

E 458

.1

.D62

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00006141195







GOD'S MERCIES TOWARDS THE NATION.

A SERMON,

BY

THE REV. MORGAN DIX, A. M.

God's Mercies towards the Nation.

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN SAINT PAUL'S CHAPEL, NEW YORK,

THANKSGIVING DAY, 1861.

BY THE

REV. MORGAN DIX, A. M.,

ASSISTANT RECTOR OF TRINITY CHURCH.



NEW YORK :
F. J. HUNTINGTON, BEEKMAN STREET.
MASON BROTHERS, MERCER STREET.

1861.

E458
1
D62

THE ETERNAL GOD IS THY REFUGE, AND UNDERNEATH ARE THE
EVERLASTING ARMS.—Deut. xxxiii. 27.

[81608

'05

W. S. 21 Nov. 12

SERMON.



How long is it, brethren, since last we kept Thanksgiving Day? How long, how much have we lived meanwhile? You talk of a twelvemonth; but do you not rather mean twelve years? Have these been only months through which we have been passing? Is it but one short year since, as a united people, we gave God thanks for all the blessings of His merciful providence? Is it but seven months since the first gun broke the dream, since the first shot tore through the line of the nation's quiet and peaceable progress? It seems as though one had lived half a century, at least, in this short space. It seems as though, since last Thanksgiving, our world had been turned upside down. We have kept two national fasts; we have come through fire and water; we have been called to the royal heritage of sorrow; we have been taught as if by briers and thorns; we have drained the cup of humiliation in stern, sad silence. One need not be ashamed to confess to days of concentrated bitterness of soul and spirit as known to him, but too well, in these months just gone. One need not be ashamed to confess to the having poured out the soul in prayer, as it were, "seven times a day," for rescue and deliverance from impending

national death. There have been hours in which all seemed, to the inexperienced eye, to have been trembling on the verge of final and utter loss. One finds it hard to describe how these calamities have seemed to shape themselves to the consciousness. But if a man were to wake in the dead of the night to feel the gripe of an enemy at his throat, and discern the pale glimmer of the steel near his heart, he would know what the nation has felt. And if such a man, in such a plight, surprised and set upon, by force and arms, being in the peace of the commonwealth, and secure in his quiet home, were able, thereupon, to rise in the very face of imminent death, and, with one tremendous effort, to hurl the murderer back, and grapple with him, and strive for life, he would know to what kind of a struggle this nation, stupefied for one instant, has, in another instant, sprung afoot. Brethren, when one reflects upon all the peril, and all the terror, and all the trial, of these late months, one is glad of a thanksgiving day, to pour out the gratitude which comes with recovered confidence and hope. The end is not yet; but it is assured. We live. We shall live. God is not dead yet. And the nation which God planted here is not, we think, dead. It recovers its power; it re-establishes its authority; it gathers up its strength; it strides on; and it thrusts aside, like rubbish, the hindrances and the stumbling-blocks in front.

This is a day for the people, as such. It is their own special holy day. It is not counted in the calendar of the church catholic; but it is one which this nation has piously devoted to the direct and formal honour and glory of God. On this day we may

speak of the nation's affairs; for since the people have agreed to sanctify these hours, their joys and their griefs, their successes and their reverses, may rightly occupy the thoughts. The preacher speaks to you to-day in response to the call of the civil authorities. He appears to add the solemn sanctions of religion to the devout expressions of the public sentiment; and if he should formulate the grand themes and topics of the public concern into the media of some just and suitable expressions, that were not to step aside from the path of churchly order and propriety. In fact it is of the office of the church to set God ever before the people, and to ascribe all mercies and benefits to His providence; to pray for the powers that be; to strengthen the hands in which just authority is lodged: to ask of God the victory when growing lawlessness stands face to face with rightful government; and to sing *Te Deum* when order is re-established, and when the enemies of liberty are quelled.

Therefore, if there be any one here present who is not grateful to God on a day like this; or who discerns not, in the position of the nation, a ground for thankfulness; or who thinks that the ministers of religion should not say plainly what they feel, and tell the people what they have to be grateful for; such a one is certainly out of place with us just now. But as for the congregation at large, they will joyfully acknowledge the duty of the day, and assent to the proposed intention of pointing out the characteristic and peculiar advantages which, amidst all the adverse circumstances of the hour, we still, through the favour of Almighty God, are permitted to enjoy.

One hardly feels like entering upon a formal and statistical account of the number of God's benefits to us; and, praised be His holy Name, it were a lengthy task, since they are indeed so many. But yet there are some which rise at once upon the view, and these we may proceed to note before we touch the one great subject of which, on a day like this, it were idle to suppress the mention.

