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BENEFITS OF THE BIBLE.

A Sermon,

Preached on Thanksgiving Day, November 24th, 1853,

BY

HENRY J. VAN DYKE,

PASTOR OF THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, BROOKLYN, N. Y.

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BROOKLYN, November 26th, 1853.

To THE REV. H. J. VAN DYKE:

Rev. and Dear Sir,—The undersigned having, with great pleasure and they trust with profit to themselves, listened, on Thanksgiving day, to the eloquent and able discourse delivered by you; and believing it is calculated to do *great* good, and ought to have circulation beyond the bounds of your own congregation, beg the favor of you to furnish a copy for publication.

With great regard and respect, yours,

G. B. LAMAR,	JOHN LAIDLAW,
HENRY SHELDON,	FRANK HINCHMAN,
W. S. DUNHAM,	A. B. CLARK,
WM. J. WOOD,	J. H. PARMELEE,
D. M. HUBBARD,	S. M. PARSONS,
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EDGAR WILLIAMS,	JOHN L. NOBLE,
SEYMOUR HOYT,	JOHN OWEN,
R. WILLIAMS,	GEO. F. TAYLOR.

BROOKLYN, December 5, 1853.

To MESSRS. LAIDLAW, LAMAR, AND OTHERS:

Gentlemen,—Whatever may be my own opinion as to the defects of my discourse, I do not feel free to gainsay the wishes of those upon whose judgment I have so good reason to rely, and whose kindness has imposed upon me so great obligations. I, therefore, submit the manuscript to your disposal.

Sincerely and affectionately,

Your servant in Christ,

HENRY J. VAN DYKE.

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SERMON.

Rom. iii, 1, 2 : " What advantage then hath the Jew ? Much, every way. Chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God."

WE are here assembled to congratulate each other on the possession of our social and political blessings, and render united thanks to Him from whom all blessings flow. If we set ourselves to inquire what benefits we have received for which to be thankful, we shall be constrained to answer—*much, every way*. There is scarcely a department of nature, of art, of government, or of social life, which is not crowded for us with unnumbered blessings. We look abroad to-day over our country, stretching from shore to shore, and embracing the choice portions of a mighty continent; enriched in every part not only with the products of a fruitful soil, but with the luxuries that commerce brings from distant climes, even to the poor man's door; rapidly populating, under the genial influence of equal laws, an unshackled press, and a free church, with a vigorous and intelligent people, and

adorning itself with whatever art, and genius, and enterprise can add to the beauties of nature ; and, we say, not, with a view to foster national pride, but in the spirit of devout thanksgiving, the sun shines upon no land whose present is so full of comforts, and whose future is so luminous with glorious hopes.

The time will not permit us to recount all the good things that crown our days. We shall better accomplish the object for which we are assembled by selecting one of these innumerable gifts as the theme of thanksgiving. We have chosen one more rich and comprehensive than all the rest. Pervading and out blessing all other enjoyments and hopes; more lustrous than the beauty that dances on our hill-tops, or the abundance that laughs in our valleys; wider spread and more powerful than "the rain which cometh down from heaven to water the earth that it may give bread to the eater, and seed to the sower," is that Gospel which has free course and is glorified among us. We have a goodly heritage, and the future opens up to us a glorious destiny, *chiefly, because that unto us are committed the oracles of God.* I, therefore, present, as the principal theme of this day's thanksgiving, **THE TEMPORAL BENEFITS OF THE BIBLE.** This topic, you will perceive, grows directly out of the text. The Apostle had been arguing to show that all, both Jew and Gentile, are under sin, and can be delivered from condemnation only according to that Gospel plan which is open without distinction to the

men of every nation. He was aware that this exhibition of the free and levelling character of the Gospel would awaken violent opposition in the Jewish mind. It would wound their national pride ; and they would be ready to exclaim, “ What advantage, then, hath the Jew ? If the Gospel puts us all on the same footing ; and if the memory of our former glory is to secure us no higher standing in the Christian Church than is accorded to the converts from heathenism, how have we been profited by our distinction as the chosen and favored people of God ? ” The Apostle denies this inference. He declares, that although the honor put upon them for two thousand years did not make any partition wall between them and the Gentiles in the Church of Christ, yet they had enjoyed many and great advantages. Without stopping to enumerate other blessings, he points, in proof of this position, to the fact that God had committed to them that holy word which he has “ magnified above all his name.” There was no need for him to recount the benefits derived from this treasure. They were familiar to the heart and lips of the boastful Jews. There was one verse in the Psalms which they all knew how to quote : “ He hath showed his Word unto Jacob, and his statutes and judgments unto Israel : he hath not dealt so with any nation.”

But it often happens that men are most ungrateful in reference to the most common and obvious blessings. Nor need we dwell upon the example of the Jews in order to illustrate this remark.

We fear it is true of ourselves, and in regard to our possession of the holy Scriptures. We look upon the advantages which flow to us from these sacred oracles as we do upon the air and the sun-light. Though reason may be ready to bear testimony in general terms to their value, the heart rarely sets itself to tracing out their far-reaching influence, or lifts up its affections in gratitude for their daily benefits.

Pursuing our business or pleasure under the protection of wholesome laws, and surrounded at our firesides by the comforts and sweet charities of life, we do not realize how many of these streams of blessing flow to us from the fountain of God's Word. My object, therefore, is to refresh your minds and stimulate your gratitude in regard to this inestimable treasure. Leaving out of view, for the present, its relation to a reconciled God, an opening heaven and a dawning immortality, I desire to show you that the possession of the holy Scriptures is the greatest of all earthly blessings. Circumscribe its influence, if you will, by the economy and politics of time; even in this narrow circle the Bible is the well-spring of influences by which every man's heritage is watered and made glad; so that the natural obligations which, according to his own principles, bind even an honest deist to unite in this day's thanksgiving, should constrain him to say, "Chiefly because that unto us is committed that book which claims to contain the oracles of God." In order to justify this position we need only take a cursory glance at *the in-*

fluence of the Bible on the Intellectual Cultivation, the Public Morals, the Social Happiness, and the National Stability of our country.

First, let us look at its influence on our Intellectual Cultivation. If the world has remained in ignorance, it has not been for lack of students. In every age there have been men of superior natural endowments, who felt the importance of knowledge, and devoted themselves with zeal to its pursuit. The soothsayers of Egypt and Chaldea were more numerous than the prophets of Israel. The temples of ancient heathenism were all, according to their measure, seats of learning ; and in all the celebrated cities of antiquity there were schools of philosophy of high pretensions and wide renown. Nor did the disciples of these schools fail to make great attainments. The records of ancient genius which have come down to us will ever be numbered among the master-pieces of literature. The monuments of science and art, scattered amid the ruins of the Eastern world, give unmistakable evidence of an advanced state of civilization.

But, then, what did the fruits of ancient learning avail the great mass of the people among whom they were cultivated ? Philosophers were regarded as a distinct class, and almost a distinct race of men. Their disquisitions were addressed to the privileged classes ; and only those highly formed by nature or fortune were initiated into the mysteries of their order. That knowledge is the birth-right of every human soul, is a prin-

ciple of which they never dreamed ; nor did they ever conceive of any plan by which the mass of their fellow men might be elevated to its enjoyment. The religious truths held to be most important by the initiated few, were regarded as mysteries which it would be sacrilege to utter in the ear of the populace ; the most sacred rites were hidden from the vulgar eye ; and even the utterances of their pretended oracles were given in such ambiguous phrase, that the wayfaring man would be sure to err therein. The display of letters which was made, at stated periods, before the multitude was like a sudden blaze of light before eyes long accustomed to darkness : it could only dazzle and stupify, and make them ministers to the pride or slaves to the ambition of the exalted few.

