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REV. CHARLES WADSWORTH'S THANKSGIVING SERMON.

THANKSGIVING.

A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

ARCH STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA.

ON THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 1861.

BY

CHARLES WADSWORTH.

"REV. DR. WADSWORTH'S THANKSGIVING SERMON.—The eloquent Sermon preached at the Philadelphia Arch Street Presbyterian Church, on Thanksgiving Day, by the Rev. Dr. Charles Wadsworth, has been published in a very handsome pamphlet by Messrs. T. B. Peterson & Brothers, Philadelphia. This discourse was one of the ablest and most eloquent ever preached by this eminent divine, a gentleman whose abilities as a chaste and vigorous pulpit orator are beyond all question. It will no doubt be eagerly sought after in this permanent form. It is a sermon all should read, as it is suited to the times, and single copies of it will be sent to any one to any place, free of postage, on remitting fifteen cents to the publishers, in a letter, or eight copies for One Dollar"—*Bulletin*

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PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

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“IN EVERY THING GIVE THANKS.”

I THESSALONIANS, v. 18.

THE simple and obvious meaning of the text is, that we have always something to be thankful for; that gratitude is due to God in every earthly condition in which a living man can be placed. And this is a truth appropriate to this occasion, for we are observing our great national festival in circumstances wherein some men judge that the keeping a fast in sackcloth were a more seemly service. It cannot be denied that we are to-day a deeply distressed people, and that our attempted offerings of thanksgiving will ascend largely from desolate households and sorrowing hearts.

To this occasion, therefore, the usual style of service would be manifestly inapt. We have little of the old exulting spirit; and amid this evident and almost overwhelming despondency, need exhortation even unto the solemn *duty* of thanksgiving.

Such an exhortation is the text; and in view of it the question, which perhaps we have all asked, Why should we keep festival when fasting better becomes us? appears ungodly, infidel, blasphemous; for we have here a Divine command, “*To give thanks in every thing,*” (*i. e.*) in every actual or possible earthly condition. And this command is most manifestly both reasonable and righteous; for where is there a living man to-day that has

not abundant reason for gratitude to God? It is never so bad with us as we deserve. It is never so bad with us that it might not be worse. If a man have lost property, he still has friends; if friends have deserted him or died, he has yet health; if health too be wanting, still he lives; if an arm has been broken or palsied, he remains strong in his feet; or if he be halt and lame, he has the use of his eyes; or if sightless, he hears; or if deaf, he yet speaks; or if at once blind and deaf and dumb, he yet feels and thinks; and for this single power of thought, allying him unto God and his angels—this function of a spirit winged and waiting for immortality—he should, were it heaven's only gift, give thanks unto God reverently with a joy unspeakable and full of glory.

But we may go further than this, affirming that, even in our worst estate, we are receiving at God's hand vastly more of good than of evil. In our experience there are always more days of sunshine than of storm, and more senses ministering to delight than to anguish; so that, reckon as we will, God has ever large claims on our thanksgiving. Meanwhile it will appear that very much of our misfortune is the result of perverted dispensations, in their design merciful. Our poverty is a result of *abused*, or at least neglected, opportunities of accumulation; and our sickness is caused by a wilful violation of beneficent physiological laws. Even these sore national troubles, whereof we especially

complain, have sprung, at least proximately, from our own evil passions.

We may ascribe the evils we experience to God's special providence, but with manifest injustice. Our Heavenly Father never constrained as to that indolence or imprudence resulting in bankruptcy, nor to the physical intemperance ending in disease.

Nor is it the great and gracious God, that for half a century has excited at the North and the South those extreme and intolerant fanaticisms which have brought this sore distress upon us. On the contrary, it is the very prodigality of His goodness unto us above all peoples of the earth, which, working perversely upon a corrupt nature—like Heaven's sunshine on tropical jungles, developing noxious and deadly growths—has strengthened thus malignantly these principles of evil.

Verily, if our land be doomed to destruction, and this fair fabric which we fondly deemed Liberty's great temple, be now abandoned of God to the destroyer, nevertheless, will its mighty ruins remain through all time monumental of God's marvelous love unto a self-destroyed people, and upon every stone of shattered pillar, and arch, and aisle amid our death-dust will be found inscriptions testimonial of the tender mercies of our God! If the American Nation be to-day dying on these hills like a strong giant in the very flush of its youth, it is not because God's thunderbolt hath smitten it—*it dies as a suicide*

But then this nation is not dying ! We are afflicted indeed, we are sorely in straits, and the kings of the earth shake the head, and shoot out the lip, and laugh us to scorn, and against us hath the feller lifted the axe as upon a cedar of Lebanon, boasting against this mighty tree that grew and was strong, and whose leaves were fair, and whose fruit much, under whose shadow we had pitched our tents, hopeful that our children's children, yea, and the children of the stranger unto the end of time, would find joyous shelter—against this goodly tree—this grand growth of God's centuries, proudly boasting—“Behold we will hew it down, and cut off its branches, and shake off its leaves, and scatter its fruit; therefore, let the beasts get away from under it, and the birds from its branches.”

