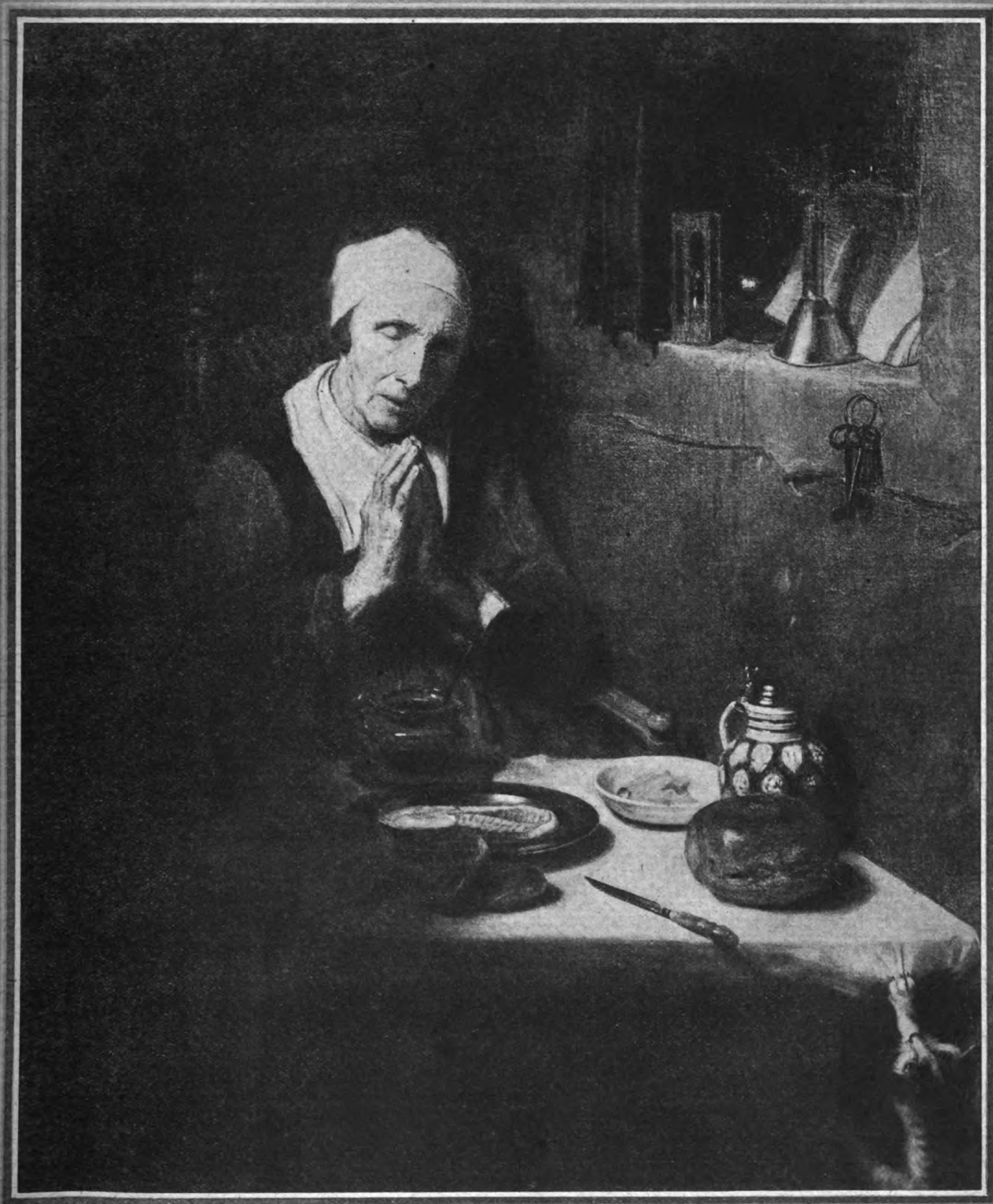


The CONTINENT



THANKSGIVING NINETEEN SIXTEEN

THE CONTINENT

NOLAN R. BEST, EDITOR. OLIVER R. WILLIAMSON, PUBLISHER. THE McCORMICK PUBLISHING COMPANY, PROPRIETORS.
156 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK. 509 SOUTH WABASH AVENUE, CHICAGO.

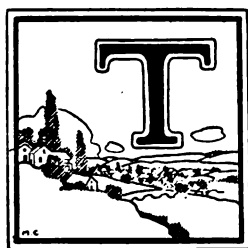
VOLUME 47, NUMBER 47

NOVEMBER 23, 1916

WHOLE NUMBER 2426

Persistent Thanksgiving

BY CLELAND B. McAFEE



HERE IS in the account of Daniel a sturdy note which in these times has a grateful sound. The foolish decree had been made which forbade asking any petition from any god or man for thirty days except from Darius. This decree came close to Daniel, as it was meant to do. The account says: "And when Daniel knew that the writing

was signed, he went into his house; and he kneeled upon his knees three times a day and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime."

