

GOD'S
MARVELLOUS DOING

108

The Nation.



GOD'S MARVELLOUS DOING

FOR

THE NATION.

A Sermon,

PREACHED ON THE DAY APPOINTED BY THE PRESIDENT

FOR

NATIONAL THANKSGIVING AND PRAYER,

In the Church of the Epiphany, Philadelphia;

BY

REV. RICHARD NEWTON, D.D., RECTOR,

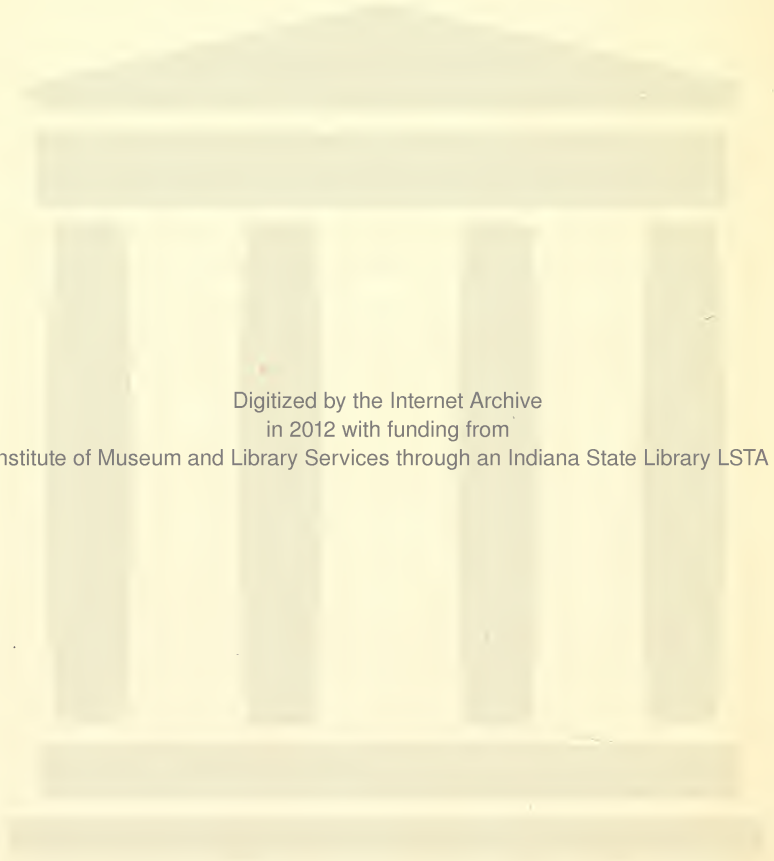
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THANKSGIVING SERMON.

“This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.”—PSALM cxviii. 23.

THE Psalm in which our text is found, is what is called a Messianic Psalm. All its utterances refer to Christ. The marvellous doing here spoken of, has reference to the great work of man’s redemption, wrought out by our glorious Saviour. Of this, it may with truth be said, that it “is the *Lord’s* doing.” The design of it is his. The execution of it is his. The results of it are his. And this doing of the Lord is indeed “marvellous.” In the magnitude of its blessings, it is marvellous. In the extent to which these blessings reach, both as to the number who are to share in them, and as to the period of their duration, the work which secures them, is “marvellous.” And it is marvellous, too, in the gracious manner in which these blessings are bestowed on the needy and perishing children of men. This is the true and primary sense in which the words of our text should be taken.

But they admit of application to other events, besides that to which they primarily refer. They may well be regarded as applying, in the way of accommodation, to the event which calls us to the sanctuary to-day—the measure of success of late vouchsafed to our national cause. We meet in the house of God, this morning, in obedience to the call which comes from the highest civil authority in the land, to present our grateful homage—our devout thanksgiving to the Most High, for the favor with which

he has crowned our arms, in the contest now waging. We have been blessed with a gracious deliverance in our own State, as well as with signal victories in other parts of our country. And as we contemplate the favorable turn which has thus been granted to our affairs, and the hope thus inspired, of the speedy termination of this sanguinary conflict, we may, with all propriety, take up the language of our text, in reference thereto, and say: "This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes."