Nevertheless, blessed be God, “*there is hope of a tree if it be cut down that it will sprout again.*” We are hopeful of our old cedar yet, that “*through the scent of water it will bud and bring forth boughs like a plant.*” We have before God an abiding confidence, that our nationality will survive this assault and emerge from the conflict only more radiant and powerful—a confidence, not of doting credulity, but of philosophic reckoning, resting on the goodness of our cause ; the greatness of our strength ; the whole history of our past as demonstrative in our behalf of Divine purposes of mercy ; and all thoughtful prophecy of the future which forsees for us a great mission of civilization and christianity to a redeemed

yet oppressed world. We have indeed as small fear that we are to be permanently dissevered and destroyed, as that this well-rounded world will resolve to the old nebula, or the Copernican system go back again to chaos and night.

On the contrary, we regard the trials we are now enduring as only parts of a great transitional development—a very evolution of that Divine wisdom which, overruling man's iniquitous purpose, delights to bring good out of evil. And in this connexion there are considerations very obvious and simple, which should both reconcile us to these trials, and make us grateful in the midst of them. Observe then :

FIRST—That our nationality is and must be *a growth, or development*, and therefore, like all growing things, depends for its progress on constant and sharp antagonisms. This is God's ordinance from the beginning. It was the primitive geological law whereby from fiery cataclysms emerged systems fairer than before in their materialism, and with races more numerous and perfect in their form and organization. And this remains manifestly the law of all life. From its lowest type, through manifold gradations, to the highest, it is developed amid, and strengthened by, antagonisms. Even vegetable life is a long and ceaseless conflict. An acorn falls into the ground, and at once the elements of the soil set to work to destroy it. Nevertheless, these destructive agents are seen presently only to have weakened the

husk, and quickened the germ of a higher organism—a green blade pierces the hardened earth, and lifts itself heavenward, while vigorous roots shoot abroad in the soil, drawing up and assimilating and so growing strong upon those very elements that seemed armed for its destruction. Meanwhile this natural antagonism goes unceasingly on—gravitation pulling heavily at its growing trunk and branches; and tempests wrestling to cast it down to destruction. And yet the living tree constantly roots itself and rises, not merely in spite, but positively by means of the conflict: its trunk grows in stateliness amid the rough ministry of the storm, and its branches clothe themselves with green garlands—the very spoil it has won from a hundred baffled tempests. And the secret of the oak's great growth is this law of antagonisms.

So, too, of all higher types of life. The sea-polyp floats reposefully yielding to every tide, and the butterfly wages no war with sunbeam and zephyr; but the lion's awful strength is matured in savage wilds, and the eagle's mighty wing is nerved by the hurricane. No man becomes great in any direction of his powers through a gentle ministry—the Columbus of the seas is tempest-tossed into seamanship—the Cæsar of Empires is fought into courage.

Nor is this less the law of great, social, and national existences. It is on this very principle of antagonisms that God works out His grandest problems of moral government.

Human progress is ever like that of a ship beating to windward, in the very eye of the tempest. Civilization, like the oak, is the result of an assimilation of seemingly destructive elements, and its sheltering branches, as the tree's, are bright with the spoil of a thousand hurricanes. Even Christianity, from its rude cradle, down through all its mighty triumphs in long antiquity, has fulfilled the same law, and grown strong through antagonisms. So that the consummation of God's most stupendous purpose, was achieved, not by the ministry of singing angels, but through human antagonisms, with treachery and a cross.

Now, studied where you will, this will seem the great law of all national life, and most manifestly of our own. American nationality is rather a growth than a production. Not a social edifice, planned by human genius, and realized by man's art and device, but a social organism, growing from a germ, and silently, under God's law of development. The heroic men who planted these colonies, and whose social virtues and sublime Christian faith have shaped and colored our destiny, seem not even to have foreseen, much less projected, this great Republican Commonwealth. But, as the oak in an acorn, unperceived by man, came, in the rough old Puritanism, the national germ, and its development has been through this law of antagonisms.

