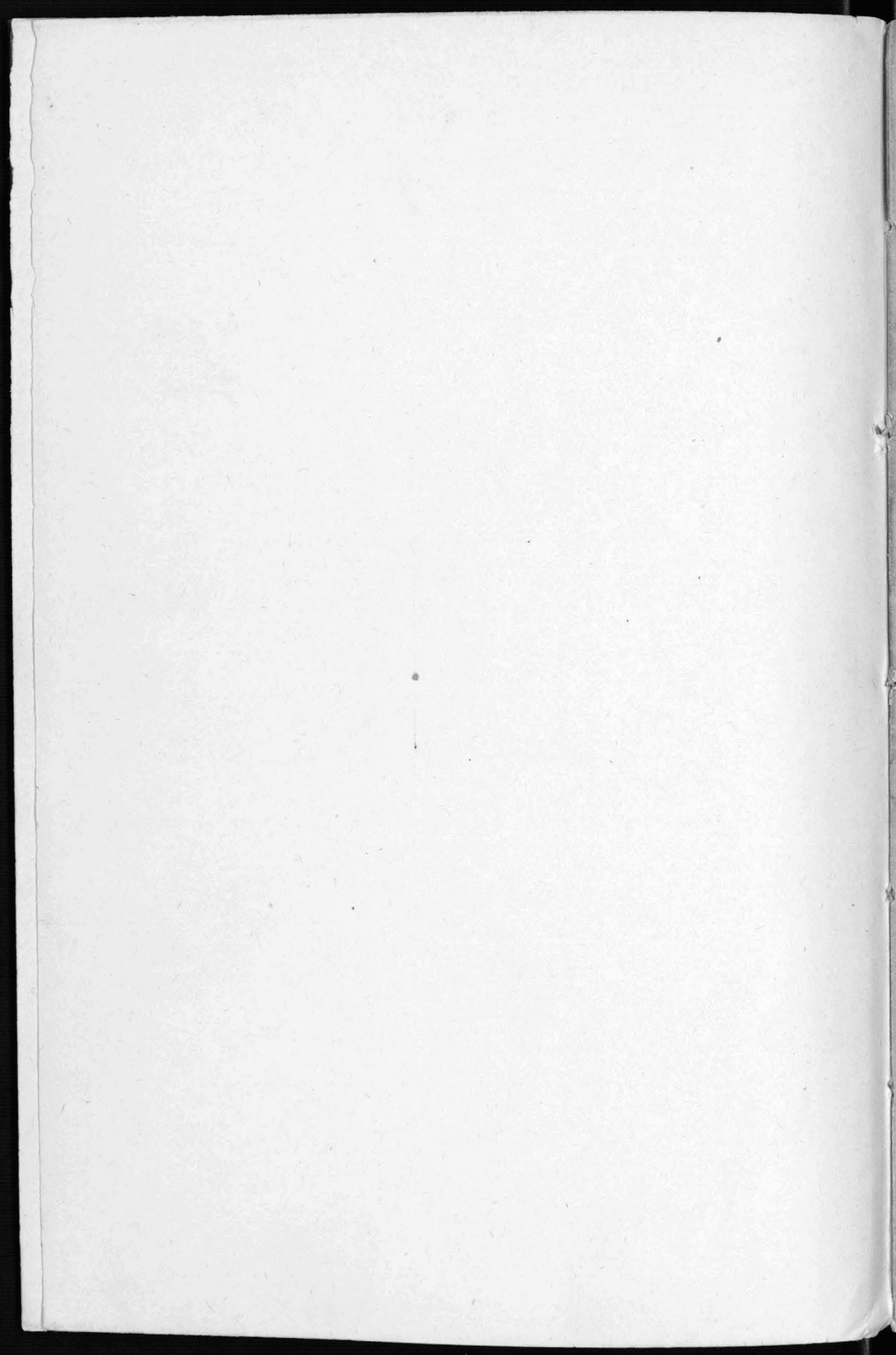




Class E457

Book W⁸35





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THE PASSING AWAY OF HUMAN GREATNESS :

A S E R M O N

ON THE

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Death of President Lincoln,

PREACHED ON SUNDAY EVENING, MAY 7, 1865,

IN THE

NEWINGTON CHAPEL, RENSHAW STREET.