In further considering the text, in this accommodated application of it, there are two leading questions suggested for our examination, viz.: *In what respect may it be said of what has transpired, that it is "the Lord's doing?"* and *On what ground may it be affirmed of this doing, that it is "marvellous in our eyes?"*

Our answer to the first of these questions, embraces three particulars. Thus, *If we look at the deliverance vouchsafed to our country, our State, and our city, from the fearful evils of late threatening them, we may say with truth, "This is the Lord's doing."*

These evils were of the most appalling character. Suppose the army of the Potomac had been defeated, what would then have been our condition, so far as regards the country in general? Washington would have been at the mercy of the invading host. They would have marched on, unchecked, to the possession of it. The seat of government of the Confederacy would have been transferred from Richmond thither. "The Star-Spangled Banner" would have been hauled down from the dome of the national capitol, and in its place, the symbol of this vile rebellion would be floating in the breeze, and insulting the light of heaven there. As a nation, we should have been humiliated and disgraced in the eyes of the whole world. And terms of a dishonorable peace might have been dictated to us from the mansion of our own national Executive. There is no drop of patriot blood in any man's heart, if the bare thought of such a calamity does not fill him with distress

and anguish. But, from such dishonor we are saved; and as we contemplate the deliverance thus vouchsafed to our country, may we not truly say, "This is the Lord's doing?"

But there is also the deliverance granted to our State and city, of which we have to speak. Suppose the army of the Potomac defeated, the invading forces rushing on, unchecked, through our borders, what would have been the result? Let us try to realize what would then, in all human probability, have taken place. It requires a more vivid imagination than mine, to sketch, even in dim outline, the picture of what the hand of stern reality would then have filled up in our experience. Look, yonder, on the back-ground of the picture, is seen our State capitol in flames. The invading host has crossed the Susquehanna, and is pushing on to our own city. The highways leading to the city, are filled with crowds of patriotic men, of all ranks and conditions, who have armed themselves, and rushed nobly forth to check the invaders. But, alas! their utmost efforts avail nothing. Brave as they are, still they are but an undisciplined crowd, and are mowed down, like grass beneath the scythe, before the solid phalanx of drilled and disciplined veterans that march against them. There is nothing to afford effectual resistance to that advancing host. Onward they come. "The land is as the garden of Eden before them; behind, it is as the desolate wilderness." Our ripened harvests are a prey and a spoil to the invader. Our fertile fields are all laid waste. Our gigantic railroads are torn up. Our splendid canals are destroyed. Our costly and magnificent coal works are ruined. Our rich, exhaustless mines are flooded, or fired, so that no human power can extinguish the flames. Thus, at one fell and fatal stroke, our supply of fuel for the winter's wants, is cut off; and all the wide-spread and diversified commercial and manufacturing interests dependent on the coal trade, are paralyzed. How terrible a calamity! What a pall of gloom would thus have been cast, at once, over all the

length and breadth of our noble State! What an arrest would have been put upon its progress! For how long a time, the onward tide of its prosperity would have been rolled back! And then imagine, if you can, what the picture would have been, of this city in the hands of the enemy. Yet, if the army of the Potomac had been defeated, and the rebel army had crossed the Susquehanna, say what you will, Philadelphia would have been in their power. Nothing that we could possibly have done, would have prevented this catastrophe. And who may venture to portray the scenes of horror which this quiet, goodly city would then have presented? See, by every avenue, north and east from the city, what panic-stricken thousands are fleeing to seek a place of safety! Behold the markets deserted, the stores closed, and all branches of business suspended! There are the Navy Yard and the Arsenal in flames! There is the Mint blown up, the Banks rifled, the Water-Works and the Gas-Works destroyed! The torch is applied to our princely dwellings, the city is given up to the devouring fire, and the means of extinguishing the conflagration, are removed. Vast multitudes of the inhabitants, unable to escape, are suffering from hunger and thirst. Hard-featured want, and gaunt famine, are staring them in the face, while violence and misrule are let loose, to hold riot in the streets, and spread havoc and destruction on every hand.