Admitting, therefore, all that the most ardent antiquary may claim for the excellency of the classics, it is easy to see why in the very golden age of ancient literature “gross darkness covered the people.” Amid the rise and fall of a hundred sects and systems of philosophy the intellectual degradation of the multitude remained unaltered. I do not hesitate to affirm that it would be impossible to find, even among those whom our scurvy politicians flatter and strive to mislead, any considerable number who are as assailable by the arts of the demagogue, as were the choicest popular assemblies of the ancient republics in their palmiest days. The instruction of the whole people is not even a conceivable attainment, except among nations to whom

the oracles of God have been committed. Nothing but the Bible, teaching the intrinsic value of the human soul under every circumstance of birth or fortune, and making every individual feel the paramount importance of those relations which bind him to God and eternity, can pervade the mass of society, with a desire for knowledge, or impress those who have attained, with a sense of their obligation to impart it freely to others. It was the possession of the divine oracles that made the Jews what they undoubtedly were—*the most intelligent people of ancient times*; and gave them so much reason to boast themselves “a guide to the blind, a light to them which are in darkness, and an instructor of the foolish.” The revival of learning in modern Europe, after that long and dreary period, which, in spite of all that has been said by the admirers of mediæval superstition, we must persist in calling the *dark ages*, was simultaneous and co-extensive with the unfettering of the Bible. And it would be easy to show by a reference to the present state of the nations, that knowledge pervades the masses only where “the Word of God is not bound.” The right and the duty of private judgment stand out upon the surface of the Bible. No people can be said to have these oracles committed to them who do not search the Scriptures for themselves; nor can any man exercise this privilege without attaining a degree of intellectual cultivation which a heathen philosopher might envy. To enlighten every man by the most sublime and elevating truths, to

sharpen and expand the human intellect, so that it may grapple for itself with the mysteries of the spiritual world, this is the first and great object of revelation ; an object which it never fails in some degree to attain. He who is familiar with these divine oracles is furnished with more authentic history, more sublime philosophy, more poetical imagery, more of those proverbial precepts which are the currency of wisdom in the world, than all the heathen philosophers combined. He who has grappled with the deep problems of creation, providence and redemption, and reasoned out of the Scriptures of righteousness and judgment to come, has undergone a better mental discipline than if he had studied Euclid and the Classics. The Christian minister hears in the homes of the poor, and from the lips of those whom the world calls unlettered, discourses enriched with a higher range of thought than Plato ever uttered in the groves of the Academy. The entrance of God's Word ever gives light and understanding ; and, even where it does not convert, it tends vastly to elevate the soul. Every page reveals some sublime truth, which in the very effort to grasp it, must expand the mental powers of the student. Whether, taking him back to an antiquity beyond and above the pyramids of Egypt, it bids him listen to the sons of God shouting for joy over the new formed earth, or hurrying him forward to the final catastrophe, pierces his ear with the voice of the arch-angel swearing that time shall be no more ; whether, pene-

trating inward, it discern the thoughts and intents of his own heart, or, soaring upward, teaches him by the very greatness and failure of the attempt that none can mount up to God's mysteries; in all its departments, and in all the exercises to which it summons the soul, the Word of God is the seed of intellectual expansion. He who has imbibed the spirit, and is familiar with the language of the Scripture, carries with him amid the works of nature a charmed word, which will open many a cavern filled with treasure—a key that will unlock riches of which science alone never would have dreamed. For him every flower of the field, every bird of the air, every cluster in the vine is the embodiment and teacher of living truth. The firmament with its resplendant garniture is, like Aaron's breastplate, "ardent with gems oracular;" the wind, blowing where it listeth, is burdened with the mysteries of the Spirit; the lily of the valley, arrayed in more than royal beauty, preaches eloquently of God's universal providence: and thus, even the most trivial objects become associated with thoughts that lift the soul to God, and embrace eternity in their grasp. The people who possess these oracles are surrounded with an intellectual atmosphere which the soul inhales from the first dawn of intelligence; and it is not possible to over-estimate the influence of the knowledge thus unconsciously acquired. It is subtle and powerful as the air we breathe.

A certain Englishman, in discussion with that noble

specimen of man, Hugh Miller, sneeringly asked, "What has all your theology done for Scotland?" "Independently altogether of religious considerations," was the reply, "it has done for our people what all your Societies for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, and all your Penny and Saturday Magazines, will never do for yours; *it has awakened their intellects, and taught them how to think.*" The Word of God, when its teachings pervade the texture of society, "lighteth every man that is born into the world," and imparts an intellectual stimulus to the soul through a thousand unseen channels. Even those who blaspheme its authority, have unconsciously received from its influence the very weapons with which they would seek to destroy it. Who can tell how great that influence is in imparting activity to great minds which would otherwise have lain dormant, and in directing to useful ends powers which, but for its guidance, would have been wasted in fruitless speculations? But for the lofty impulses of the Gospel many an eloquent tongue would have been mute and inglorious, and many a skilful right hand would never have acquired its cunning. If this be not true, why is it that the great triumphs of the human mind are achieved in countries where the atmosphere is impregnated with Bible truth? Why is it, for example, that New England, with a barren soil and a frigid climate, has belted the globe with the traces of her enterprise, and crowded every avenue of commerce with the products of her skill; while

under the genial skies and upon the fat soil of Mexico and South America we behold only a race of ignorant and emasculated slaves ? It is the glory of the land of the Pilgrims that they plant school-houses and raise men, and that the Word of God, itself unbound, and inspiring true freedom wherever it has free course, was interwoven with the very foundation of all their social and political institutions.

If, therefore, we have reason to rejoice to-day over our schools and colleges, and printing presses ; if we glory in the right and ability to participate in our own civil government ; if we have taste to appreciate the fruit of intellectual toil ; if our homes are adorned with the skill of the cunning workman, and our social intercourse elevated by the refinements of polite learning ; it becomes us, in our thanksgiving for these blessings, to say, "chiefly because that unto us are committed the oracles of God."

Secondly, Let us look at the influence of the Bible on Public Morals.

The total depravity of human nature is not a doctrine peculiar to Revelation. It is written in the statute book of every nation under heaven ; it is inscribed in bloody characters on the prison and the scaffold. The great design of government is to be "a terror to evil-doers." The first step in the elevation of any tribe from barbarism to civilization is to impose restraints upon their natural passions ; and the great problem which the statesmen of every age have la-

boured to work out, is to devise some simple, omnipresent power by which such restraints may be enforced. If it were within the compass of human reason to solve that problem, it would long since have been demonstrated. It has been more than four thousand years since civilization went forth from her cradle on the Nile. In the days of her youth she fringed the desert with those mighty monuments which succeeding generations have never ceased to admire. In her riper years she passed over into Southern Europe, and adorned her favourite seats with the master-pieces of genius and of art. She found out many inventions. Nor was she wanting in legal enactments, enforced by the weightiest sanctions human ingenuity could devise. She ordained laws for regulating all the business and relations of life. She forged irons for the hands that do evil. She wrote her penal statutes in blood.

But with all these efforts ancient civilization utterly failed to enforce Public Morality. Her devices were destitute of any power to reach the heart and restrain its wickedness. The powers of the world to come, from which alone virtue can derive any adequate sanctions, were perverted into sources of corruption. Her gods were fashioned after the similitude of corruptible things ; her priests were examples of debauchery ; her statues and paintings exhibited the vices of her imaginary deities in all their naked deformity ; the secret places of her magnificent temples were defiled with abominable rites ; her masterpieces of music and poetry

celebrated adulterous pleasures in a paradise of sensual delight ; and, while genius and physical skill were crowning her favourite sons with triumphant wreaths, the people were universally laden with the iniquity of crimes which it were a shame to mention. "The shew of their countenance witnessed against them, and they declared their sin as Sodom." The Apostle has given us a description of heathen morality in his Epistle to the Romans ; and would that they who are wont to laud the refinements of antiquity, might speak more in accordance with this inspired testimony.