At first, the colonists were not only a feeble, but a widely scattered, and unsympathizing folk—uncongenial communities, dwelling each in its own

sphere, as aliens and strangers, and brought, only by outward pressure, within the power of social attraction. First, the cruelties of a common savage foe kindled friendly sympathies among the scattered hamlets, and then, as they grew into considerable colonies, the intolerance in turn of English, French, and Dutch rule, linked stranger-hearts into a community of suffering, and stranger-hands into a community of resistance. Then came the Revolutionary period—when the attack of insane tyranny upon sacred charters, and the storm of foreign invasion around those homes in the wilderness, brought a scattered race more tenderly into sympathy, overcoming old prejudices of envy, or ignorance, or fear, and through that stormy era of confederacy, ever strengthening those social ties, till they took the seeming of nerve and sinew and vital tissue in a single, common, organic life.

With the adoption of the Federal Constitution, the colonies became, at least in theory, a composite nation. Old leagues and compacts and articles of confederacy, were put away as partition walls—provincial watchwords were forgotten, provincial flags furled forever, and in the form and with the functions of a single organism, the young Republic set forth in her progress, all her sons keeping step to the same music, following the same banner, *E Pluribus Unum*, their one glorious motto amid, or against, the kingdoms of the world!

And yet, though from the first our theory of a

nation was perfect, there was lacking in the reality something of the compactness of a vital organism, whose great strength should be wielded by one imperial will, and wherein a common heart should beat, and a common mind think. There was, as philosophical statemanship had foreseen, the working within, of powerful unassimilated elements threatening destruction. Sectional interests, State jealousies, personal ambitions, all tending to occasional interruptions—indeed, seemingly to the ultimate destruction of the one common life. There was need of another and a last antagonism, to compact the organism—the burst of another fiery flood over the conglomerate strata, melting and moulding them forever into one composite world.

Now, just this thing we are experiencing. And though to short-sighted and timid reason it seem a veritable destruction, yet to masterful faith it is no more than a fulfilment of the law of all social progress, by which a state of conflict, of discomfiture, of seeming overthrow and disintegration, precedes a condition of higher excellence and triumph.

The grand obstacle to our permanent nationality has been, from the first, this heresy of State Sovereignties—the selfishness of the old Colonial and Confederate eras, transmitted as hereditary virus to disorder the functions of constitutional life. But the effect of this war must be to annihilate that pestilent heresy at once and forever. This, indeed,

is its grand end and aim. One resistless, controlling, central power—one great, sympathizing, supreme heart, sending the tides of a common healthful life through all the members to the farthest extremities—this is what we want, what we are struggling for, what we are sure to obtain. For whatsoever else we may lose in this fiery trial, if we come forth with national life at all, it will be with a strong, common, constitutional life—in fact, as in theory, not discordant congeries of States, but a composite nation. If true to ourselves, we may, and God helping us, we will, drive out forever this disquieting demon, and bequeath to the future more than we inherited from the past—a government, not only the freest and fairest, but as well the most immutable and mighty of the governments of the world.

But obviously this could be done only by sore conflicts. There are evil spirits that yield not to gentle exorcisms—“a kind that goeth not forth even by prayer and fasting,”—fiends that “cast into the fire and into the water to destroy,” and must needs “tear and rend sore,” even unto a seeming of death, ere they depart forever.

With such an one are we wrestling, and the struggle is good in itself, and will be glorious in its influences. With all its terrible evils it seems, as well to the eye of philosophy as to the heart of faith, of the phenomena of development,—a great step in our political progress—an affliction,

indeed, in form, but in fact a great blessing, which it becomes us, not merely with patience, to endure, but to receive as from God with true Christian thankfulness.

Observe again—

Secondly. How this thankfulness becomes us in view of some benefits incidental to this great national struggle. Evil as War is self-considered, yet in the experience of a sinful race it is oftentimes a necessary, always a mitigated evil. And though Peace is always self-considered a blessing, yet in its influences upon human character, it proves, not unfrequently, more disastrous than even War itself—like a long calm on a campagna breeding pestilential malaria, until we thank God for the purifying and strengthening ministries of the storm.

There are principles of our nature, developed by long continued industrial and commercial prosperity altogether more fearful and foul than those which inspire and arm men for patriotic battle. One of these, and the most fearful, because the root or ground-form of all evil, is *covetousness*—the consummation of all iniquities—toward God the idolatry that denies Him the throne—toward men the selfishness that inflicts every injury.

