

Sin Found Out.

A DISCOURSE

PREACHED TO THE

CENTRAL CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH,

LAWRENCE,

ON SABBATH MORNING, APRIL 7, 1850,

IN REFERENCE TO THE CONVICTION OF PROF. J. W. WEBSTER,
FOR THE MURDER OF GEORGE PARKMAN, M. D.

—
BY REV. LYMAN WHITING.
—

LYNN:

H. J. BUTTERFIELD, PRINTER, OVER THE DEPOT,
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Lawrence, 9th April, 1850.

REV. LYMAN WHITING:

Dear Sir—The undersigned listened to your discourse last Sabbath morning, from the text, "And be sure your sin will find you out," with deep interest. In the conviction that its perusal would produce a lasting and beneficial effect upon the community, we would respectfully solicit a copy of the same for publication.

In Christian affection,

We are, very truly yours,

A. W. STEARNS,
G. W. BENSON,
V. DANFORTH,
H. KENT,
R. W. FRENCH,
H. DOUGLASS.

MESSES. STEARNS, BENSON, AND OTHERS:

Gentlemen—Your request for a copy of my sermon preached on Sabbath morning, April 7, I have received and considered. My esteem for your opinion, and the reasons you have assigned, induce my consent.

As the sermon was preached without a thought of any future use, and without writing in full, you will find, in the completed and more finished copy, some words and sentences you did not hear. I trust, however, the changes are amendments, and so will more promote the purposes you hope to be gained by the publication.

Yours, sincerely,

Lawrence, April 13, 1850.

L. WHITING.

SERMON.

Numbers, xxxii: 23.—"AND BE SURE YOUR SIN WILL FIND YOU OUT."

THE criminal annals of our Commonwealth have now been enlarged, by a deed and a name which find no fellows, probably, in the entire records of crime and justice, in the new world. The history of criminal jurisprudence has attained a distinction in ignominy, unknown until now. The highest rank in the permanent distinctions of our country, has been bereft of a name in her honored scroll, that is to be transferred to the catalogue of malefactors. Our Ancient and Honored University mourns in an afflictive disgrace. She has been called upon to resign an honored son, a matured preceptor, to the hands of sheriffs, jailors, and to the criminal court of the Commonwealth. To him, personally, the transition is from the chair of exalted science, to the felon's cell; from companionship with the famed and learned of the land, for years past his daily associates, to the abode of culprits—to the common jail. The delightful, decorated dwelling, the gay, enchanting family, are given up for the cheerless stone cell—the home of many of the children of guilt before him—and to the escapeless companionship of horrible recollections and of awful anticipations. Alas! *what a change one sin has made!* How terrible its finding out.

My hearers, the hand of God is in this. The Almighty finger is writing a lesson in this dark drama. That lesson you and I, the

community, the nation, the world, ought to learn. It is a stain upon human nature not easily washed out. Coming generations shall mourn at its narration, and tongues unborn shall deplore this deed of a man. Through all the ranks of pupils now living and to come, shall be sorrow and shame, at the story of this deed of blood.

But beyond all personal remembrances of it, every fellow man who is making his way to the Judgment seat, feels in the solemn trial and verdict of this earthly Tribunal, the uprising of new convictions concerning the certainty, awfulness, and necessity of a Judgment day. They show that sin should find out its author, and that detailed trial is the mode for gaining that end. Here, all men may see the defencelessness of sin, when once put into the hand of justice. It gives Inspiration a stronger meaning, a more disputeless verity. The words I have chosen seem to be filled with tones of authoritative warning by these acts—"And be sure your sin will find you out." The certainty that sin will be proved, will be fixed upon its author, will be met by justice, is declared anew by word and example. Here is the assertion; in yonder city has been the verification, as human judgment decides. In a terrible example, a man sinned—in appalling sureness, sin has found him out. We may fix our convictions from this instance, which is but one remarkably manifest case of the working of that law which will indict every sinner to the final trial. How, then, does this show that sin will find out the sinner? What specific modes are shown here, common to the final trial of all sinners?