BY THE

REV. JAMES WAYMAN.

LIVERPOOL :

HENRY YOUNG, 12, SOUTH CASTLE STREET.

PRICE ONE PENNY.



THE PASSING AWAY OF HUMAN GREATNESS.

"How are the mighty fallen."—2 Sam. i. 19.

WE, to-night, link these words with an event which has caused a thrill of horror to run throughout the civilized world. An event—such as the pages that chronicle the six thousand years of the world's history cannot record. For there has fallen the illustrious ruler of the United States, in the full flush of his triumph, and in the hour when he was about accomplishing the crowning act of his life, the act which will render his name immortal, and keep his memory green for evermore. We mean the trampling out finally and for ever of that thrice-accursed and villainous monster, from which was bred the cruel civil war that has so long desolated the land, separated from us by three thousand miles of sea. We said, that there stood not upon the pages of history the record of so foul a crime. We thank God for it, for the sake of our common humanity, blighted though it be by transgression, we thank Him; for the sake of that feeling of liberty, which He has given to every man as a birthright, we thank Him. For as a Martyr to LIBERTY, to human progress, to large heartedness, to sympathy with suffering humanity, has Abraham Lincoln fallen a victim. And though so many miles intervene between us and the land where that crime was committed, yet we cannot do other than sorrow at the thought of a tragedy so dire. Thankful we are to see that not to one class alone has sympathy been confined. But from the illustrious lady, who sways so well the sceptre over these realms, down to the humblest cottager, hearts have been stirred, and the wail of grief has gone up to Heaven—proving that no inappropriate words have we chosen by way of text; for a noble heart has ceased to beat, a grand life has been eclipsed by death, and a man mighty in deed, and in word, has passed from our midst. Our, I say advisedly. Abraham Lincoln lived not for a sect or class. The man whose highest aspiration was to wipe out the foul blot of *slavery* from his country's escutcheon, and break the fetters from the limbs of four million bondsmen and women, must have had sympathies far reaching as the family of man, and akin to those which stir the hearts of all true men the wide world over. Therefore, 'tis but right and fitting that we should hallow his memory, and mourn his loss. That we, in the language—inspired and beautiful—that came from the lips of the slain Jonathan's friend, should say, "How are the mighty fallen. Tell it not in Gath. Publish it not in the streets of Askelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice; lest the uncircumcised triumph!"

I.—HUMAN GREATNESS STOPS NOT DEATH.

Death, we know, is the common lot of our race. "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return," said the Almighty, when man first transgressed His law. And there are none among us who expect to escape the struggle with the last enemy. Who expect to be freed from dissolution? Yet, though death be the enemy that walks unsparingly among our kind—that strikes, with rigid impartiality, prince and pauper—we should be more than human if we felt no sorrow when we saw the loved, and the true-hearted, borne from us by the rider of the pale horse.

"One writes, that 'other friends remain—
That loss is common to the race';
And common is the commonplace,
And vacant chaff, well meant for grain.
That loss is common would not make
Our own less bitter—rather more.
Too common! never morning wore
To evening but some heart did break."

A loss, like that which we to night mourn, is not common to the race; hence we feel it more. Sorrow we should have done, had the tidings come that before some fierce attack of foul disease the noble ruler of that great American people had succumbed, but uncommon and sad the tidings were that told us how in robust health, with active mind, and kindly heart, he had fallen; how the coward assassin went upon his path, and paused not till the fatal deed was done—that deed for which great nations are sorrowing to day.