Now, in our enjoyment of unexampled and almost uninterrupted peace, this evil principle has been terribly developed. We were fast becoming the most mercenary people on the earth. So intensely material had become our civilization, that we were

tempted to say, that the old chivalric and sentimental barbarism were better. In the absence of a feudal aristocracy of birth and blood, we were inaugurating that worst of all social castes—an aristocracy of riches. Craft, shrewdness, subtlety, artifice, cunning—anything, everything mighty in money-getting, were grounds of claim for our patents of nobility. The men successful in heaping treasures, let them be whatsoever else they might—dexterous cheats, unscrupulous defaulters, adroit stock-gamblers, robbers of public revenues—though uncultured in intellect, unchristian in morals, uncouth in manners—were nevertheless fast becoming the principalities and powers of our social hierarchy.

Esquire Money-Love, Colonel Many-Acres, the Reverend Dr. Make-Gain, the Honorable Mr. Great-Purse—these were the men taking precedence of the great nobles of character at the court-end of the Republic. Gold was becoming our supreme national god. Gold controlled our franchises, elected our rulers, shaped our politics, and colored our religion. For gold our juries rendered verdicts, our rulers reversed sentences, our statesmen endorsed measures, our physicians turned charlatans, and the very ministers of our sanctuaries left God's sheep in the wilderness, to wander vagrant and mountebank through the land, lecturing on — moonshine. Virtue was a thing quoted in prices-current; conscience and character rose and fell with the stock-market. "The creed of the multitude was, life is

the time to get rich ; death is the winding up of a speculation ; Heaven is a mart with golden streets ; hell a debtor's prison for unsuccessful men ; the chief aim of man is to glorify gold and enjoy it forever." The very temples of God were places of money-changing, and the priest at the altar an alchemist with a crucible in its holy fire, seeking the philosopher's stone. The public, in a word, were mad for gold, and when gain becomes the grand popular end and aim—the *summum bonum*—the highest and ultimate good—then has avarice become the spreading leprosy of the social state, and all things fair and noble and of good report sicken and die, as in the breath of the pestilence.

I speak not these things invidiously. I but say what we all know. We were, proverbially to the world, and consciously to ourselves, fast sinking into the unleavened sordidness of avarice. Like the Hebrews at Mount Sinai, we had torn off our ornaments of honor and honesty—the jewels of price which our fathers brought through the flood—and cast them into the raging fires of covetousness and then came forth a golden image, and with songs and dances we worshiped the calf!

Meanwhile this insane greed of gain was naturally and necessarily working out our ruin—for by an immutable law of life, wealth begets luxury, and luxury palsies the strength and digs the graves of nations. There was indeed an hour, only just past, when it seemed that this dire palsy of avarice had

already reached the national heart, and we were hopelessly death-struck. That season no American heart can ever forget, and its record shames us more than flight from a hundred battles! Alas what days those were! When with the old flag spurned, torn, trampled under traitorous feet, our nationality reviled, our capital threatened—the derision of enemies—the gazing-stock of a world—we stood yet calmly by, ease-loving, pusilanimous, servile, seemingly troubled only about prices-current and stock-markets, careful only of trade and gain. There lay the grand old ship of State, with all her priceless freight of human interests and hopes and fears, and divine purposes of mercy to an oppressed world, yet driven back from her course, dismantled, dismasted, on her beam-ends, rolling a shattered wreck upon the waters, seemingly about to be broken up piecemeal and go down forever; and yet we, not girding ourselves in seamanship to wrestle with the storm, neither tightening a rope, nor standing to the rudder, we only anxious about her lading—the supercargo’s invoices—with outstretched hands and quivering lips crying, “*Out with the life-boat, the long boat, the yawl, the pinnace, for Heaven’s sake save—THE DRY GOODS! To the rescue! Bear a hand every man—Oh! THE COTTON—THE COTTON!*”

Verily it did seem that the palsy of avarice had reached the national heart! Columbia the fairest child in the family of nations seemed dying! The old Empires watched for the death and made ready

mourning weed and cypress-wreath for the burial! Her disconsolate sisters beyond the sea were quite prepared to administer, not exactly to her relief but—*upon her estate!*—But blessed be the Lord God the young giantess did not die! Presently there gleamed from that glazed eye a flash of the old fire! There was a re-knitting of wasted sinews! a quickening and deepening of the old vital flood! the stricken one staggered to her feet again; she breathed heaven's pure air and drank the living water, and grew strong, and walked abroad! and her old flag floats again! her old eagle soars! She concluded to defer dying, at least for the present! our disconsolate English cousins can not have their "*wake*" yet! Sir Lytton Bulwer writes glorious romances, but rather fails *as a prophet!* And God's hidden meaning of love in these American providences lies a little too deep even for the stupendous plummet of Earl Russell's intellect!

Blessed be God we are saved! But how? *By blood-letting!*—the good old allopathic, and only infallible remedy for this plethora of avarice! We are saved from this deadly evil of Peace, by the sharp, but smaller evil of War! The thunder of cannon in Charleston harbor broke the lethargy that was fast destroying the national life—and every true heart thanks God this day that this death-spell was broken, even by the tramp of armed men and the roar of the battle!