Now, in contrast with this hasty but truthful picture, it would be easy to show that the moral sanctions which were wanting in all heathen systems are abundantly furnished by the Bible ; and that just in proportion as these oracles are known and honored, society is adorned with all that is lovely and of good report. Like the sun in heaven, it sheds its genial and beautifying influences even around those who have no eyes to behold, and no speech to praise its glory. It purifies society at the fountain head. It plants at every man's door not only the tree of knowledge, but the tree of life. It does more to inform the soul with just and noble sentiments, and restrain the outbreaking of unhallowed passions, than all the statutes in the land, and all the legal terrors by which their provisions are enforced. Let a child be taught the ten commandments and have his mind imbued with the precepts of

Christ, and though he may live to sting like a serpent the bosom that has warmed him into life, he cannot altogether shake off the influences they have thrown around his heart.

“ Like the vase where sweet roses were wont to distil ;
 You may empty, and shatter the vase, if you will,
 But the scent of the roses will hang round it still.”

If the infidels who go about in Christian lands to establish their own righteousness, would come fairly to the contest with Christianity, they must first divest themselves of all the inspired sentiments they have imbibed with their mother’s milk, and all the holy influences which have distilled upon them from the gospel institutions by which they are surrounded. Let them lay down the weapons they have stolen from the armory of Christ, and come up to this warfare armed with the silly stories of mythology, and reeking with the filth of heathen abominations. Instead of standing in the pure sunlight to blaspheme the source from whence it comes, let them go back and clothe themselves with the gross darkness that covered the people before they were visited by the day-spring from on high.

Need I detain you to prove that the security of private property, the protection of domestic purity, the public provision for the wants of those whom poverty would else impel to crime, are the great features which distinguish a Christian from a heathen land, and that

these features stand out in beautiful harmony just in proportion to the prevalence of Scripture knowledge ? Need you be reminded that our missionaries sacrifice the joys dearest to a parent's heart, and interpose thousands of miles between themselves and their beloved offspring rather than risk their exposure to the debasing influences of a land illuminated only by the boasted light of nature ? Need I stop to show you that in Christian lands the thief, the murderer, the reckless disorganizer of human society are not found among those whose "delight is in the law of the Lord ;" and that God's poor rarely come to the alms-house and still more seldom to the prison !

If, therefore, we rejoice to-day before God that our storehouses and homes are not broken up by the hand of ruthless violence ; that our public ways are not stained with blood, and our secret chambers undefiled with the iniquities of Sodom and Gomorrah ; let us not forget that these evils are warded off from us, "chiefly because that unto us are committed the oracles of God."

Thirdly.—Let us notice the influence of the Bible upon Social Happiness.

From a multitude of illustrations which here present themselves I select two ; and desire you to look at the notorious fact that nations destitute of the divine oracles have *no sabbaths*, and, in the sense which we attach to that sacred word, *no homes*.

The sabbath is purely a Bible institution. The light of nature never invested any portion of time with such blessed and humanizing influences. The feast days of heathenism bear no resemblance to it ; and scarcely less unlike it are the saints' days of Popery, which, in respect to all the vanities with which it appeals to the lust of the eye, is nothing more than a baptized heathenism. The sabbath was made for man, and is adapted with infinite wisdom to his wants for this life, as well as for eternity. It is, indeed, what it has been so eloquently termed, "the Pearl of Days, the Torch of Time, Heaven's Antidote to the curse of labor." In the language of one who was a son of toil, and, therefore, well qualified by experience to testify : "the fifty-two sabbaths with which the year is interspersed are like patches of verdure watered by ever springing fountains, that dot the inhospitable wilderness, and invite the weary traveller to exhilaration and repose. Oh, precious day ! The workman's jubilee, the slave's release, the shield of servitude, the antidote of weariness, the suspension of the curse ! How it smoothes the brow of care ! How it braces the enervated limbs of labor ! How it revives the drooping spirits of despair ! How it gives wings to the clogged affections and aspirations of the soul ! How it extinguishes the jealousies of week day occupations, and links men's hearts in the bonds of brotherhood !"

Now, if we can endorse these true and noble sentiments ; if we desire that the day of rest may ever

wipe the sweat from the brow and pour its sweet charities into the heart of the poor and the toil-worn ; if we would deprecate the crimes and miseries which deluged infidel France, when she aspired to the bad eminence of “ a land without the sabbath ;” let us learn to appreciate, and be thankful for the temporal benefits of the Bible.

Nor will we put a lower value upon these blessings, if we consider them in their relation to Home—that star in the firmament of time, to which the heart of Christianized man, in all his wanderings, turns with the fidelity of the needle to the pole. The Scriptures teach the only system which enforces the sacredness of the family relation ; and elevates woman to the rank for which God designed her, as the help meet for man, and the mother and nurse not only of his physical frame, but of all that is tender and noble in the human character. They, who under pretence of advocating woman’s rights, despise and trample upon the divine oracles with regard to the conjugal relation, would do well to remember that their sentiments are not original with themselves. The experiment for which they contend was tried centuries ago in the Republic of Sparta, where women were publicly matched with men in contest of strength and courage, and where the family relation as organized upon Bible principles was utterly unknown. I need not picture to you the results of such institutions ; or explain why the citizens first ceased to love, and then betrayed the honor

of a country that afforded them so few domestic endearments. Nor must this be regarded as a solitary instance. Sparta only carried out the tendencies of depraved human nature when destitute of the restraints of revelation. Nations without the Bible are universally nations without homes, in the sense which we attach to that hallowed word. When men buy their wives for so much gold, and regard the increase of children as they do the multiplication of cattle—and this is no slander upon heathen lands—where, in such a state of society, are we to look for the fountains of domestic peace and comfort ? Oh ! if you would learn how to estimate the temporal benefits of the Bible, you must first set a price on the mutual affections of husband and wife, parent and child, brother and sister ; you must count up and appraise at their true worth all the delights of the domestic circle, all the consolations of the chamber of sickness, all the restraints divine truth throws around the wayward steps of youth, all the support it ministers to the tottering limbs of age. Take the blessed image pictured so vividly in Burns' Cotter's Saturday Night, and multiply it by hundreds of thousands. Go into the families of the poor and afflicted, where the authority of God's Word is daily acknowledged and felt : see how its promises lighten burdens, and wipe away tears ; how it smoothes the pillow of sickness, puts a song of praise into lips quivering with pain, scatters the light of immortal hopes all down the gloomy pathway to the tomb, and makes

the tomb itself shine with the brightness of eternal day. And in the light of such facts, let us learn how to regard those who by the lying vanities of a usurping hierarchy, or the swelling words of an insidious philosophy, or the honied falsehoods of social Reform, would deprive the poor and grief-worn of this precious inheritance. Of every one who rails at the Bible, whether openly or by implication, whether he wear the garb of a Romish priest, or a German philosopher, or an American reformer, we say,

“ Beware of yonder dog ;
Look, when he fawns, he bites ; and, when he bites,
His venom tooth will rankle to the death.”

He who would take away my Bible, or in any wise destroy my confidence in it as the Oracle of God, is the enemy of my body as well as my soul. He would not only weave sackcloth into my heavens, but shed blighting and mildew upon the chief blessings which adorn my earthly lot. He would lay the axe to the root of the vine and fig-tree under which I sit. He would crawl like the serpent of old into the paradise of my home, and blast all its purity, and wither all its bloom. Yea, he would apply the incendiary’s touch to the temple of my country’s freedom, and destroy the fairest fabric of civil government that was ever erected.