But all that fancy can picture, falls immeasurably short of the tremendous evils that would have been inflicted on this devoted city. The pent-up wrath of the South, in all the force of its intensity, would here have found full vent. Such scenes as these, as we but yesterday stood in apprehension of them—how like a terrible dream they appear! But the danger is passed away. We breathe freely. And as we meditate on the gracious deliverance vouchsafed to us, we may say, with thankfulness, "This is the Lord's doing."

Again, we may say the same, if we look at the gracious preservation of those, unused to war, who sprang forth so nobly, for our defence in the hour of danger.

It was the flower of our city, that made up those ranks of brave defenders. Among them were found our fathers, husbands, brothers, sons, and friends—"our choice young men, and goodly." If the army of the Potomac had not rushed so nobly to the rescue, or if it had not been so successful in its efforts, then those fresh troops, as yet unskilled in war, would have had to bear alone the shock of the invading host. The Blue and Gray Reserves, the City Troop, and the other forces so hastily gotten together for our defence, were composed of brave men. There were sinewy arms, and dauntless, heroic hearts among them. They stood between the invaders of their homes, and all that was dear to them on earth. If they had been called to the contest, they would doubtless have borne themselves heroically. As brave men, I believe they would have done all that brave men, under such circumstances, could have done. But that it would have been a possible thing for them, effectually, to have checked the veteran host then marching against us, I do not believe. They would have hurled themselves, right nobly, on that host; but it would only have been to be overwhelmed, scattered, and destroyed by it. But for the army of the Potomac, the brave men who rushed forward to repel the invasion of our State, would only have rushed forward to the embrace of death. Their slaughtered ranks and mangled limbs would have been strewed over our now smiling fields. And what an experience of sorrow that would have involved to our city! Then indeed would have been presented to our view a roll, like that the prophet saw in vision, written within and without, and the writing would have been—lamentation, mourning, and wo! We owe it to God, and to the army of the Potomac, that such an experience of bitterness is not pressing upon us, as a city, to-day. Then how highly we should prize the surviving warriors of that army! As we meet them here-

after, how gladly we should embrace every proper opportunity of testifying our gratitude to them! And as for the maimed and wounded relics of that army, now suffering in our hospitals, how freely, how tenderly, how sympathizingly, how affectionately we should minister to their wants! The wounds they bear, the pains they endure, are the price of our deliverance from all the evils that erewhile threatened us.

And then, as for the fallen heroes of that army—the honored dead of Gettysburg—what shall we say of them? They gave their lives a ransom for us. Ah! what do we not owe *to them*? Who has not a sigh to heave, a tear of genuine grief and affection, to shed over their consecrated graves? Let us embalm their memories in our inmost hearts, and raise over them enduring monuments, which shall record their honored names in imperishable renown, and hand them down to those who shall come after us! And as we welcome back our returning loved ones to their homes again, while devoutly grateful for their preservation, let us apply thereto the language of the text, and say, in thankful acknowledgment of the favor thus vouchsafed to us, “This is the Lord’s doing.”

We may thus appropriate the language of the text, again, in view of the substantial progress made by our Government, in the work of re-establishing and maintaining its authority.

It becomes us all, to keep clearly and distinctly before our minds, what the work is in which the Government of these United States is now engaged. It is emphatically what has just been stated. Its first great aim, is to re-establish and maintain its authority. The war now waging by our Government, is not a war for the triumph of party, nor for the success of a particular set of measures. *It is not a war for the abolition of slavery.* The overthrow of this institution may be one of the results that will follow from the final success of the Government. No doubt, this will be the case. But to secure this, is not the object of the Government in the war it is waging. It is striving for