And in emergencies like this surely even war is

a blessing. It is the natural antagonist of the sordid lust of gain. It calls into play other and higher social instincts—the craft, the subtlety, the guile of unscrupulous avarice give place to the self-denial, the self-sacrifice, the chivalrous daring of patriotism and soldiership. Evil as it is, it is still the less of two evils. Better a thousand times the wild torrent from the mountains, sweeping away the corn and the vines, wherewith human industry has clothed the fair lowlands, than the stagnant pool breeding deadly malaria! Even these blasts of war have quickened our better impulses. We feel now that life has nobler aims than to build fine houses, to drive fast horses, to beautify large estates, and leave much wealth unto children. That courage, and manliness, and patriotism, and the preservation of a strong national life, and the homage and respect of a world, are of more worth even than a monopoly of the cotton trade.

This war, in a word, is developing an American manhood and womanhood, full of the old noble and heroic impulses, worthy of our glorious ancestry and traditions, in whose reckoning the accumulations of industry, the thrift of trade, the gains of commerce, yea, even the life and blood of the beloved, are all only as the dust of the desert when the stake of the mighty game is a great philanthropic and Christian nationality.

Meanwhile there are other collateral benefits which this conflict will work out for us. If we

triumph here—as, if at all true to ourselves we must and shall—we shall have convinced the world of the permanency and strength of free institutions, and indeed so have developed that strength in grand naval and military organizations, that we shall hear no more sneering at “the bubble-bursting Republic of the West.”

Sure we are—the more sure from all their malignant manifestations in this, our sore trial—that the old Empires in their essential antagonism to our institutions, and the intense hatred they cannot but cherish toward a social system elevating into self-government the masses of the race, as from the first they have prophesied our destruction, so they stand ready now to aid and exult in it. And it needs this great demonstration, not only of our inalienable right, but of our inherent power of self-government; this bringing forth of old banners; this marshaling of countless men; this lavishing of wealth; this triumph of the old flag, the old patriotism, the old unparalyzed, undivided, indomitable national life over an antagonism within, compared with which all foreign invasion were as nothing; it needs just this, I say, to teach a gazing and gainsaying world that, ordained of God for a great philanthropic mission into all nations, ours is as well the resistless power as the steadfast purpose to achieve it, even should it lead us into conflict with the despotisms of the world.

Meanwhile, beyond all these simply temporal

benefits, has this struggle a great spiritual use, in restoring our old primitive and puritan sense of dependance upon God. As already observed, under the united influences of prosperity and covetousness, we were fast becoming an irreverent, and indeed, atheistic nation, and that divine favor, whereon solely our fathers relied, was scarcely reckoned among our sources either of preservation or prosperity. But we are now learning, once for all, and thoroughly, that our national salvation depends neither on political sagacity, nor military strength, but on the protection of that Arm that ruleth in Zion—that, indeed, all those material resources, and social influences, which we counted as strength, are, without the divine blessing, only so many elements of destruction; and that all those bonds of national Union, that we pronounced indissoluble—this broad communism of industrial and commercial interest—this grand geographical unity—this brotherhood of kin, and cast, and race—this proud partnership in blessed memories and glorious hopes—that these, and whatsoever else have seemed bands of triple steel round our beloved confederacy, are yet only as a spider's web when an incensed God, turns away from us the light of his countenance. God is teaching us herein great ethical and theological lessons, and will bring us forth from the trial, as gold purified from the fire, not the old boastful infidel nationality, but a reverent and christian people, whose God is the Lord.

We may not pursue this point further. Enough

has been said to illustrate, and guard from misrepresentation, our simple thoughts. We have attempted no commendation of war; we have not said that self-considered, it is not ever and only a great and sore evil. We have only insisted that, terrible as it is, yet life, may have greater evils—that anarchy is a greater; that the dismemberment and destruction of this fair heritage is a greater; that to live without a country, or a government, or an earthly future for ourselves and our children is a greater; that to be stripped by traitorous hands of all that renders life enjoyable or endurable is a greater; that just here and now to pause in our national progress, and suffer our free institutions to fail, and the American name, with all its traditionary glory, and all its fair promise unto oppressed humanity, to become an offence and a scorn unto a gain-saying, or a disappointed world—that all this is immeasurably worse than any evils war itself can bring.

We believe, indeed, that just this conflict is a great philosophic necessity in our national progress—sure to occur at some time, best to occur now—that it is only a mysteriously merciful dispensation of Providence working out for us, through much tribulation, the integrity of a strong national life in the present, and in the future an enduring and far more excellent glory.

