

**A SERMON DELIVERED BEFORE THE
EXECUTIVE AND LEGISLATIVE
DEPARTMENTS OF THE GOVERNMENT
OF MASSACHUSETTS, AT THE ANNUAL
ELECTION, WEDNESDAY, JAN. 7, 1863**

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A Sermon Delivered Before the Executive and Legislative Departments of the Government of Massachusetts, at the Annual election, wednesday, Jan. 7, 1863 by James Walker

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JAMES WALKER

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S E R M O N

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

Executive and Legislative Departments

OF THE

GOVERNMENT OF MASSACHUSETTS,

AT THE

ANNUAL ELECTION,

WEDNESDAY, JAN. 7, 1863.

BY

JAMES WALKER, D. D.

BOSTON:

WRIGHT & POTTER, STATE PRINTERS,

NO. 4 SPRING LANE.

1863.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

SENATE CHAMBER, BOSTON, January 9, 1863.

REV. AND DEAR SIR,—I esteem it a privilege to have been made the organ of communicating to you the inclosed Resolve of the Senate of Massachusetts; particularly so, as the sentiments expressed in your admirable discourse are such as I most heartily approve and believe to be eminently just.

I hope you will find it convenient to comply with the request of the Senate, so that all the citizens of the Commonwealth may have the benefit of the wise and conservative views taught in your excellent discourse.

With highest respect and regard,

I am, most truly,

PETER HARVEY,

For the Committee.

Rev. JAMES WALKER, D. D., Cambridge.

CAMBRIDGE, January 12, 1863.

DEAR SIR,—I have had the honor to receive your note, inclosing an Order of the Senate requesting a copy of my Election Sermon for publication. I beg you to communicate to the Senate my acknowledgments for this expression of their favorable regard, and to inform them that a copy of the discourse is submitted to their disposal.

Very respectfully yours,

JAMES WALKER.

Hon. PETER HARVEY, Chairman of the Committee.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

SENATE, January 15, 1863.

The Committee to whom was referred the Order in relation to the printing of the Election Sermon preached before the Government of the Commonwealth on the 7th instant, have attended to the duty assigned them, and recommend the adoption of the accompanying Order.

For the Committee,

PETER HARVEY.

Accepted.

S. N. GIFFORD, *Clerk.*

IN SENATE, January 15, 1863.

ORDERED, That eight thousand copies of the Election Sermon preached by the Rev. JAMES WALKER, D. D., before the Government of the Commonwealth on the 7th instant, be printed for the use of the Legislature.

S. N. GIFFORD, *Clerk.*

S E R M O N .

ISAIAH V. 3, 4.

AND NOW, O INHABITANTS OF JERUSALEM, AND MEN OF JUDAH, JUDGE, I PRAY YOU, BETWEEN ME AND MY VINEYARD. WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN DONE MORE TO MY VINEYARD THAT I HAVE NOT DONE IN IT? WHEREFORE, WHEN I LOOKED THAT IT SHOULD BRING FORTH GRAPES, BROUGHT IT FORTH WILD GRAPES?

There is no shutting our eyes on the fact that we have fallen on times of trouble and perplexity. Things have not turned out as we hoped and expected they would, a year and a half ago; and this has very naturally given rise to a spirit of fault-finding. The Administration is blamed; Congress is blamed; the generals are blamed; the press is blamed; the pulpit is blamed; every-body and every thing is blamed, in its turn. But I do not see what good can come of this propensity to mutual recrimination, or of this desire to shift the burden on a single person, or class, or party.

Again, there are those who say that our calamities are a judgment of God for our sins, and seem, from their look and manner, to take a kind of satisfaction

in saying it. Perhaps they are right; but I do not see that any thing is proved. Besides I confess to some impatience at the haste with which a vain mortal, full of prejudices, thinks to read the purposes of the Almighty by the light of these prejudices. At the very best it is neither more nor less than a religious way of maligning one's neighbors, and as such is rebuked by the Great Teacher: "Those eighteen, upon whom the tower of Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt at Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay." As far as my observation has gone, temporal calamities, whether in the case of nations or individuals, are quite as likely to be the consequence of weakness, or folly, or mistake, as of conscious fault; and even when they are the consequence of conscious fault, they are its natural consequence. There is nothing like a special judgment; it is still cause and effect.

In attempting, therefore, to account for and explain the present unhappy and distracted state of the country, I shall leave it to the Searcher of Hearts to determine what is *sin*, and what is *judgment*; it is enough if I can see how events have been connected together as *cause and effect*. Moreover, I am not going to speak of exciting and proximate causes, about which you have heard so much, but of remote

and predisposing causes, underlying all others and giving effect to all others. Should it be objected, at the outset, that what men are now anxious to know is not the cause of the national malady, but its cure, I answer, that to know the former is one step towards knowing the latter, and the first step.

To meet the subject fairly we must begin, I think, by acknowledging a general decay of what may be termed the *civic* virtues,—a decay which has been going on for many years, affecting all parties and all classes. You will understand me to speak here of the civic virtues alone: in other respects I believe the community has been slowly improving, growing more moral, more religious, more humane. Even the hackneyed charge that our commercial spirit has degenerated into a mercenary spirit, is no farther true than this, that the pursuits of a people give form to their vices. Where all, from the highest to the lowest, are eagerly intent on bettering their condition, you must not wonder if you occasionally meet with instances of over-reaching, of sordid avarice, of vulgar display. But let no one presume to assert or insinuate, on the strength of this, that the tendency on the whole has been downward; that people in general have become less public spirited; that the standard of probity or honor has been lowered. It is

not so. Your flourishing public institutions, the reformatory movements of the day, the increased activity of Christians of all denominations in doing good, these thousand ministries in behalf of the children of want, suffering, and oppression, all testify that it is not so. Nothing is gained by a senseless and indiscriminate railing at what is called modern degeneracy. I repeat my concession: for the last fifty years the people of this country, or at least of this section of it, have, as it seems to me, been growing better, and not worse, in most respects. But I am obliged to make an exception of one entire class of virtues; those, I mean, which have their foundation in a true loyalty, in a proper reverence for government and law.

If the evil here complained of were confined to the vicious part of society, it might make the execution of the laws more difficult, but it would not cause the laws themselves, or those who make and administer them, to be looked upon with indifference or contempt. Unhappily, however, the defection of which I now speak pervades, more or less, all classes, and is owing, in no small measure, to opinions, theories, and practices countenanced by good men.

Even our unexampled and uninterrupted prosperity has indirectly contributed to it. Until the recent