For, (*Fourthly.*) It is a fair inference from what has already been advanced, that *the possession of the divine*

oracles is the great security for our national stability. Whatever tends to elevate the intellectual and moral character of a people—whatever rivets their affections to their native soil, by associating its scenery with the recollection of fireside enjoyments—tends in the same degree to establish and defend their public institutions. And especially is this the case in a country like ours, where the powers that be are the creation of the popular will. Here, legislation must ultimately be the index of public opinion. The sovereignty of this land is not lodged in a jewelled bauble, nor does the integrity of the government depend upon the succession of any one man to the supreme authority. While there is no *heir apparent*, every man is an *heir presumptive*. And it is indeed a glorious sight, to behold twenty millions of freemen entering into a bloodless contest for the chief-magistracy of such a country as this, and when the contest is decided by the still but mighty voice of the ballot-box, both victor and vanquished sitting down together in the bonds of a common brotherhood. Here, if no where else, we may truly say,

“ What constitutes a State ?
 Not high-raised battlement, or laboured mound,
 Thick wall, or moated gate ;
 Not cities proud with spire and turret crowned ;
 Nor bays, nor broad-armed ports,
 Where, laughing at the storm, rich navies ride ;
 But *men, high-minded men.*

If, therefore, the oracles of God both stimulate and

gratify a thirst for knowledge, constitute the best textbook of morals, are the source of all the humanizing influences of the home and the Sabbath; if, in short, they are the best instrument for training up "men, high minded men," then is their possession not only a crown of glory, but a battlement of defence.

It is a historical fact, that Christians have manifested a degree of attachment for their religion and for all the institutions with which, in their estimation, it has been rightly associated, which no other class of men have ever exhibited. The noblest examples of unflinching endurance and heroic performance the world has ever seen have characterized those contests which Christians have maintained in defence of their religious rights. The history of those

"Whose bones
Lie bleaching on the Alpine mountains cold;"

the memories that haunt the mountain passes of Scotland; the wonderful achievements that led to the establishment of the Puritan Commonwealth of England, and quenched in the blood of the reprobate Charles I. the accursed claim to the divine right of kings; yea, and the glory that crowns the battle-fields of our own struggle for independence, all testify that no blow is so terrible, as that which the Christian patriot strikes for his altar and his home—that no arm is so mighty to wield even a carnal weapon, in a good cause, as his whose soul has grown strong in spiritual conflicts.

Now, it is on this testimony that we ground our hopes for the permanency of our free institutions. History tells us in a language too plain to be misunderstood, that civil liberty is the offspring of an older and a holier spirit, even that liberty wherewith Christ makes his people free. The food whereby her sinews have become strong as steel, is “the sincere milk of God’s word.” The fourth of July was not the birthday of freedom: she was born long before. Her infancy was cradled in the valleys of Piedmont, where the first protest was made against the usurpations of Papal Rome. She was nourished in the mountain caves of Scotland, and in what the minions of a corrupt state establishment called the *conventicles* of England. The friends of her youth were the reformers of Germany, Switzerland and Scotland, the Huguenots of France, and the Puritans of England; and, standing foremost among them, a man to whose fame the world is just beginning to do justice—I mean the Christian hero, OLIVER CROMWELL. The declaration of our independence was the voice of her maturity; a maturity which, after a long and for the most part unsuccessful struggle with the tyranny of the old world, was installed at length in a permanent home in the new.

The principles of this government, so far from being against the Gospel of Jesus Christ, *grew out of it*; and there is a most striking resemblance between the provisions of our national constitution and the apostolic

form of government adopted out of the Scriptures and maintained by the reformed churches against the spiritual tyranny of Rome. Because God and his holy oracles are not expressly mentioned in the Constitution of the United States, many have hastily concluded that ours is an infidel government; and there are not wanting those who maintain that it is an infringement of civil liberty to require the children in our public schools to read the Bible—that same Bible whose authority is recognized in the empanelling of every jury and the inauguration of every public officer from a President down to a Justice of the Peace. Such views are evidence either of gross ignorance as to the origin and nature of our institutions, or of a profane desire to pervert them. Christianity is a part of the Common Law of the land. Its claims as such have been acknowledged and enforced in some form by the legislative enactments of all the states, and by the judicial decision of our most eminent jurists. The convention that organized the Federal Government were not legislating for a nation of no religion; but for the people of states whose laws already recognized God and the Bible in the most explicit terms, and with whose social habits and relations the divine oracles were intimately interwoven. The silence of the Constitution no more discards the authority of the Bible than it does away with the relation between man and wife; on the contrary, that very silence is the strongest kind of a declaration that the Christian religion was still to

be recognized and defended. The national government was established for specific purposes and endowed for these ends with limited powers. These purposes did not include either the abolition or support of Christianity. It had no more to do with religion than with the dress of the people. It no more abolished the one than the other. It did not even abrogate the ecclesiastical establishments which existed in most of the colonies before the Revolution, and which continued in full force in some of the states after our independence was established. The dissolution of these unions of the church with the state did not in any case involve the abolition of the Christian religion. It was merely the withdrawal of that pecuniary support which government had hitherto given to its ministers ; and that, upon the single ground that it was not just to tax all for the support of one denomination. The design of thus placing all sects upon an equal footing was not to bind the Word of God, but to give it a freer course. They who were the most earnest advocates of a separation of the church from the state, and who would resist to the death their re-union under any form, have ever been the most zealous and successful propagators of the Gospel ; and it would not be difficult to show that our rapidly increasing population has been more extensively evangelized upon the voluntary system, than it could have been by any ecclesiastical establishment. There is not this day under heaven a government that has more honourably ac-

knowledged, or more impartially protected religion, than our own. True, the State has not laden men's shoulders with the burden of taxes grievous to be borne, in order to build palaces for pampered priests, who would not touch those burdens with one of their fingers ; nor have the professed ministers of Christ clothed him with the purple robe of a power whose kingdom is of this world, or prostrated themselves before a mortal whom the accident of birth has raised to an earthly throne : from *such* a national religion may the good Lord ever deliver us ! But the State has secured to all "that freedom to worship God," which is all that any wise minister asks at her hands ; and by the principles of good citizenship which they have disseminated, the ministers of religion have paid for that protection an hundred fold. The sun does not shine to-day upon a nation better entitled to be called a christian people. And it is for this reason,—because our government is the creation of and intimately dependent upon the will of a christian people, that we have confidence in our national stability. It was the love of religious freedom that first approved of, and clung round, and bled for the declaration of our civil rights. That love now burns more brightly than ever. The thanksgiving of this day, and of its every returning anniversary, will add fuel to the flame. And when the heart of this great nation shall cease to throb with the lofty impulses of christianity, and our people shall cease to prize a free conscience and a free Bible ;

then, and not till then, will the death-knell of our institutions be sounded. Weaving into the national character the knowledge and the love of God's Word, we surround the foundations of our Republic with that most impregnable of all defences, the love of free, pure hearts ; yea, we enlist in our behalf the omnipotence of our fathers' God, who, while the voice of his oracles is heard in every quarter of our land, will not give over the heritage of their children to reproach.

When Napoleon was threatening to invade England, and the nation was straining every nerve to put themselves in a posture of defence, one of their poets uttered the well-known sentiment—

“ Britannia needs no bulwarks—
No towers along the steep ;
Her march is o'er the mountain wave—
Her home is on the deep.”

These words, thrilled like lightning through the national heart. They were caught up, and applauded, and incorporated into the household songs of the people. Their brave sentiment has animated many a man on the perilous edge of battle ; and their echo has been heard in every land where the English tongue is spoken.