We, perhaps, may not live to witness the end of the conflict. Indeed there are some men who, in view of our present rate of progress, have little hope

that we shall. God seems to be treating us as he treated Israel—because of their unbelief and cowardice, keeping them marching backward and forward forty years in a desert, which a band of Bedouin cavalry would have crossed in a month. It looks like this now. We are surely as yet perplexed in the Exodus; there is a wild howling wilderness around; and the water of our springs runs bitter; and enemies fierce and strong are encamped in our path; and there are among the tribes mean men, like Achan, that would turn back our march for gold; and traitorous men, like Korah, who rejoice in our discomfiture; and timid men, like the spies of evil counsel, who whisper with pale lips of walled cities, and armed giants; and between us and the longed-for rest rolls a dark deep river, and as yet we have not found our Joshua with the rod of God in his hand. And it may be God's purpose of judgment, that not a man of ours, as of that old generation, shall pass the Jordan in triumph. But it shall be passed! If not we, yet our children shall go over dry-shod and exulting and in the morning light. And when, in the serene calm of that sure future, the philosophic and Christian historian shall write up the record, and from that Canaan—that fair land of the promises and the covenants and the glory—reached at last wayworn and with weary feet, through wild deserts and armed foemen and dark and angry floods, shall review the strangely chequered past—all that weary way which the Lord God led us in the wilderness to humble us

and to prove us—then it will, I doubt not, be seen that this our Exodus, like the old, was the very richest in the experience of God’s loving wisdom—a transitional era when a grandly rounded world emerged from a fiery deluge—an epoch of social progress, when a divinely strengthened people, having thoroughly mastered themselves, went up to a place of peerless glory amid the nationalities of the world.

Now we have dwelt thus at length upon this war, because more than all else it tends to disturb our moods of thanksgiving, and we would have you feel that even this is no exception to the divine rule,—“*In every thing to give thanks.*”

But as yet we are only on the outskirts of the text’s important truth. This war is but a single item of our large personal experience, which, even if it be reckoned only and altogether an evil, should not yet beguile us this day of the grace and joy of thanksgiving. So paramount and absorbing has become our thought of this war that it will at once surprise and benefit you to consider how little, with all its evils, it really lessens your reasons for gratitude to God. Grant that it is an unmitigated evil, it is nevertheless, only one evil in a vast and ever varied experience of good. In spite of it, and in its midst, God has spread His banner of love over your banqueting house, with your table prepared in the midst of your enemies; your head anointed with oil, your cup running over. No less than before has this bright sun shone on you,

and healthful breezes fanned you, and ministries of love gladdened your habitations. And yours have been all the ineffable consolations of the Gospel of Christ, and the hopes of a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Count this war only a divine judgment, nevertheless, it is no more than a solitary cloud on a firmament still lustrous with the sun and stars of His infinite loving-kindness, and scarcely weakens the force of the inspired exhortation —“ *In every thing give thanks.*”

Nor this only. This balancing of accounts with God, to feel that He has done us, on the whole, more good than evil, is a very pitiful and unworthy view, to take of the duty of thanksgiving. Our text takes much higher ground. It enjoins thankfulness *in all circumstances*. Even if they should seem utterly distressing. And teaches us that true thanksgiving is not a selfish emotion gratified by prosperity, but a vital grace in the soul, existing independent of circumstances or condition.

Let us then in our brief remainder of discourse consider *Thankfulness as a gracious affection of the soul—What it is? and How it is to be strengthened?*

FIRST.—*What is the thankfulness which the text enjoins?* And we answer that it is not a simple, but a composite emotion—consisting of *joy from benefits*. And *love for the benefactor*. Simple joy alone has no determinate moral quality; it may be good, it may be thoroughly evil. Without love it is altogether bad and abominable. Thankless delight belongs to the

class of selfish and malevolent emotions, and may be felt in full strength by a beast, or a demon. *Joy sanctified by love* is that heavenly grace which the Bible calls "*Thankfulness.*"

SECONDLY—*How is this grace to be developed and strengthened?*

It is implied in the text's very language that true thankfulness does not depend upon our outward condition—because it is enjoined in the midst of, and despite the most calamitous circumstances — "IN EVERY THING *give thanks.*"

And here we are reminded of the nice old distinction of language (now indeed lost) between "Happiness" and "Joy". The word *Happiness*, from the verb "*to hap*" expresses our delight in what *happens* to us—or comes to us from without. But the word "*Joy*"—from a root which means *to spring*—denotes a delight, not produced by outward things, but by the quality and harmony of the soul's inbred emotions. In short—Happiness enters from without—Joy issues from within—the one results from condition: the other from character. In this sense the ground-form of thankfulness is not *happiness* but *joy*—the abiding grace—not the occasional emotion.