From some there may come the question, Do you believe in a wise and overruling Providence? If so, what of wisdom do you see in God's allowing this calamity to come upon the United States? We answer, we do believe in an overruling Providence! We do believe the Lord Jesus has the keys of death and of Hades; that no event, it matters not how mighty or how insignificant, can take place without his knowledge and concurrence. We undertake not to explain God's providence, or "justify His ways to men." Standing reverently aside, we do say, "Thy judgments are a great deep, and thy ways are past finding out." "Thy thoughts are not as our thoughts, neither are thy ways as our ways; wisely thou rulest, and well;" and we, with limited vision, looking from the platform of the present, knowing not what the future containeth, or what it shall bring forth, acknowledge, "Thou doest all things well, and what we know not now we shall know hereafter." There need be no doubt as to the primary cause of Mr. Lincoln's death; that fact is patent and legible to all. It is sin. Sin, we maintain, spite of all the objections urged against it by a modern and a spurious philosophy. We know God gives, and preserves to us our life. In His hands are all its issues, every heart-beat is a request to him for sustenance; and He, when He will, can snap the brittle thread that links together soul and body. But it is the secondary cause that makes this death so mysterious. Mr. Lincoln was smitten down in the very zenith of his life, in the very centre of his great work. Looking

at things humanly one would suppose that they who were the best would live the longest. And how many of us are there who think, were we but placed in control of the affairs of this world, death should first make his mission to the aged and decrepid, to the vicious and useless; never to the young and fair—never to the noble and good—those to whom it is given to work for the good of their race, and for the glory of their God. Oftentimes have men asked themselves this question, Can there be a wise Controller at the head of the universe? If so, why does death strike so indiscriminately? If ever this question was asked before, how many will ask it now? For the world seemed less able to spare Mr. Lincoln than any other man. He was the chief magistrate of one of the leading nations of the earth, filling that exalted position at a period when one of the direst struggles that ever occurred took place; filling it with honour to himself, with honour to his countrymen, and with honour to humanity. Looking at the whole of his extraordinary career, we would say he seemed raised up for the performance of that work which is progressing so gloriously. Born in the midst of poverty, his early days passed amidst the incidents of a poor settler's home; and from such a beginning the rise to greatness invests his life with all the charm of a romance. Blessed even in those young days he was with God's best gift to childhood, a pious mother; a woman who had one fervent desire for her boy, and that was, he at least might have education enough to read the Bible. Noble desire. Would to God that it had a place in every mother's breast, then would there soon be a manhood and a womanhood nobler than the world had ever known; for 'tis from *inspiration's* fount that holy purposes and noble thoughts are got; and who knows how much the teachings of that book, which contains God's Emancipation Proclamation to a fallen and a bondaged race, may have gone to influence his character, and sow in his heart those seeds which have germinated so gloriously, and which placed him in the van of that noble band of champions across the Atlantic, who have given the best years of their life to the cause of human progress; striving with all their powers—powers of pen, and speech, and deed, to wipe out the unholy blot of slavery, which has so long disgraced as well as disfigured their banner; to snap the fetters from the limbs of four million men and women, and to make one great empire, extending from the shores washed by the stormy Atlantic, to those on which the Pacific more gently falls; from the noble river St. Lawrence in the north, down to the waters of the Mexican Gulf in the far south; one great empire over which the genius of liberty should hover, proclaiming, as one did in other days, "that of one flesh, of one blood, hath God made all the nations of the earth."

When once Mr. Lincoln had learned to read, there came upon him a thirst for knowledge. Books in the place where his boyish days were passed were not easily obtainable; few were there that he could get to read, but what he did get were good. That grand allegory, which a captive dreamed in the prison upon the banks of the sluggish Ouse, Bunyan's *Pilgrims' Progress*, the life of a great

and wise statesman, Henry Clay and Æsop's Fables. Not an extensive library, but one well fitted to form the character of a man destined to rise to greatness as Abraham Lincoln rose.

It is one of the peculiar characteristics of true nobility, that it makes difficulties the stepping stones to triumphs, and marches on with victor tread where others cower and shrink. The life of the great man, whose loss the world mourneth, was an illustration of this truth. Fearless in danger, upright in life, strong in principle, noble in genius, true in heart, and reverent in spirit, he rose, not merely to fill the seat once occupied by the illustrious Washington, but to become God's instrument in proclaiming liberty to the captive, and opening the prison doors to them that are bound; for he lived to see—and we thank God for it—that “*sum of all villanies*,” accused by God and man, *human slavery*, trampled out, and trampled out, we trust, for ever.