its own existence. It is contending for the high and holy principle of self-preservation. It is struggling for the maintenance of law, of order, and of constituted authority. It is not a war of conquest, or of subjugation, in any other sense than that in which a father's effort to bring back to duty a disobedient son, is an effort at subjugation. The best interest of the child, and the happiness of the family to which he belongs, are both involved in the success of the father's effort. And it is just so with our Government in its present struggle. Its success involves the triumph of right, of order, of justice, and humanity, in opposition to the cause of anarchy, confusion, and oppression. And this being so, every indication of success on the part of the Government, is a legitimate ground for our rejoicing, and for assembling in the sanctuary, as we are doing to-day, in order to present the grateful homage and praise of our adoring hearts to Him who is the only Giver of victory. We cannot look over the broad field of contest, without perceiving much to encourage us in the present position of affairs. Delaware and Maryland, Western Virginia and Kentucky, Missouri, and the greater part of Tennessee, are now firmly secured to the cause of the Union. The Mississippi river, fully and finally opened, cuts the territory of the rebellion in two. The rebel armies of the South-west are scattered and broken up, while the great armies of Grant and Rosecrans, instinct with life and energy, and flushed with victory, are entering on fresh "enterprises of great pith and moment." Mississippi and Louisiana are well nigh lost to the rebellion. North Carolina, never very hearty in the cause, is considering the question of withdrawing from it. Charleston is likely to fall. Savannah, Mobile, and Wilmington, must soon follow in its train. The area of the rebellion will thus be hermetically sealed. In this position of affairs, further fighting will soon be unnecessary. The natural exhaustion consequent thereupon, will finish the work. The inevitable result will only be a question of time. Let, then, the successes already attained, be but

properly, and vigorously followed up, and we may hope that God, in whose hand are the hearts of all men, and who turneth them even as the rivers of water are turned, will lead the mass of our brethren in the South, to see the folly of the course they are pursuing, and thus bring on the sheathing of the sword, the extinguishing of the torch of war, and the return of smiling peace, with all its manifold blessings, to our borders. And thus, as we contemplate what has been already accomplished, towards the securing of so desirable a consummation, we may well say, with thankfulness, "This is the Lord's doing."

And now we come to the *second general division of our subject, viz.:* *On what ground may it be affirmed of this doing, that "it is marvellous in our eyes?"*

It is so, as illustrating, in a striking way, how God, in the operation of his mysterious providence, makes the very sins which men commit, the instrument of their own punishment.

No careful student of Scripture, and no attentive observer of Providence, can fail to admit, that this has been one of the fixed principles of God's dealings with his creatures from the beginning. The sin of our first parents lay in the indulged desire "to be as gods, knowing good and evil." The punishment of our first parents lay in this, that they knew *good* as that which they had lost, while they knew *evil* as that which they had gained, as their personal and transmitted possession. The sin of Israel lay in the determined desire to have a king, like other nations, when the Lord their God was their King. The punishment of Israel came to them, in the oppression and tyranny practised by that very king whom they had so sinfully insisted on having. Later down in their history, the sin of the Jews consisted in the rejection of Christ, when they cried, "Not this man, but Barabbas," "His blood be on us, and on our children." The punishment of Israel for that sin, they have found in "the indignation and wrath" kindled thereby, which, like an outbursting tempest, has beat upon them in unceasing wo for 1800 years.

The page of history, both sacred and profane, is filled with instances of the same kind, showing how constantly God makes use of the wickedness of men as the rod by which he corrects and punishes them. And these cases may be quoted as practical illustrations of the meaning of passages of Scripture like these: "He gave them their desire, but sent leanness withal into their souls." (Psalm cvi. 15.) "They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind." (Hosea viii. 7.) "They shall eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices." (Prov. i. 31.) But the annals of the world afford no such striking and stupendous illustration of this principle, as God is now working out by means of the present rebellion, in its relation to slavery. Before the breaking out of this rebellion, the institution of slavery was firmly established in our country. It was recognised in the Constitution, and found its protection there. Those who were, on principle, opposed to slavery, might mourn over it, and declaim against it, but they had no power to touch it. As the framers of the Constitution left the matter, slavery, as an institution of the country, was inviolably secure. No man, no set of men in the land, had power to put forth the hand of violence against it, or materially to interfere, in any way, with the interests of those who sustained it. If the South had been satisfied with this condition of things, all their interests, as connected with this institution, would have been safe. But they were not thus satisfied. It was not enough for them, that slavery was merely tolerated and protected. The patriots of the revolution, and the sages who framed the Constitution, had dealt with slavery as an evil. They acknowledged it as such. It was an evil which had been entailed upon them. It was an evil to which they tried to accommodate themselves, as best they could, and which they hoped, eventually, by some means or other, in the good providence of God, to get rid of. But the politicians of the South had out-grown these antiquated notions. A new light had dawned upon them. They de-