1. *Sin will find out the guilty, because it disturbs the natural course of things.*

God made the world on a plan of righteousness. The natural course of things was wholly exempt from any of the disturbances of sin. Events were connected with causes: put in a natural order;

arranged upon a plan; in all of which there was not the least provision for sin. It was not a part of the system. If it ever got in, it would show itself an alien and a hostile power. It would be where it was not meant to be, and where its presence would be at once betrayed by the disturbances it would bring on. But sin does work, and all the system is marred by its power; and when it rises to crime, even our disordered perceptions feel the shock of its disturbances. So soon as this given deed was done, that *disarrangement* began to proclaim it. The man of habits, fixed by their repetition for years, fails to fulfil them. His home, which had unfailingly welcomed him at given hours, does not feel the pressure of his foot and the comfort of his presence. The rounds of business, which for years had witnessed his assiduous scrutiny, feel it no more. Something has displaced the long course of things with him. The selected delicacy is left unclaimed; the half-completed bargain lingers unratified; sure there is something out of order. The common movement is stopped, and ah! how soon did this bloody crime begin thus to whisper of itself, and then of its author. Here was the first step of God's declaration of the deed. Here began the pursuit which found out that crime. This is the law to which all sin is put in trust. There is no escaping its detection, because there is no avoiding the disorder which guides the pursuit. Find where the disorder began, and you find the crime itself. Reach the author of the disturbance, and the criminal is detected. And this source of discovery is two-fold, for it involves both the *author* and the *subject* of the crime. While the latter mysteriously fails in long-accustomed habits, so characteristic and established as to cause alarm almost at the point of failure, the former is plainly perceived to have changed his ordinary modes of conduct. The door-bolt clings to its socket, the fastenings of his room prohibit entrance beyond, and contrary to the habitual custom.

The sounds within, the mysterious secrecy in these unknown movements, silently announce, there's disorder there. *Things are out of course.* It is the waking moan of an atrocious deed, my Hearers; and when it joins the whispers of amazement which come from the friends of the victim, no marvel a startling cry flies through the land. God is there beginning to help the crime find out its author; the changeless laws of the course of things are guiding, in fearful sureness, the search of justice.

II. The detection of sin is made certain, *from the fact that crime, and all sin, deposit evidences on material things.*

Speechless matter takes note of crime, and in providential positions renders dread and unpervertible testimony. The polished *knife-blade* snatches a stain from the veins it has pierced; the *hatchet*, the *saw*, the *towel*, find tongues in the scenes of crime, and utter testimony more convincing than human speech can give. From the trodden floor, the faint stains send up whispers which enter the ear of justice; and the dumb wall husbands a residue of the fierce flame, which confirms as by an oath. The scrap of twine, which the winds would toss about, becomes a link of steel in the chain of testimony; and the cold ashes deliver up the calcined bone, and the half-fused tooth, to bear an evidence so fatal that the heart of him who interpreted their confounding speech, melted at its utterance.

In the Divine hand these mere remnants of material things rise up against the guilty; witnesses no prejudice can distort, no corruption bribe, no malice or prejudice can pervert. *They are the Divine government's testimony.* Holy providence puts it in, and who can refute it? Let the man of crime—the heedless sinner—tremble at this dread truth in God's government over him. Every sin of a man connects with some material things; and in the great trial we are approaching, they shall be the swift witnesses against him.

From this one example, embarrassed by all the infirmities of human

judicature, how plain the possibility of infinite evidence *from material things.* The dust under our feet may come into a position between us and our sin, more decisive in evidence against us, than a living tongue would be. The very air contaminated by your oaths and blasphemies will hasten, in the judgment, to deliver to the judge the images of those oaths and blasphemies. The gentle breezes, upon which you cast the breath of lust and crime—to which you told your schemes of sin—shall there give proof against you, no tongue can gainsay. The “rocks and mountains” will not hearken to the cry of sinners, to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb; for they are summoned as witnesses against the wailing throngs of the imploring guilty. On this small scale, any one may see how material things retain and give the proofs of sin. In the hand of Omnipotence, on the scale of Infinite Justice, how shall it be?