May we not with still greater truth express a similar sentiment ? America needs no bulwarks ! The unfailing source of her national enthusiasm and strength

is in the recollection of christian firesides and Sabbath influences ; and the last, impregnable rallying place of her patriotism, as it was the first, would be the altars where the oracles of God are expounded.

And from the same source we derive an assurance of safety, not only against foreign, but also against domestic enemies. The oracles of God have laid a deep ground-work in the character of this great nation on which the Christian patriot may build securely. I am simple-hearted enough to believe that even in the intricate game of politics a straight-forward, honest course is the best policy ; for I have *confidence in the intelligence and integrity of the people*. And by the people I do not mean the brawling politicians, whether in high or low places, with whom the only virtue is adherence to party organizations, and the only test of a good administration an accurate division of the spoils ; but I mean the great majority of the nation, who make less noise in the state, because they find other business more profitable than the trade of politics. The great mass of our people do judge and act for themselves. The number is very small whose suffrages can be bought, or obtained by fraud, or controlled, when any great principle is at stake, by the dictation of party leaders. Politicians may compound principles, and divide the land among themselves ; but their decrees after all are not the laws of the Medes and Persians. Every few years some startling turn of events shows that their dogmas can no more

control the roused action of this giant nation, than the green withes could bind the limbs of Sampson.

One Bible principle deeply interwoven with our national character is *subordination to law*—that spirit of gospel conservatism which would “rather heal that which is lame than have it turned out of the way.” In great cities where the vagabonds of all nations congregate, “lewd fellows of the baser sort,” may incite to riot and bloodshed ; but we should remember that cities do not constitute the nation. Paris may be France ; but neither Philadelphia, nor Boston, nor New York, can ever become the United States. Our rural districts are populated by a law-abiding people ; and even in great cities the uproar is made by the noisy and riotous few.

As an illustration of the influence of Bible instruction in maintaining the supremacy of the law, and restraining the mad passions of fanatics, take the result of the agitation about the Union, with which the country was convulsed a year or two since. It is true that the champions of covenant-breaking and disunion carried on their enchantments in the name of Israel’s God, and like one of old, quoted Scripture to suit their purpose ; but did not the advocates of law and order draw more triumphant weapons from the same armory of truth ? Did not Aaron’s rod swallow up the rod of the magicians ? Much of the oil that allayed the waves of sectional strife, was poured out from ten thousand pulpits ; and of those who stood up for the

defence of the Union in legislative halls, none were so mighty as he, on whose eloquent lips the words of Scripture lingered till the latest moments of life, and who went down into the dark valley, exclaiming “Thy rod and Thy staff.”

And, now, in conclusion, let us dwell for a moment on the reflections suggested by the statement, that the oracles of God *are committed to us*. We as a people are a repository of that Truth whose influence is yet to work out the moral and political regeneration of the world. These oracles are committed to us, not that we may enjoy them ourselves alone, but that we may bestow them freely upon a benighted world. Whether in the convulsions which may yet shake the corrupt systems of Europe, we are to interfere by force to unbind the Word of God; whether this nation is ever to resent the insults which are daily put upon our citizens, and demand of other governments that they shall reciprocate to our people the same religious freedom we accord to theirs, are questions which I will not undertake to discuss. But this I know, we cannot be mere spectators to the unfolding of the prophecies. God in his providence has given us a mighty work to do. He has made this land *the school-house of the world*. *He is sending all nations here to be educated, and He has put into our hand the great text book, whose truth is able to make all men free.* The obligation resting upon us is obvious and weighty. It is pointed out and enforced upon us by the whole course of that Provi-

dence under which this land was discovered and settled, and has been conducted to its present lofty position. Away, therefore, with the narrow and ungrateful policy which would bid away the foreign exile from these shores whither our own fathers so recently came as pilgrims and strangers. Away, too, with the cowardly spirit that stands trembling lest the oracles of God should be destroyed by contact with error. God's truth is mightier than the Pope and the devil too. All we need ask for it is a free course. It will glorify itself. Instead of trembling before the apostles of evil, or spending all our strength in railing at them, let us imitate their example of zeal, in propagating the almighty Gospel.

God has cast all nations here into a great furnace. His word is the hammer and fire, which, crumbling and melting together the pure metal, and burning up the dross of every national character, is producing a combination like Corinthian bronze—mightier than all. I will not undertake to map out the destiny of this new race. But this much I will venture ; its future opens up visions of glory in which the Christian as well as the patriot may rejoice. I do not believe the croakers with whom every election is a grand crises in our national affairs, and every defeat of their party a prelude to utter destruction. I do not sympathize with the ministers who seem to think that the appropriate business of Thanksgiving Day is to magnify evils and prophesy wrath. The end is not yet. *Ichabod* shall not

be written upon the history of our national progress, until it has studded the Pacific coast with a long line of sister States, stretching out the hand of a friendly greeting to the benighted millions of Asia, and calling on the multitudes of the isles to be glad ; until it has crowded every sea with the canvass of a Christianized commerce, and belted the great globe with electric nerves vibrating to the lofty impulses of religion, and iron veins through which the knowledge of God's word may run to and fro. Then shall the end be ; *not* in the darkness that gathers over shattered states relapsing into barbarism and tyranny ; but in the glory of that millenial light which shall blend all governments into one universal Theocracy ; when the angel that flies through heaven "having the everlasting Gospel to preach to them that are on the earth," shall cry "Babylon is fallen, and the kingdoms of the earth have become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ ;" and from the jubilant earth shall go up one song of triumph, "Hallelujah ! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

C

GIVING THANKS FOR ALL THINGS.

A

S E R M O N ,

PREACHED IN

The First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn,

On Thanksgiving-day, Nov. 29, 1860,

BY

REV. HENRY J. VAN DYKE,

PASTOR.

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1860.

BROOKLYN, November, 1860.

To the Rev. HENRY J. VAN DYKE.

Rev. and Dear Sir:

Believing that a more general circulation, at this time, of your THANKSGIVING Discourse, would be of great value to all who love the Church of Christ, we earnestly desire that you will furnish a copy for publication.

Yours, with affection,

WM. S. DUNHAM,
ROB'T H. LOWRY,
WM. KUMBEL,
GEO. G. SAMPSON,
JAMES C. WILSON,
WM. O. MASSIE,
JOHN SCRYSER,
JAMES D. CARHART,
S. T. CASWELL,
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HENRY CAMMEYER,
ROBERT TWEEDE,
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WM. E. MORRIS,
A. B. CLARK,
G. C. WOODHULL,
F. HINCHMAN,

HENRY BUTLER.



BROOKLYN, December 3d, 1860.

Messrs. DUNHAM, LOWRY, KUMBEL, &c.

Dear Brethren:

In compliance with your request, I cheerfully submit the manuscript of my Sermon to your disposal. May God add his blessing to its publication.

Yours truly, in Christ,

HENRY J. VAN DYKE.

SERMON.

EPHESIANS, V. 20.

"GIVING THANKS ALWAYS FOR ALL THINGS UNTO GOD."

Gratitude to God, the source and inspiration of all true thanksgiving, is a duty which brings with it its own ample reward. Indeed, it is more a privilege than a duty. Harmonizing the faculties and affections, and centering them upon the Father of lights, from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift, it produces that inward delight which the apostle beautifully describes in the context, as a "singing and making melody in the heart unto the Lord."

In the hope that God, by his word and Spirit, will give each one of us an experience of this spiritual delight, I propose as the subject of our meditation to-day—

THE NATURE AND THE OCCASIONS OF THANKSGIVING.