The text implies moreover that unthankfulness is not merely a sorrowful mood caused by conditions, but a sinful disposition constituting character.—And a sin it surely is everywhere and always—a fearful distemper of the spiritual man—an insanity of the will—a neuralgia of the affections—rendering the arm nerve-

less for good—the heart pulseless of gladness—a malignant inspiration, moody and wrathful, thinking evil of God and working evil toward men, unfitting the soul for heaven, and excluding it from its blessedness.

Thankfulness is the effluence of a fine grace of character, which like all graces is to be strengthened by the culture of the various dispositions upon which it depends. Among which are—

1st. *Humility*.—Much of our discontent results from pride—an overweening estimate of our own desert. But let a man in true humility regard himself, as he is, a wrath-deserving sinner, and by every mercy that lifts him above eternal despair will his heart be filled with joy, and his lips with thanksgiving.

2ndly. *Benevolence*.—A disposition that rejoices even in the superior happiness of others. Augustine calls *envy* the besetting sin of the devil, who envied Jehovah in heaven and Adam in Paradise, and the essence of whose torment is a thought of happiness which he cannot share. To an envious soul true joy is impossible—if perfect in conditions of manhood, it will writhe at the thought of angelic spheres and pinions—if raised to Gabriel's ministry in the very presence of God, it will be in anguish at the sight of that higher throne and the loftier One that sitteth on it. Now in a universe like this we must all have superiors—spirits of loftier spheres, even fellow-men of finer gifts and positions. And to be thankful in our lowlier estate, we must have that benevolence which finds joy in the happiness of others.

3dly. *A Good Conscience*—A sense of ill dessert gives to real good the seeming of evil. To a murderer the gentle footstep and voice of ministering love seem, sometimes the fierce tread and cry of the blood-avenger. It was an accusing conscience that made that lustrous hand-writing terrible unto Belshazzar as words of doom; and unto Herod arrayed the miracle-working and most merciful Savior in the terrors of an avenging phantem risen from the dead. And so it is ever. A troubled conscience makes our good seem evil—like the Gadarene demon driving the man, whose lot God had cast under the glorious skies, and by the blue lake of Galilee, to torture himself in the mountains, and make his home in the tombs. While a peaceful conscience builds for itself a palace even in the wilderness, gathering joy from all circumstances, prosperous, or adverse, adjusting the heart's chords, like an Æolian's, to give forth pleasant harmonies, whether touched by the zephyr, or swept by the hurricane.

4thly. *A Sound Judgment*.—Our discomfort with things as they are, springs often from a misconception as to how things ought to be. Setting out with the notion that present comfort is our chief good, we will be sure to misjudge God's dispensations. For, in that case, the kindest thing he can do for us, is to sink our rational powers into mere animal instincts. An immortal spirit, within the limits of time, and the conditions of probation, must necessarily be restless. The bird-of-paradise will never sing in a cage like a pet linnet. But zoophites are proverbially

uncomplaining, and periwinkles float with the tide in a very sea of comfort, and well-fed oxen and geese and swine are, in their own sphere, and after their kind, as contented as the angels. But then present pleasure is *not* the supreme earthly good. Man's life here is not terminal, but a transition, not a May-game, but an earnest work—a battle in heavy armor with Principalities and Powers—an Exodus through a desert where angels encamp round us under burning suns, and the fiery serpent hisses even in the shade of the Shekinah. And the true heart prefers the pilgrimage to the play-ground, accepting and exulting in its condition of discipline, and, wise to value blessings according to their spiritual uses, thanks God more for the crown of thorns than the May-queen's garland, and counts the star-fire of the firmament of greater price than all the colored lamps of an imperial pavilion.

5thly. *Patience*.—In considering our obligations to God, we are to remember, that He works for our good, as elsewhere, slowly and in circles of immense sweep. His buildings are not Aladdin's palaces, nor his oaks Jonah's gourds. His mercies come to us often *in the germ*, and sometimes the kernel has a rough shell, which yields only to acrid chemistries and sharp frosts. And we must perceive the oak in the acorn, and the perfected temple in its slowly wrought walls and pillars, and, patiently awaiting the consummation of God's gracious pur-

poses, be thankful for *undeveloped* blessings, even though their rind be rough, and their bud bitter.