And, 1st, we have to thank Him for the recent abundant harvests: and especially to remember this, that while we are plenteously supplied with the fruits of the earth, other parts of the world are in comparative need of the same. This is indeed a noticeable fact, that the want of grain, the first of all wants, should, at a moment so critical, make measurably dependent upon us the foreign powers with whom it is essential now that we should be at peace. God has given us enough for ourselves and for them. He has set Necessity to watch between us and the other side of the world. He has forbidden jealousy to interfere in this just and righteous quarrel which we have with domestic rebellion.

And, 2dly, we have to thank God for our preservation from pestilence and disease, and for the saving our homes from fire and sword and the scourge of war. The seasons have been fine; the treasure of seedtime and harvest, of day and night, has not failed; we have had no sickness to destroy us at noonday, nor evil that walketh in darkness to make us afraid. And within our own borders there has been neither strife nor battle; the din of arms is heard afar off, but we have not felt the shock at home. Wherever loyalty has held the reins, the people have been at

peace. Wherever they have remembered the command of the Apostle, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers;" wherever they have remembered that "the powers that be are ordained of God;" wherever they have known and acted on the knowledge that "he that resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God," there have the people dwelt securely. So has it been with our State: safe in the loyalty whereof she may well be proud. And meanwhile the wealth of the country has proved adequate to her needs thus far, and she has found how vast are her resources. And thus far we are at peace with all the world; and the parricidal onset against which we are striving has not attained to the respect or approval of mankind; it has been viewed with doubtfulness, at least, and more commonly with horror; or if it has found sympathy, we trace that sympathy at once to its source in self-interest, or in the fear of our advancing power—there is no moral principle, no basis in conviction of justice and right, at the bottom of such sympathy: it is a manifestation of self-love.

But, 3dly, it may be counted as a blessing of the times that we have been aroused to the sense of our failings—awakened to know our national sins, and to bewail them—shaken up from the vile torpor of dull material prosperity, from the rut-like tracks of greed, gain, ease, sluggish enjoyment. We have been taught to deny ourselves—to cut off superfluities—to think of something higher than getting wealth—to sacrifice, and labor, and pray for others. Let no one be slack to confess his errors; let no people be backward to admit their faults. Thus far we have done this

bravely. We have not withheld the confession of our own mistakes; the worst that could have been fairly said about us was said by ourselves.

We have entered upon a course of the severest discipline; but nothing less severe would have served the turn; we need the rod. If it be in the order of God's providence that one great nation shall still hold this continent, and be the master and ruler thereof, that nation must be trained to the dignity and the balance befitting its rightful position. These troubles, in their season, will bring their own reward, in an elevation of the national character and a purification of the whole mass, and a tempering of the elements of our composition. And so we shall be prepared to wear, without presumption and without offence to others, the mantle of that greater power which is to come.

But, brethren, let us advance in thought and speech. Not to enlarge, to-day, upon the position of the country, would be a kind of solemn affectation. The subject which is in every man's thoughts all day long, introduces itself without need of apology. What shall we say, then, on this our Annual Thanksgiving, about the struggle and the conflict in the midst of which we are engaged? What ground or gratitude, might some one ask, can be discerned in the position in which we are now placed? Why, brethren, one can hardly be thankful enough, all things considered, that this dire battle has commenced, and that we thus far have conducted it in a spirit so truly humane, and have sustained in it so little damage. The fury of the assault which has been made on what may be justly entitled the mild-

est and most equable of governments—the prodigious energy with which the Constitution, and the laws, and the flag, dear to our very hearts, have been set upon—these indicate that, one day, the conflict must have come. It could never have been avoided. If it had not been this year, it must have been ere long. Nothing has been made clearer by the whole course of events than that this terrible collision lay, inevitable and deadly, somewhere in our future; that we should have to fight to keep what it cost eight years of fighting to gain. Now, that which must come had better come at once; we had best have it over at once. And no nation could have risen more magnificently to its work than this. There is not the people now on the earth that could have done what we have done in so short a space. We have learned, in this, the power of our political system—its power of self-preservation; and we have come to know the love in which the people hold the heritage given to their fathers. And let it not be forgotten that on our side the contest has been waged in a spirit of forbearance without example. Slow to wrath have we been from the outset, and still up to this hour slow to wrath. The foreign critic looks upon the Government troops and says that they exhibit no *vindictiveness*. This witness is true; and let us be glad that it is so—that the spirit of kindness toward men still triumphs over our abhorrence of their principles. But look upon the work thus far: to what does all that has transpired incite the patriot heart, if it also be the heart of a Christian, but to profound and reverential gratitude to God? Think but of the weakness of the people seven months ago. A gov-