clared slavery to be not an evil at all, but only, and altogether a good. They proclaimed it a divine institution, absolutely essential to the proper development of human society. The great truth, which shines with so celestial a radiance in our immortal Declaration of Independence, that "all men are born free and equal," they ignored, and ridiculed as an obsolete idea—an exploded error. Nothing would satisfy them, but a new form of government, from the Constitution of which this time-honored truth should be expunged, and in place of which, slavery should be set forth, and unblushingly proclaimed, against the enlightened conscience of all Christendom, as the distinguishing feature—the chief corner-stone of their political superstructure. To attain this object, they raised the standard of rebellion, and plunged our late happy country into the untold horrors of this tremendous war. And now, without assuming to be a prophet—without attempting to predict what the issue of this war, in other respects, will be—without venturing to affirm, that the Union *must* be preserved, and the South brought back to its fraternal bonds again, one thing is absolutely certain—*slavery has received its death-blow*. It is not the President's emancipation proclamation which will effect this result. If that proclamation had never been issued, or if it were formally revoked to-day, it would not make the slightest practical difference. It is not that proclamation, but this war, which must inevitably bring about the result of which we are speaking. The very men who stood forth in defence of slavery, the very means employed by them for its preservation,—are the men, and the means, which will most surely work its overthrow. The sin of the South, in this matter, was, that they set the interest of slavery above every other interest; the punishment of the South, in this matter, will be that by the very course they adopted to secure this end, the interest of slavery will be rebuked, put down, destroyed. "This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes." As illustrating, in a striking way, how God, in the opera-

tion of his mysterious providence, makes the very sins which men commit, the instrument of their own punishment, we may truly say, "This is marvellous in our eyes."

We may say, again, of God's recent intervention in our behalf, that "it is marvellous in our eyes," when we see how clearly it illustrates the power of prayer.

When General Lee, with his powerful and veteran army, began the invasion of Pennsylvania, our prospects in this city and state, not to say in the North generally, were very gloomy and discouraging. It seemed as if there were nothing to prevent that army from doing all that was in their hearts to do. To desolate Pennsylvania, and pillage and destroy Philadelphia, was part of their programme. In that dark hour, despairing of other hope, those who knew the efficacy of prayer, both here and elsewhere, had recourse to the mercy-seat as their chief dependence. They besieged the throne of grace with reference to the calamities that were impending over them. They stayed themselves upon God's promises. They pleaded them before him, and thus sought to encourage themselves in the Lord their God. Day after day they waited upon him and pressed their suit before him. They prayed him to roll back the tide of invasion, to save this city, and state, and country, from the dangers that then threatened them. They entreated him to watch over the loved ones who had rushed to arms, and gone forth in defence of the imperilled city. And while they were thus meeting and praying, the Lord graciously heard their cry and arose for their deliverance. He did roll back the tide of invasion that was sweeping in desolation through our borders. He did save our city, our state, our country, from the dangers that were threatening them. He did preserve the loved ones in whose behalf those earnest petitions went forth from agonized hearts. We called upon the Lord in the day of trouble, and He heard us, and gave us abundant cause to glorify Him. Most striking, indeed, was the answer thus vouchsafed to prayer. I know not how others are affected by the review of this gracious

deliverance; but, for myself, I cannot recur to it without emotions of the most heartfelt and adoring gratitude. Not the answer to Abraham's prayer in behalf of Sodom; nor the rescue of Jerusalem, by angelic hand, from the power of the Assyrian, in answer to the prayer of the prophet and the king; nor any similar instance recorded on the sacred page affords, in my estimation, a more satisfactory, practical demonstration of the prevalence of prayer than our own experience offers in the deliverance so graciously vouchsafed to us. "This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes." As showing clearly *the power of prayer*, it is thus marvellous.