I.—In regard to the nature of thanksgiving, we should ever remember that it is the utterance of gratitude to God. It is essentially a service and sacrifice of the heart. Though our lips were musical and eloquent as an angel's, and our ritual glorious as that of heaven itself, without this inward singing, this gushing melody of the heart, quickened by a sense of Divine goodness, we shall be but a tinkling cymbal and a sounding brass, and our solemn assembly become an iniquity before God.

Obviously, therefore, it is essential to all true thanksgiving, that we duly consider the Divine benefits. “ Whoso is wise, and will consider these things, even he shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord.” But, alas! the brutish man knoweth not, neither doth a fool understand this.

Because God’s goodness is so unwearied and inexhaustible, opening for us the gates of every morning, and curtaining the repose of every evening ; crowding every element with teeming life for the gratification of our appetites ; watering the furrows of the earth with rain from heaven, and warming it with sunshine, and crowning every successive year with bloom and fruitfulness ; just because his providence is thus bountiful and constant, the inconsiderate and ungrateful man forgets and ignores him in the midst of his benefits. Like the grazing ox, that tramples the flowers of the field under foot, intent only on the satisfying of his present appetite, he eats, drinks, and is merry, amid the abundance of corn and wine, without even a thought of Him whose is the dew and the fatness of the earth.

In order to a sincere thanksgiving for the Divine benefits, it is necessary, not only that we think of them as they pass, but that we treasure them up in our memory ; so that, on suitable occasions, we may review and rehearse them in our songs. The memory of men is usually tenacious enough of the wrongs they have suffered. The re-

cord of their losses and injuries is graven upon their heart as with a pen of iron on the face of the rock ; and both eye and lips are ever ready to read it again at every mention of the offender's name. But the favors they receive, and especially God's incessant benefits ; alas ! how slight and how fading are the impressions they make ! Every one has a vivid recollection of the sickness he has endured—the hours of pain and languishing are carefully chronicled, and often rehearsed ; but how few, like the sun-dial, mark the hours that shine, and tell over with minute and grateful particularity, the successive days and years during which health coursed through their veins, and the cup of their comforts was full to overflowing. The sweet singer of Israel seems to have this universal and shameful tendency of our nature in view, and to be fortifying himself against its insidious influence, in 103d Psalm :—“ Bless the Lord, oh my soul, and forget not all his benefits : who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases ; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies ; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.” Nor is it only his own personal blessings that he would charge his soul not to forget. God's dealings with his forefathers, and the wonders he had wrought in the land in days gone by ; his universal providence over all people, and especially his fatherly pity and kindness toward all that are

distressed—are mingled in the Psalmist's song with the remembrance of his own experience. And thus the theme seems to grow too large for his heart and lips. He summons other creatures to assist in the utterance of his gratitude. He would be one in a universal and perpetual choir. “Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word: bless the Lord, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his that do his pleasure. Bless the Lord, all his works, in all places of his dominion: bless the Lord, O my soul!”

In the hearts of those who are actuated by the spirit of the Psalmist, gratitude will become, not only a perennial fountain, but a fountain whose fullness and force will constantly increase. In riper years the mercies of childhood and youth will not be forgotten. In the time of prosperity and plenty there will be a vivid remembrance of the eye that pitied, and the hand that guided and fed them, in the day of adversity. The milk and honey of the promised land will be mingled in grateful memory with the manna and water of the wilderness. As the field of their observation enlarges, and the treasure of their knowledge increases—whether these treasures be gathered from the history of the past, or from the wonders of nature, where God, in his providence, worketh hitherto—they will possess a constantly accumulating store of grateful memories, which the very darkest hour of adversity can-

not overshadow or destroy. And thus their thanksgiving will ever be what David so often and so expressively calls a NEW SONG. For gratitude in the heart is not a stagnant pool, but a flowing fountain. Out of its fullness, the mouth will speak. To those who rightly consider and remember, it will seem a mean thing to conceal God's loving-kindness, or to suffer the remembrance of it to sleep among men; and the earth, which imbibes the dew and sunshine of heaven, does not yield its increase with a more spontaneous abundance, than a heart softened and warmed with Divine love will bring forth "the fruit of the lips." Even the heathen crowd the gates of their imaginary deities with thankful songs. How much more should a Christian adopt the pious resolution : "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever. I will publish with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of his wondrous works."

But, then, mere praise, however comely and acceptable in itself, can never sufficiently express or discharge the obligations of a grateful soul. In this delightful service, words must go hand in hand with deeds. Wherever there is a true song, there will be also a *sacrifice of thanksgiving*. Yes! the *sacrifice* of thanksgiving, without which all the anthems that ever were sung would be but a mockery and a delusion. How vividly was this taught, by both ordinance and prophecy, under the Old Testament economy. The worshiper was required, as a fitting acknowledgment of the Divine bene-

fits, to honor God with his substance, and the first fruits of all his increase. Not a shock of corn was to be gathered into their own garners until the first fruits had been consecrated upon the altar ; the cattle on a thousand hills did not rightfully belong to the reputed owner, unless the firstlings had been offered in sacrifice ; nor the gold and silver become a private possession, until the tithe had been cast into the treasury of the temple. When the worshipers in that temple neglected these plain requirements, God spurned their vain oblations, and charged them with robbery. And have the obligations thus recognized and enforced under the Old Economy, been abrogated under the increasing light and privileges of the New ? Nay ; the great principles illustrated in the temple service are confirmed by new sanctions, and perpetuated on a wider scale, amid the superior blessings of the Gospel. God having crowned all his ancient benefits by the gift of his Son, and perfected his former revelations in the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ, the specific requirements of the law are done away, only in order that more liberal and costly offerings may be presented under the constraining influence of love. And now, he who does not contribute habitually, and from principle, to the cause of Christian benevolence—he whose *lip service* is not fortified by *thank-offerings*, according to his ability—may not sing praises without incurring the guilt of hypocrisy.

At the present time, as in the days of old, our goodness extends not to God. Our great benefactor is beyond the reach of our gratitude, so far as any actual benefit is concerned. But, then, his children, whom he loves, and whom we ought to love for his sake, are everywhere around us, appealing to our sympathies, and beseeching us to help them for Christ's sake. The poor we have always with us—not only those who suffer bodily nakedness and hunger, but those who are perishing for lack of the bread of life; whosoever we will, we may do them good. And they who come into the sanctuary to-day, to participate in this annual thanksgiving, can bring no more acceptable offering than the recollection of zealous efforts and liberal gifts for the relief of human suffering, and the extension of the Redeemer's cause in the earth. If they have visited the widow and the fatherless in their affliction—if they have comforted and instructed the poor children who would otherwise grow up in ignorance and misery at our doors—if they have clothed and fed Christ's brethren in the ministry, and contributed to the mighty Gospel the wings by which it might fly abroad; or if, in the absence of any such blessed memories, they are ready to record their sincere vows of zeal and liberality for the future—then, and not otherwise, will their praises come up as a sweet incense before God! Such is a brief description of the duty enjoined in our text: it is the utterance of gratitude

to God, prompted by a due consideration and remembrance of all his benefits, and finding its appropriate expression not only in *songs*, but in *sacrifices* of thanksgiving.

II.—Let us consider the time and the reasons for the performance of this duty—when and for what are we to give thanks? How comprehensive and emphatic is the answer of our text:—“*always and for all things.*”

The precept in regard to the *time* of thanksgiving is analogous to the commandment which requires us to “pray without ceasing.” We are not to be incessantly engaged in the actual utterance of either praise or supplications. But as we are to pray, so we are to give thanks, frequently and habitually. Our character and purposes are to be cast in the mould of gratitude by the hand of charity.