ernment which seemed to exist but by sufferance and in name; an army of a handful of men; a navy scattered in far-off seas; a treasury empty; a people distracted and confounded, without a rallying point, and bewildered in the search for a place where to make a stand; such a government and such a people, surprised in full security, and suddenly confronted by the gaunt and ghastly spectres of Insurrection and War, stalking up, full-armed, and threatening the name, the traditions, the very existence of a grand family of the friendly and allied nations of the world: is it not a cause of gratitude when we see, what we have seen, the slow, but sure reconstruction of all that seemed lost; the recovery of the ground, the reassertion of right, the daily advance in moral force and material strength, and confidence in God and in our cause; the one profound movement, stirring all our system to its core and its roots, and drawing from every point the vitality and the forces needed for the long work yet before us? The turning-point is passed. But there were those at home who feared, and those abroad who predicted, that there would be no turning point. Brethren, this has been a resurrection, and from a grave of which Patriotism feared and Jealousy hoped that it was closed over and sodded down forever. But in this resurrection we may count some certain facts to be established. 1st, that the rights of States are not to be regarded henceforth when they conflict, or seem to conflict with the rights and safety of the commonwealth. 2dly, that the ruler for whom we have this morning prayed, God's servant, the President of the United States, is to be the ruler of this whole land. 3dly, that whatsoever

stands in the way of the government, to hinder, to thwart, to resist it, must ultimately fall. And, 4thly, that there is such a positive reality as an American nation. This is the great and grand benefit out of all our trouble, and this were worth that trouble an hundred-fold multiplied. We are not a mere inorganic cluster of petty tribes, huddled together for a time, and liable at any moment to resolve into separate and contemptible individualisms; but we are one people and one nation, and the boundaries which separate us are but map-lines and imaginary divisions—rude water-color marks, which the wet sponge will in a moment rub out. It is this grand truth, that we are one nation, and that our history is not ended yet, which ought to make the basis of our thanksgivings to-day. For, remember, brethren, the invariable lesson from all the past. All great nations, since the world began, were formed by trial and sorrows, just as all great characters have been formed by affliction and adversity. This is the royal heritage of grief to which we have been called. As Christians we dare not quarrel with afflictions, for we have been told that whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. Surely it is natural for a Christian so to judge concerning the sorrows of his country. No nation ever became great without civil, war, revolution and rebellion. These are the maladies, which the system, if able, will throw off; and if it cannot throw them off, if it is of too feeble a constitution to stand a fever or a pleurisy, the sooner it dies the better. We think that God has work for us to do, because He thus visits us. We think that He is framing and

fashioning us for some very high and worthy ends. We are in His hands as clay in the hands of the potter; and He, we hope, is moulding us large and strong for His purposes. The blows that are inflicted upon us by lawless hands do but compress us together more closely; and if foreign force should be added to the present weight upon us, let us trust that such assaults would but knit the material into still more compact form, and harden it like iron.

All that has come upon us is the sign of our acceptance, and the omen of our coming strength. The red light now kindling in a semicircle round the land, is nothing more than as a morning glow upon the sky: the fires are not those of the sunset; rather are they the ruddy harbingers of increasing light, and strewed with hopeful radiance upon the angry clouds. All the day, with its twelve hours of useful, honorable, and godly labour, lies, let us hope, in our now shadowy future; and the drums, as they beat each morning along our whole front, on sea and land, are sounding, to the ear of faith, the reveillé of a great era of national prosperity and advance. And let not our hope and trust be checked by allusions to the divers disasters of the time; by reference to the business broken up, and the institutions which have gone by the board, and the associations which have been interrupted, and the harmonious relations which have come to an end. It is all true. But yet, even there, one must feel and say that the suddenness of these collapses proves the poorness of the stuff. Why shall we regret that which was so weak that the first rough stroke shivered it to dust? When we see how easily, how instantly, much that we depended on and

trusted to has been turned to destruction, we suspect that it could not have been worth the keeping. As a churchman, I blush with shame at the sight of a reverend father in God transforming himself into a military commander—throwing aside his bishop's habit and his pastoral keys and staff, and, awkwardly and most revoltingly, assuming the dress and weapons of carnal warfare. But, at the same time, the thought must come, that if a bishop were capable of such an act, the sooner we know it of him the better. And if it be true that the bonds of church unity have been broken, and that a schism has actually occurred in our communion, what more clear than this, that the feeling of church unity which we thought to have existed did not exist, and that we have been flattering ourselves over a delusion? Brethren, what we all of us want, in practical life, is, not fair-weather friendship, not formal courtesies, not sunshine comfort. We want what has firmness, and endurance, and truth; friendship which is stronger in evil report than in good; strength to resist the storm; light for the rainy day; the real, the true, the honest, the reliable, on which to lean, and in which to rest. And if there were which promised all this, and yet, in the very moment of affliction and adversity, failed us, when first we felt our need of it, better that we knew at once the real emptiness, the real hollowness and insincerity of the whole grand imposture. If this be all, if this be the true character of the idol, why, we are well rid of it, and, in Heaven's name, let it go!