But what has seemed to make his death more mysterious is the horrible manner in which it was accomplished. No cruel disease wrought its ravages. Men looked not for an event so sad. He fell by an assassin's hand. Well is it said, “In the midst of life we are in death.” And well need we pray, “Lord, teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.” For to us all the message that bids us leave the temporal, and the terrestrial, may come sooner than we expect. Horrible it seems for a man to go forth in the morning, with the flush of health upon his cheek, and ere the sun has climbed to his meridian altitude in the heavens, to be brought home a corpse—smitten down by some fell disease, or overtaken by some fearful accident. Sudden death is fearful. We all shrink from it. We all dread it. But sudden death by a murderer's hand is most horrible of all. Well may the civilised world stand aghast, and lift up its voice in one cry of terror and of shame. Well may humanity feel that a fresh, and a blacker, stain than ever has been fastened upon it by this unholy deed. For he who fell was no tyrant, no despot, or robber of the people's rights; he bartered not liberty for power, and climbed not to his high position over broken promises and cruel deeds. There might have seemed some palliation for the crime had he been like to the tyrant who reigned at Naples, when Italy rose in its might to proclaim itself free; had he misused his power, and strove to crush out the moral and social existence of the nation. But, no! for four troubled years, while holding the reins of national affairs in that great land, he had battled manfully against wrong, and in defence of right. His country's glory was dear to his heart. But he wanted its glory to be unsullied, and its historic pages to be unwatered by one human tear, and unstained by one drop of human blood. And now, looking calmly over the past, we can say, and we think without fear of contradiction, if there have been great results achieved through this war; and what we mean by great results is, the bringing out into clearer light of the fact inscribed upon the corner stone of the American republic—“*All men are free, and equal*,” and the practical carrying out of that noble sentiment by

repealing those laws which made it lawful to trade in flesh and blood, to Abraham Lincoln much of the glory must be given. It is late in the day now to protest against slavery, yet we may say, in the words of a distinguished advocate of freedom, "According to the law of nature, every human being has a complete title to himself direct from the Almighty. Naked he is born, but his birth-right is inseparable from the human form. A man may be poor in this world's goods, but he owns himself. No war or robbery, ancient or recent, no capture, no middle passage, no change of clime, no purchase money, no transmission from hand to hand, no matter how many times, and no matter at what price, can defeat this indefeasible—God-given—franchise. And a Divine mandate, strong as that which guards life, guards liberty also. Even at the very morning of creation, when God said let there be light, earlier than the malediction against murder, He set an everlasting difference between a man and a chattel, giving to man dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. Slavery tyrannically assumed a power which Heaven denied. While under its barbarous necromancy, borrowed from the *source* of evil, a man is changed into a chattel, a person is withered into a thing, a soul is shrunk into merchandise. Say, in your madness, that you own the sun, the stars, the moon; but do not say that you own a man, endowed with a soul that shall live immortal, when sun, and moon, and stars have passed away."

II.—DEATH STOPS NOT GOD'S WORK.

God's work goes on, though the men who seemed foremost in doing it are cut down. In every age this has been so. God has again and again taught the world, that not upon any one man does his work depend. The Apostles died, but Christianity lives. The Reformers died, but their work goes bravely on; and Protestantism breathes as a salutary breath, and as an healing influence in many lands. Lincoln dies by a murderer's hand, but the work of peace and Emancipation will go on. Right it is, that men should bow their heads in sorrow. But it is also right they should dash away the blinding tears and look upward, remembering, though man die, there is an undying God, and he the God of the down-trodden and oppressed, a God whose decrees no tyrant can curtail—whose purposes no evil ones can ever set aside—who can shiver all systems of oppression, and sweep the earth clean from those unholy influences that work iniquity and wrong; "breaking them as with a rod of iron; dashing them in pieces like a potter's vessel." All eyes were fixed upon Mr. Lincoln. All lips were getting to utter his praise; and men thought, looking at things in the light of earth, that he who spoke of mercy in the hour of victory, and wished to show kindness towards those who had rebelled;—that he of all who lived was necessary to complete the work; which to do, for four long suffering years he bore ill-fate, ill-feeling, ill-report. He is dead; but the work will go on. For