And then, lastly, it is so, also, as affording proper ground of encouragement in these times of trouble. We find encouragement here as to the frame of mind we should seek to cultivate while passing through these troubles. The subject we have considered assures us of the fact of God's providence as connected with the condition of things in our country. And this affords us ground for quiet trust and confidence. War is, indeed, a fearful evil. And yet there is no denying the fact that, from the beginning of the world, it has been one of the instruments employed by God for working out the great designs of his wisdom and love. God does not, ordinarily, originate war; nor is He responsible for the fact of its inauguration. But He permits its evils to arise, and then, by His mysterious providence, brings good out of them. He made use of the sword of Joshua to put Israel in possession of Canaan. He made use of the war of the Revolution to secure for us the goodly national inheritance of civil and religious liberty that we enjoy. *Why* the God of peace and love *should* thus act, is a mystery that cannot be explained; but that He *does* thus act, is a fact that cannot be called in question. Without any doubt God is acting in this way now. We may find comfort here under all that is dark and distressing in connexion with the present war. His providence is working through it. He has a wise and gracious purpose to work out by it. All the de-

signs formed, and all the plans executed in the progress of this war, will only serve "to do whatsoever His hand and His counsel have determined before should be done." We are now, as a nation, passing through what may be called a great geological period. Great forces are at work. The strata formed during long periods by peaceful, quiet agencies, are violently broken up. Tremendous dislocations and strange upheavals are taking place. There is something strangely exciting in the thought of the influences that must emanate from the period through which we are passing:—

"In an age on ages telling
To be living, is sublime."

As we gaze upon the turmoil and commotion of the prevailing war, we can form no idea of the order, and beauty, and blessing which a Divine hand will bring out of this wild confusion. But that it will secure this result, is certain. Then let us "be still, and know that the Lord is God." Let us honor Him with unshaken confidence, and calmly wait till we see "the end of the Lord" in reference to these things.

And then, from the consideration of the subject before us, we may gather motives to encourage us in the continued exercise of earnest prayer in behalf of all the interests of our country.

Nothing is needed more than this. The mightiest influence now operating in the broad arena of our country's strife, is the influence of prayer. It is not the general at the head of the army, nor the soldier in the army's ranks, nor the statesman in the halls of legislation, who is doing the most to cut short the days of carnage, and bring again the blessings of peace; but it is the men of prayer, throughout our land, who are faithfully using their power at the mercy-seat. In all this broad theatre of strife, there is not a mind, or will, or energy, anywhere, on which the hand of Omnipotence is not resting, at all times, with controlling power. And yet, the only influence which moves that omnipotent hand, is the influence of prayer. The putting forth of this

influence, is now the thing most greatly needed. We want more earnest, wrestling, unceasing prayer. The bereaved and stricken families of the fallen, need our prayers. The sick and wounded in the crowded hospitals of the land, need our prayers. The soldiers on the tented field, and amidst the strife of battle, need our prayers. Our military leaders, in all their circumstances of danger and perplexity, need our prayers. Our rulers and public men, under the burden of their anxieties and responsibilities, need our prayers. Our brethren of the South, deceived, embittered, alienated, need our prayers. There is no one point, in regard to which prayer should be urged with more importunity, than this. That their delusions may be dispelled, and their bitterness and alienation of mind toward us may be taken away—this is the thing to pray for. It is a great thing to ask, but yet an easy thing for Omnipotence to effect. Our hopes of the restored Union rest upon the effecting of it. We know that God *can* do it. In answer to earnest prayer, we may well believe He *will* do it. With the thanksgiving and praise which we owe to-day, let us join then our prayers for this blessing. And if it shall please God to grant it to us, then shall the devouring sword soon be sheathed. The sound of discord and strife will die away through our borders. Peace and harmony will return to bless us, and “Liberty and Union, thenceforth and forever, one and inseparable,” will be the key-note of our country’s march, in the onward progress of its prosperity, and

“The star-spangled banner, in triumph shall wave,
O’er the land of the free, and the home of the brave.”

And then, in very deed, it may with truth be said: “This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.”