As he did aforetime! It was no new defiance, no new affectation of devotion assumed for effect. It was an old custom which had become part of the makeup of his life. A strong man's relation to God is not determined by passing conditions. There is a deep undercurrent of his life that is not turned aside by pebbles on the bank. The decree of an earthly king cannot break a habit of fellowship with God. When a minister had had a sharp difference with an old believer, he was surprised to see the latter in his place at church as usual the next Sabbath. He expressed his pleasure that this should be so after what had occurred. Whereupon the man of the pew replied that he did not come to church out of deference to a pastor, but because of a lifelong habit of worshipping God. He had come to worship, "as he did aforetime." Not so with the small man; he must have a wholly favorable relation with a minister before he can worship. His habit has no deep roots.

Such thoughts as these seem specially pertinent when the nation is called to thanksgiving. Many disquieting feelings will be in the hearts of earnest men. Some will ask whether America is nationally ready to observe its accustomed day. The war and all it has done and is doing for the nation; internal unsettlements; growth of perilous plethoric prosperity; strife of groups within the body politic; materialistic mammonism, and all the rest will lead many minds to wonder if the thanksgiving will not have a hollow note. All will depend on how deep and fixed the habit and spirit of thanksgiving may be.

This is the fifty-third consecutive year in which the national executive has called the whole American people to observe a day of thanksgiving. Many particular days of thanksgiving were appointed in the earlier days. The Pilgrims, with all their needs pressing upon them, observed a formal day of thanksgiving in 1621 after their first harvest was in. In the colony of Massachusetts bay such a day was occasionally appointed after 1630 and it became an annual custom in 1680, and has been observed there ever since. In Connecticut it has been observed annually since 1647. The Continental Congress appointed occasional days, and President Washington proclaimed two such days. At the close of the war of 1812 President Madison called for a national day of thanksgiving. State governments had practiced the custom for years, but it has been a matter of regular national proclamation and celebration only since 1864, when President Lincoln set apart the last November Thursday as such a day.

The review of these dates helps one to realize how varied have been the conditions under which the national rendering

of thanks has been observed. Starting with striking occasions which suggested peculiar gratitude, the nation came to a sense of the abiding grounds for thanksgiving, unchanged by the passing years. How impossible it would be to wait for conditions which should be altogether favorable! Panics, calamities, wars, public and private distresses, election crises seeming to threaten the very life of the nation—how few years have been free from them! Yet, without carelessness or indifference, the nation has given thanks to God—as it did aforetime. With a true instinct it has learned to be sure of reasons for thanksgiving lying too far below the surface to be disturbed or destroyed by even the most dreadful calamities. Sometimes, difficult as that seems to a rebellious heart, it has even been able to give thanks for its distresses. They reminded the people who thought and prayed of a dependence which could never fail.

Opportunity comes this year to strike the deeper notes, to tap veins that run deep, to feel foundations that lie far down. The surface is upheaved in the sight of many, but the things of God are undisturbed. Harvests, fruitful seasons, sunshine and rain, have been granted. It is our national privilege to serve the world's need as never before. There will be less distress, less hunger, less perishing because this nation has food for the hungry. Problems connected with its distribution, the possibility of the few mercilessly exploiting the needs of the many for their own profit—all such things are only so much challenge to a sound national spirit, which here and there is asserting itself. Meanwhile, it is ground for thanksgiving that America is more truly a servant of the world this year than ever before. The reason our sins seem so dark is that our opportunity seems so glorious. Let the day draw us toward a more worthy acceptance of so great a fact.

And deep down, also, wholly undisturbed by surface conditions, is the spiritual service which the nation is rendering. Our world mission has been an expanding fact during this hard year. The nation has risen to the unexampled demand of the prison camps in Europe with an eagerness that is touched with pathos. The Christian Association talks in terms of a million dollars for its work there alone. The Red Cross, uncounted relief funds, a multitude of plans for help, all have been drawing on the deeper currents of the national life. The gospel of Christ has won its increasing victories in America, in schools, colleges, cities, country; and its victories have been registered in lives dedicated, fortunes given for the good of men, burdens cheerfully assumed and borne for others. Agencies for good have pursued their courses, leaving the nation better. Strife has been allayed and in its worst forms hatred has been kept from us.

But deepest of all lies the ground for thanksgiving in the marvelous possibilities of the times. More than seventy-five years ago Bishop Coxe wrote the hymn in which he said that the men of his own day were living and dwelling in a grand and awful time, in an age on ages telling, when to be living was sublime. How tame and unimpressive those times seem to us when we look at our own days! To live in a time like this and to have a chance to be used of God in the directing of the new forces—what meaning it gives to life! Every anxious heart can afford to discount all these annoying concerns and rejoice in the privilege of finding and doing God's will in a time like this.