if we believe that God takes interest in the affairs of this world—and the Bible teaches us that he most assuredly does, can we be so blind as not to see His hand in that fearful calamity which has raged across the sea. It is not for us to enter here into all the details of what in our opinion brought on the struggle; which has been fiercer far than all wars before it. We have mourned over the torrents of human blood that have been poured out; and have saddened as we thought of the widow's loneliness, and the orphans' bitter cry; yet in our minds the thought has ever been. Great an evil as war is, yet slavery and national degeneration are greater. Therefore, from this struggle God will bring out this people united and nobler. Four millions of human beings shall clap their hands with joy to feel this curse removed; and black and white shall join hands and hearts and voices in one common ascription of praise, to Him who created us all, and who hath not "withheld His Son, but freely delivered him up for us all," and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

How are the mighty fallen! So the world has spoken. And so it has sent its cry across to the dwellers in that distant land. Blessed sympathy! Far will it go to assuage the passions that have been wrongly engendered, and give the people who are our kinsmen to see that the mother land takes their loss as her's. By a closer tie than ever will the people, already linked by blood; language, and religion be bound, and thus understanding each other more fully—be better fitted to lead the world toward that diviner future, which the sure word of prophecy leads us to expect.

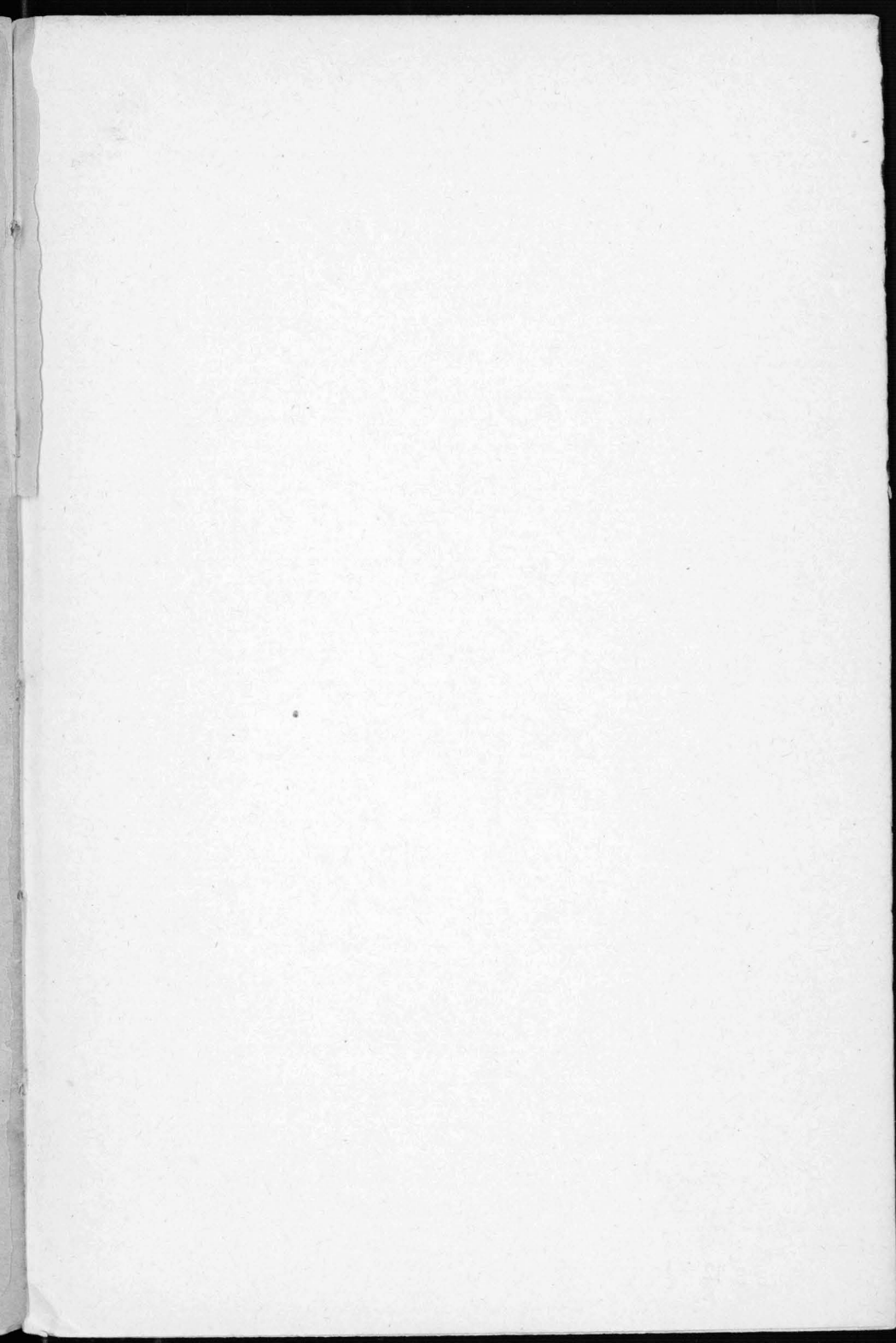
Mr Lincoln is dead, his body is buried, "but his name liveth for evermore;" and of him can we say, as one said of the murdered Abel, "he being dead, yet speaketh." Mr. Lincoln speaks, and will speak, long as the sun shall shine and the world shall roll. He shall speak of noble integrity, for few men lived a life in which there was so little to find fault with as he; he shall speak of trust in God, for every speech he made breathed of his confidence in a higher power; he shall speak of fixedness of purpose, and the way in which noble men can live down the lies that fall from slanderous tongues; he shall speak of devotion to the cause of freedom, that grew with his growth, and strengthened with his years, and which found utterance at last in that noble sentiment, (and none nobler ever came from pen uninspired)—"fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away; yet if it be God's will that it continue until the wealth, piled by bondsmen, by 250 years unrequited toil, shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be repaid by another with the sword, as was said 3000 years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether;" he speaks in all those things which ennoble manhood, and make us proud of our race and kind. Does he speak to you to-night? For from his grave there comes a voice, loud as though it were trumpet-tongued, "prepare to meet thy God," for die you must at some time. You know how Mr. Lincoln died; rather would we it