But to return to the objects for which this day has been set apart—to the duty of giving thanks to God Almighty for the fruits of the earth and all the other

blessings of His merciful providence. Let me, in drawing these reflections to a close, allegorize somewhat, if this may be permitted, upon one of these expressions. The fruits of the earth; the seed-time and the harvest. Brethren, there lies a deep and solemn meaning in these words; we may apply them to the nation, and draw from them a moral for the hour. This is the seed-time for us. God has upturned the soil; He has ploughed the land from end to end, and laid it open in furrows to the long sunshine of the coming ages, as well as to the rain and stormy seasons towards the end of the world. What shall be the growth out of this deeply-wrought field? And of what sort shall the harvest be in its times? and of what fashion and quality shall be the fruits out of this now reddened earth? We know not, as yet. But still we can hope and trust; and we can also pray. Yea, brethren, on this our thanksgiving feast, we can pray for the coming crop, for the harvest in the future, from this rough and thorough tillage of the Lord. We may pray that the first growth from the upturned fields shall be the religious fear of God; the first, the strongest, and the most enduring. We may pray that the people, taught as by briars and scorpion scourges, may learn, through trial, the grand lesson that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will. Wherever this truth has been acknowledged, the people have prospered; and the trouble with us has been, that we have not felt this as we ought. We have trusted in our own strength, and not in God. Now must we learn that the Lord God is the Ruler, above and below. One thinks, in these days, (it

were hard to say why,) but one thinks often of the history of the Venetian republic. There, where Venice now sleeps, inactive, and unhonoured, in the midst of her dull lagoons, there once, in long past days, enthroned upon her hundred isles, sat the grandest and stateliest republic of Europe. The secret of all that glory, now existing but in name, of all the strength with which her winged lions were girt, of all the pride, and wealth, and honour which made her lustrous to the eye of the world; the secret lay here, that she feared God. Venice was the home of liberty; the asylum of the oppressed; the champion of the rights of man. She held at bay, with one strong arm, the swarthy Turk, as he threatened the religion of the Cross; and with the other, no less resolute, she waved back the Bishop-Pope of Rome when he would have forced the consciences of Christian men. There flourished the Arts; and there rode navies as gallant and as daring as our own; and there, stiff with their gold embroidery, floated her proud banners, defiant of the foes of human progress. But the secret lay here, that Venetia feared the Lord. She was a Christian and a religious power. The stateliest of all her shining palaces bore on its magnificent front the still more magnificent inscription, "NON NOBIS DOMINE, NON NOBIS, SED NOMINI TUO DA GLORIAM!" And that was the habitual thought of doge, and senate, and army, and navy, and people. Somehow or other, the glory of Venice, and its cause, seem to be continually recurring and recurring to the thoughts; and then, as that inscription on the Vendromini palace burns upon the eye of the inner consciousness, the wish is felt that those very words might be inscribed

upon our own national flag; that we might see, written by the voice and will of the people, in the thick-clustered stars, and along the red stripes, and through the blue field, those words: "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name, give glory." What a flag were that to hold up in front of the nations! With what a shout would an army under such a flag go forth to fight the endless battle for freedom, and right, and law. "Not unto us, O Lord, but unto Thy Name, give glory." Brethren, let us place the words upon our own proud flag; let us place them there in thought, and think that we descry them, blazing there through the cloud, and the smoke, and the storm. And when this Union shall be reconstructed, and peace shall be restored, and the government shall be perpetually secured in its right; when all the arts shall flourish again, and trade and commerce shall find once more their old paths; and when the church shall lift up her head, and the bitterness and grief and trial shall have fled away forever; then let us still give glory to God. Purified and strong, the people shall bow the knee and worship. The crash and peal of arms shall die away along the harvest fields. The hymn of praise shall ascend from every thing among us that hath breath; and we shall say that the years of our war against the rebellion were but an inadequate payment for the best of all lessons, learned by us in those very times, that the Lord alone doth rule among the inhabitants of the earth.





WERT
BOOKBINDING
Grantville, Pa.
March - April 1989
We're Quire Bound