The key-note to all a Christian’s affections and thoughts must ever be praise; not the bitter remembrance of past trouble, or the dark anticipation of evil to come, but the grateful and joyful recollection of Divine benefits. There is not in all the Bible a single precept requiring a Christian to mourn and weep. It is true, indeed, that a pitiful Father allows to his children, when they are afflicted, a comely and temperate expression of their grief. But even this permission does not justify them in cherishing their sorrows, or refusing to be comforted. It is true, also, that the spirit of

prophecy calls on impenitent and unthankful men to anticipate their woes, saying to those who lay up treasures for themselves: "Go to, ye rich men, weep and howl for the miseries that shall come upon you." But the precepts that are addressed to Christians are all full of joy and singing. And the reason for this is obvious. A mournful and repining temper is inconsistent with the growth, if not with the very existence, of grace. Grief is in its very nature a selfish and shrivelling affection; wherever it obtains supreme dominion, it contracts the soul, and suppresses all its generous impulses; and, therefore, it will always be found that they whose eyes are so blinded with tears that the ways of Providence seem to be utterly dark, and in whose lips the unceasing complaint leaves no room for praise, make but a sorry exhibition of the power and blessedness of our holy religion. The household from which grief or discontent, like a bolted window, shuts out the sense and enjoyment of heaven's sweet light, can hardly be called a Christian family; for "the voice of joy and thanksgiving is in the tabernacle of the righteous." The grateful reception of daily and hourly mercies, and especially the consciousness of pardon and salvation through Jesus Christ, if they cannot dissipate and blot out the gathering clouds, should at least illuminate them as with the radiance of the setting sun.

And the same measure of obligation and privi-

lege extends to that practical thanksgiving, in which our gratitude to God prompts us to relieve the wants of his creatures. It is a Christian's business, and it ought to be his joy, to be *always giving*. Does a fountain grow weary of dispensing its living waters? Does the sun become tired of shedding down his quickening beams? Does the ocean, into whose bosom God bountifully pours ten thousand streams, ever refuse to fill "those wandering cisterns of the sky," from which descend the former and the latter rain to garnish and fructify the earth? Neither should they who are the lights of the world, into whose homes and hearts God empties the full horn of his providence, and pours out the riches of his grace, ever grow weary in freely giving what they so freely receive. O, if this spirit of gratitude and practical benevolence pervaded the daily life of the church, the return of this annual thanksgiving-day would be indeed a sacred festival. God, from his throne, would "smell a sweet savor," more fragrant than the incense of the altar when the purified earth was consecrated anew by the sacrifice of Noah; and our feast of ingathering would be crowned by his blessing with more than the joy of harvest.

The motives and occasions for such thanksgiving as we have described are numerous as the moments of time, comprehensive as the providence of God, infinite as the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge. The language of our text is to be un-

derstood in its most literal and universal sense. *For all things* we are to give thanks unto God our Creator, Preserver and Redeemer. We are to thank God our Creator for this body, so curiously wrought, and this indwelling soul, so marvelously endowed. It was a spark of devout affection, lingering amid the ruins of the intellect, that prompted a madman to arrest every passer-by in the street with the startling question—"Did you ever thank God for your reason?" Such a question might be propounded with equal propriety in reference to every sense and organ of the body, and every faculty of the soul—the eye, painting the beauty of the external world on its wonderful retina—the ear, through which the heart drinks in the language of eloquence and love—the hand, with its cunning skill, and the tongue, which the Psalmist calls his "glory," because it can vie with angels in praising God.

We are to thank God our Preserver for air and sunshine and water, and all the marvelous chemistry of nature by which the regular succession of seed-time and harvest is secured. Never was such thanksgiving more appropriate than at the present time. The earth has yielded her increase with unparalleled profusion; and God, as if to show by contrast the unkindness that perverts his gifts, and involves the recipients of them in fraternal strife, has loaded every bough with golden fruitage, and caused every valley to laugh in the abundance of

its harvests. Now, if ever, the worshiper ought to sing that song of the seasons :

“The rolling year
Is full of thee. Forth in the pleasing spring
Thy beauty walks, thy tenderness and love ;
Then comes thy glory in the summer months,
With light and heat resplendent. Then thy sun
Shoots full perfection through the swelling year.
Thy bounty shines in Autumn unconfin'd,
And spreads a common feast for all that live.”

We are to thank God our Redeemer for that unspeakable and all-comprehensive gift, from whose fullness we are always receiving grace for grace ; for an open Bible, shedding the fadeless light of truth into our hearts and homes ; for our peaceful Sabbaths, linking us in sweet bonds to each other and to heaven ; for the ministry of the word, uncontrolled and uncorrupted by secular power—and for all those spiritual blessings that come to us through the ordinances of the sanctuary, the family altar, and the closet.

Nor is the motive to thanksgiving circumscribed even by the great circle of these unnumbered benefits. We are to give thanks *for all things*, even for those disguised blessings which bear the name and appearance of *affliction*. He knows little of the true Christian philosophy, and has penetrated but a little way into the source of a true believer's gratitude, who understands not how to “glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience

hope, and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in the heart."

And this sublime philosophy applies not only to the private and personal afflictions by which our Father chastens his own children, and works out for them "an exceeding and eternal weight of glory," but no less to the more public calamities which disturb the commercial and political interests of the world. There is honey in the carcass of every lion, and true gratitude is the Samson that extracts bread from the eater and sweetness from the strong. It has always been, and still is, God's method and his glory, to bring light out of darkness, and order out of confusion. Calling to mind the days of old, wherein this truth has been signally exemplified, Christian faith can thank God not only *in*, but *for*, the trouble that broods so darkly to-day over ten million hearts. We hesitate not to affirm, that if this simple but sublime philosophy had pervaded the land, or even controlled the utterances of its Christian teachers; if pulpit and press—instead of ringing the changes upon real or imaginary wrongs, and prostituting the Sabbath and the house of God to the stirring up of wrath and bitterness—had labored to teach the people the greatness of their blessings, and provoke them to love and good works, there would not be so many to-day trembling on the brink of commercial and political ruin, and turning this blessed thanksgiving into fasting and prayer. Suffer me

to illustrate this position in reference to the fruitful theme of all our political contentions for the past twenty years. I allude, of course, to *African Slavery*. Whatever may be thought of the origin of this institution—though its establishment by the British Government, in spite of Colonial remonstrance, involved a guilt as great as that which crucified the Saviour—and whatever may be thought of the real or alleged wrongs which have grown up in the defence and regulation of the institution—(for which wrongs, so far as they are *real*, we have no apology to offer)—every eye not blinded by prejudice or passion must perceive that African Slavery is a wheel within a wheel—an integral part of that vast providential machinery—an important link in that chain of secondary causes—by which God is making the wrath of man to praise him, and moving forward to the accomplishment of his glorious purposes. Rising above the strife of parties, and turning a deaf ear to the ravings of fanaticism, the devout believer may thank God for that commerce which, based upon the production of the cotton-field, has gone forth to clothe and civilize the naked nations, break down the walls of barbarian prejudice, and open up a highway for the triumphs of the gospel; for the thousands and hundreds of thousands of precious souls who have gone, and are still going, up from this house of temporal bondage to the enjoyment of true and eternal freedom in heaven; for the light which the return-

ing sons of Africa are kindling upon the shores of that benighted continent, in anticipation of the day when Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hands in thanksgiving to God. Such recognition of an overruling Providence no more involves a sanction of any abuse that may exist in the divinely recognized relation between master and servant, than a eulogy upon marriage and its blessed results involves a sanction of the legalized prostitution, the wife-murder and infanticide, of which almost every day gives us a new example at our own doors.