had been in another place, and under other circumstances; rather that he had fallen in the halls of the legislature enunciating those great principles which have made his name famous, or in his own home, with his children around him. The theatre is not the place where men like to die. Yet it is hard to conceive that the mind of the President was occupied with the vanities around him; with all the cares of a nation pressing upon him, with the vast responsibilities which the great crisis to which it had arrived engendered, it is impossible to believe that motives led him there other than those intended to benefit the cause he had at heart. We believe better things, and gladly accept the explanation that has been given, and trusting that now the martyrs crown is on his brow. Yes! "We believe him something far advanced in state, and that he wears a truer crown than any wreath that we can weave him."

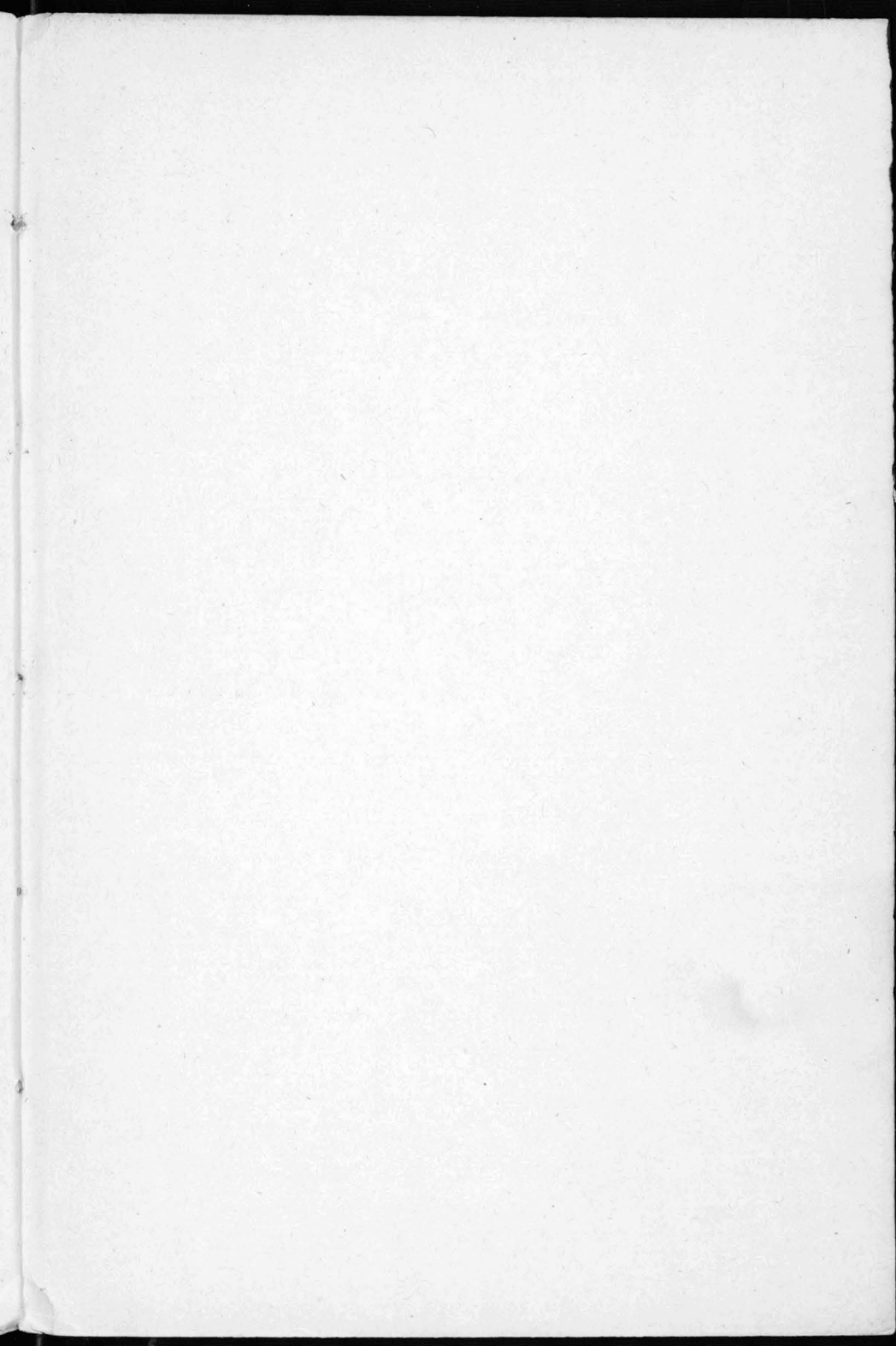
Brethren, your hearts have been stirred within you as you have thought of the mighty fallen, of the great man snatched away; but have you been led to look at the uncertainty of life, and the issues that hang upon it? Have you asked, "If the death angel came, am I prepared to say, 'Lead on amid the circling gloom?'" It may be that you have so asked, and the response is, No. Shall it continue to be no? It need not, if you forsake your sins, and turn unto the Lord. I will not stop to picture the scene that would be, should the message, calling you hence, come unexpectedly. I love not to talk of death, I care not to hold up his skeleton form, to frighten you into religion. Rather would I tell of one who has "abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light;" of one whose sublime words may be borne into your hearts, conveying consolation and hope, "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth on me shall live, though he die; and he that liveth and believeth, shall not die eternally." Believest thou this? Do you say, is this true? Is death virtually abolished? In one sense it is, and though there may and will be the taking down of this frail body, and mingling of its atoms with the dust, yet to all believers, that which made death terrible is taken away. Shall we then have no fear? Does the thought of Jordan's swelling cause no alarm? No! In Christ, you see as from Pisgah's top,

"Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood,
Stand dressed in living green."

And by the dark waters that you seem to dread, is there not the ark of the Covenant which shall go before you and clear your way. Oh, Christ is the conqueror of death, and the victor of the grave, and, believing in Him, you shall never be confounded. God help you to believe, and then you shall go through your earthly life knowing whenever death shall come, "You will fear no evil," but be able to say, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" The sting of death is sin, the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. For you we pray; and pray that your last cry on earth may be—"Victory, through the blood of the Lamb."



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