III. The detection of crime is made certain, by the fact that *every sin has an author; it is unchangeably connected with some individual.*

It hence is fastened by a destroyless tie, to some one or more in the family of man. The bond holding the crime and its author is fastened at one end to *a man*—the other may be lost in clouds of mystery. The moment, the motives, the scene, may repose forever unknown; but the *act has an author*, that author is a man, and *there*, is a permanent clue to the crime. The diligent eye of justice peruses every probability the varied acts of man may cast up, and pursues with acutest assiduity the *unknown author* of the *known crime*, through all the crowds of men, and all the developments of minor transgression. *Every sin has an author.* There was never a sin without a sinner, and a great end of justice is to search from the known crime for the unknown author. The first great premise is, that such an author exists; that he is under a moral government

failure of evidence, may intercept conviction. All these are separate escapes; and he may indeed be turned loose upon society, *an unconvicted guilty man*. But how many chances against final escape are there here? And suppose they be all safely passed, *is that the end?* Has his sin failed to find him out? Has he got quit of all consequences of the crime, by eluding all these dangers?

Go, put the question, when torturing conscience, made fiercer by the double task of executing the external penalty he has escaped, and the internal retribution which is the beginning of the "second death;" ask, in those dread moments, if all those escapes quenched the remembrance of, and concern for, the deed. How many lives of misery, how many suicides, how many monster crimes, undertaken that they might bury the remembrance of minor ones, unite in the reply! Then follow the guilty man into Eternity, where only, indeed, *the full end* of sin is found. Is he out of the reach of the penalty there? Does the great tribunal of the Son of Man pass him by as innocent? In the chambers of despair—beneath the burning waves of God's wrath, is he out of the reach of retributive justice?

3. The example before us shows us, that, *living beyond lawful income is a dangerous mode of life for any man*.

It is so, because it is a continuous dishonesty. It is taking others' property to live upon. It exposes to so many clamorous emergencies—to so many fierce demands; on the one hand from lawful creditors, and on the other from unlawful expenditures, that no moral integrity can long sustain itself before them. The beggarly shifts, the degrading turnings, to keep the *show* without the *substance*, wrenches, dislocates the moral character, stupefies the moral feelings; and results, that while living on the frontiers of a haughty poverty, a man is living on the borders of atrocious crime. Is it not a lawful

conviction, that only a *thoroughly honest* man, can be a truly *good* man?

A thousand good qualities may be united in a character, but they only make a dangerous pitfall, rather than a tower of strength, if that great parent virtue, *honesty*, is wanting. The vase may be of pearl and golden bands, but if full of crevices, no precious incense, or common fluid, can be trusted in it. Who was ever badly used by a truly honest man? or what abuse has any one borne, which did not come from a dishonest mind? He, not "willing to live honestly," sets out on a course which very directly leads him to the malefactor's doom.

Shall we not also derive a warning from a too rigorous and acrimonious pressure of claims against our fellow men; and learn to temper our enforcements of justice, and of lawful right, with considerations of kindness, lest otherwise we provoke to desperation, and impel to crime by changing justice into oppression!

4. The mournful example we have considered, in its process and results, *displays the worth of our civil and judicial securities*.

The majesty of Law is exalted in this mournful decision. The arm of civil guardianship, while becoming more terrible to the evil doer, becomes more reliable to the upright. Human life has a new value put on it in this Commonwealth, by this issue. It is safer to live in such a jurisdiction, than where "justice is turned away backward." Rank, station, and all their associated influences, have not availed to work escape from the penalty of God's command. The seat of public justice echoes the utterance made upon "the mount that burned with fire," "*Thou shalt not kill*." That echo shall travel, wherever the story of this crime shall go.

My Hearers:—we instinctively turn from this scene of human trial and conviction, to that great Tribunal before which we all must

stand, to give account, not alone of *one act*, but of a life-time. Our hearts sank within us, our words trembled in sorrow, when we read, or heard, that last, awful verdict word, "GUILTY." How it fell upon every humane ear; how it filled with weeping every pitying eye; but, oh! how faint a picture is it, of that hour when every unpardoned sinner—and how many are they—shall hear the verdict on himself at the Judgment Day of God! O ye! looking on this scene—seeing how "*sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death,*" can ye, dying, guilty men, can ye bear that Day!