6thly. And above all, as indeed the strength and life of all else, will thankfulness depend upon the cultivation of *Faith*—or a firm persuasion of and trust in God’s loving kindness. This, in its connections, the text especially teaches—“*In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.*” Whatever be the precise force of the words—“*in Christ Jesus*”—they certainly connect thanksgiving with Gospel faith. If we are in Christ Jesus—or instructed by Christ Jesus, we shall reckon all that comes to us from God as truly and only beneficent. If our cup be bitter, yet trustful in the great Physician, we judge that our true need is of medicine, and take it, as more richly a “cup of thanksgiving,” than a crystal chalice of the water of life from the hand of an angel. If our way be in the dark valley, where overhanging cliffs shut out sun and stars, and the air is chill, and the path flinty to the bleeding feet, yet we know that through it the Great Shepherd leads his flock in love to richer and greener pastures and fairer landscapes beyond, and so walk it with joyous footsteps and thankful songs.

Faith.—Faith resting on the Gospel of “God in Christ Jesus,” and strengthened by livelong experience of God, unfailing loving-kindness—this is what we most want to quicken our thankfulness. *Faith in the present*—not considering with Job, “*the parts of*

God's ways," (*i. e.*)—the lower parts, or endings, of His wonderful workings—not looking solely at the one wheel moving on the dust of the great car of Providence, but lifting the eye heavenward to take in the whole pageant, until it seem, not merely a revolving wheel but a careering chariot—"a fire unfolding itself and a brightness, round about it," and above it, "a crystal firmament and the likeness of a sapphire Throne," and upon it, the Eternal One triumphantly marching in His great purposes of love. And *Faith in the future*—looking even beyond the careering chariot to the Eternal bourne whither it is bearing us—that celestial city with its golden palaces—that immortal kingdom of peace and righteousness and rapture, where God's germ of love bursts into magnificent blossom, and "these light afflictions" bear fruit in "that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Such a *faith* we need, until every part of our present experience, whether joyous or grievous shall seem a necessary step in a triumphal progress, and instead of balancing the evil against the good in our reckoning with Providence, we feel that there is no evil about it—that it is good only and good altogether, so that we can not do otherwise than—"in every thing give thanks."

Such are some of the dispositions to be cherished if we would live in obedience to the exhortation of the text. Such is the nature of the grace of thanksgiving—and such is the ground of the apostolic exhortation—"In every thing give thanks.

It is sad to think that such an exhortation should be needed—that thankfulness should ever be enjoined as *a duty*. An unspeakable privilege, an irrepressible and joyous instinct of a loving heart, it should be rather! What living man can be unthankful? What place in a heart here for the demon—Discontent? What could have been done for God's vineyard that He hath not done? Go, compute, if you can, heaven's constant and marvelous benefactions! Creation, preservation, redemption—who shall ascribe values to such things? *Life!* what a gift it is in contrast with non-existence! Life, even the lowest—a flower's life—a bird's! How the lily and the lark praise God, till the air seems odorous and musical with their thanksgivings!

And yet the winged bird is a poor soulless wanderer and the brightest flower dies with the summer! How then with *your* life can you be thankless! An immortal life, bearing God's own image! With a power of thought and love to soar over the grave and wander through eternity! A life springing from the depths of the Heavenly Father's love, and preserved at the price of the eternal Son's redemption! A life so conditioned for developement, awaiting such a destiny—watched by angels in a star-hung world—approaching spheres for whose glory, thought has no image, and language no name!

Oh, men! immortal men! sons of God! Princes of endless empires, borne in this world-chariot to palaces and thrones! How can you be thankless?

How can you sit in God's house in sack cloth, or return to your homes disconsolate? You, who might have been fading flowers—dead stones—nothing! Nay, who, but for God's amazing and infinite grace, would be this hour *lost spirits*—the eternal gulph between you and the heavenly mansions—the immortal wing outward-bound unto the blackness of darkness! You, whose afflictions, even at their worst, are no more than a stain of dust on a conqueror's chariot-wheel—a plume gone from the wing of a soaring eagle! What mean you, thus thanklessly to count your losses and trials and sorrows in a reckoning with God? Oh, awake to better thoughts! Lift your eye from the low path you are treading to the brighter things before and around you—the divine love that watches over you; the shining angels that wait on you; the eternal city that opens its glorious gates to welcome you!

Awake! awake from those frames of thankless sadness! Awake, psaltery and harp! Oh, sons and daughters of God, break forth into singing. Praise ye the Lord. Sing unto the Lord a new song. Let Israel rejoice in Him that made him. Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King; both young men and maidens, old men and children. Sing unto the Lord with thanksgiving. Praise God in His sanctuary; praise Him in the firmament of His power. Praise Him for His mighty acts; praise according to His excellent greatness. Praise the Lord, oh my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name!

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