But your radical reformer has no ear nor heart for such philosophy as this. All the evil passions of his nature are inflamed by the bare intimation that good may come out of Nazareth. The methods of Divine providence are too slow for him: he cannot wait for God to work his own problems in his own time and way. The example of Jesus Christ and the holy apostles, in dealing with this very question, he ignores and reviles: the idea of reforming the world by the melting influence of a gospel preached alike to bond and free, and the triumphs of a church in whose organic law the standing of both master and slave are distinctly recognized, is obsolete in his estimation, and he has actually persuaded himself to regard it as wicked. And so, instead of giving thanks to God, he rails at men. Accusation, reproaches, evil surmises, ridicule, are the weapons of his warfare. No

place nor time is too sacred for the outpouring of his wrath and reviling, and no amount of evidence can satisfy him of the Christian character and motives of those who presume to differ from him.

And what are the practical results of thus discarding the example of Christ and his apostles, and refusing to recognize the broad sweep of Divine providence in reference to this matter ? These results cannot now be fully described. The spirit of fanaticism is too subtle and far-reaching in its influence, touches the social, political, and religious interests of men in too many points, to be comprehended at a glance, or described in a hasty discourse. And yet, though the harvest is not ripe, and could not be gathered in a day, if it were, its first fruits are obvious ; they are already garnered in ten thousand aching hearts, and may be described in a few brief sentences. They consist in the doubtful blessing of freedom secured to some thousands of the sons of Africa, by a system of *man-stealing* which is condemned alike by the law of the land and the word of God ; in the utter shipwreck of faith in multitudes who have floated down the stream of railing Abolitionism to the abyss of blaspheming infidelity ; in a sectional and fraternal strife, which, if it shall go on to the bitter end, will soon sing its jubilee among “the broken and dis-honored fragments of a once glorious Union ; in a

land rent with civil feuds, or drenched, it may be, with fraternal blood."

It is a remarkable and instructive fact, and one at which Christian men would do well to pause and consider, that in this country all the prominent and recognized leaders of Abolitionism, outside of the ministry, have become avowed infidels; and that all our notorious Abolition preachers have renounced the great doctrines of grace as they are taught in the standards of the Reformed Churches, and adopted a method of Scripture interpretation in reference to this subject, which, if consistently carried out, would utterly reject and destroy the authority of God's word. They make that to be sin which the Bible does not declare to be sin. They denounce as the sum of all villainies a relationship which Christ and his Apostles recognized and regulated. They would institute terms and tests of Christian communion utterly at variance with the organic law of the Church, as founded by its Divine head; and, attempting to justify this usurpation of divine prerogative by an appeal from God's law to the dictates of human nature, they would set up a spiritual tyranny in the house of God, more odious and insufferable, because more arbitrary and uncertain in its decisions, than Popery itself. The fruits of this usurpation are such as might be expected. *It is a demonstrated fact that Abolitionism leads to infidelity.* Such men

as Garrison, and Gerritt Smith, and Giddings, have consistently yielded to the current of their own principles, and thrown the Bible overboard. Thousands who listen to Abolition preachers will go and do likewise. And whether it be the restraint of official position, or the preventing grace of God, that enables such preachers to row up stream, and regard the authority of Scripture in other matters, their influence is all the more pernicious because they prophecy in the name of Christ. In this utterance of my deep convictions on this point, I am only exercising the rights of a Christian minister, and discharging my conscience toward the flock I am called upon to feed. When the shepherd seeth the wolf, he is bound to give warning.

I have asserted that Abolitionism is the author of the strife that now threatens to shake every institution and interest of the land to its centre. Let me not be misunderstood in this assertion. I do not mean to intimate or admit that the result of the recent election, which is the immediate *occasion* of the present outburst of sectional jealousy and hatred, is an Abolition triumph. By no means. It is true that Abolitionism entered into the contest, and now, with characteristic self-assurance, claims the result as its own work, and exults over it with words of ridicule that sting like a serpent. But then, these claims are not allowed by those who are entitled to explain their own views and

opinions. Thousands and tens of thousands who voted for the President elect have no sympathy with the spirit, the letter or the designs of Abolitionism, and will never consent that it shall control the policy of the incoming Administration.

They who look below the surface of passing events must perceive that the cause of the dangers which now threaten our very existence as a nation is not the simple fact that a President has been elected by Northern States alone, nor the legislative enactments by which some Northern States have nullified the Constitution these many years. The real cause lies underneath and behind these things, in the alienation of feeling which for a quarter of a century has been growing between the North and the South, and which, there is reason to fear, has already and utterly dissolved the union of our hearts. Of this alienation Abolitionism is the first great cause. The first spark of this balefire was struck from that flint. And as it was the source of this mischief, so it is now the chief hindrance to the settlement of our difficulties upon a peaceful and permanent basis. Its voice is still for war, and, mingling a horrid mirth with its madness, it still scatters firebrands, arrows and death, and says, "am I not in sport?" Who stands to-day in God's house, and, exulting in the prospect of an irrepressible conflict, protests against all concession and reconciliation? Who puts into the

hands of secessionists at the South the very whips with which they lash the popular mind into fury ? *The Abolition preacher.* There are conservative and good men enough in all parties and sections to settle our differences upon a basis honorable to all. But, alas ! one madman threw a torch into the great Ephesian temple, and kindled a conflagration which a hundred thousand brave men could not extinguish ; and so, it is to be feared, the noisy and reckless few will blow the embers of strife into a flame which coming generations cannot put out.

But suppose, now, this strife does go on to the bitter end—what then ? Shall we cease to give thanks ? Shall we, in the gloomy anticipation, restrain our praises on this day of thanksgiving ? Nay ! As the floods rise, we only go a step higher on that rock where God puts a new song into our mouth. Dearly as we love our whole united country, and fondly as we still cling to the hope that the spirit of brotherly kindness and concession may yet return to heal our breaches, we do not forget that we have a higher relation, and a more glorious and enduring allegiance, than any which binds us to these United States. Our citizenship is in Heaven. We are subjects and princes in a kingdom whose existence and progress does not depend on any human government, and which can never be identified, except by gross usurpation, with any

principality or power on earth. Christ, to whom pertains the glory and crown of this kingdom, in times past has "*dashed the nations in pieces as a potter's vessel.*" While his church has been marching on through all ages to its glorious consummation, successive empires have been built, and garnished with mighty skill, and crumbled away in its triumphant path. The work of overturning is going on in these days with uncommon rapidity, and every Christian heart ought to rejoice in its progress. Amid the noise of our internal strife, let us not shut our ears to the joyful news of events at which the Chistian historian, in future times, will pause in wonder, love and praise.

The crescent is waning in the eastern sky. The successor of the false prophet is sick unto death, and all the efforts of nominally Christian nations cannot keep him from that deep grave over which heaven will sing hallelujah, and earth respond *Amen*. The Pope, too—the man of sin—the anti-Christ and the deceiver—is gasping for breath. The blood of ten centuries of persecution has been crying out from the ground against him; and now the imprecation is about to be fulfilled. God, in the slow but sure method of his providence, is avenging "his saints, whose bones lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold." Blessed be his name! the old dotard can only sit now, like Bunyan's giant in his cave, gnashing his teeth, and whining,

in his drivelling impotency, at his coming doom. Meantime, Christ's kingdom, which is not of this world, moves on to its consummation. And if, in his inscrutable providence, *this* nation, too, must be dashed in pieces—if the bright vision many of us have cherished from childhood, and still cling to with unutterable fondness—the vision of this confederacy of States, marching on in the greatness of its strength till its brightness melts away into millennial glory—is to be suddenly and forever dispelled ; sorrowful as we may be, we shall not, therefore, cease to give thanks, but, wrapping ourselves in the broad mantle of our heavenly citizenship, we shall look up to Christ, our king, and sing—“Thy throne, oh God ! is forever and ever, and thy sceptre has an everlasting dominion.”