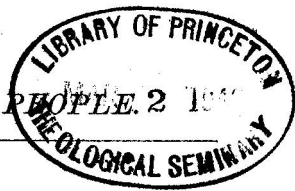


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GOD'S HAND AMONG THE PEOPLE. 2 1863



A

SERMON

DELIVERED ON

THANKSGIVING DAY,

BY

REV. SAMUEL J. NICCOLLS,

AT THE

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 1863.

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THANKSGIVING SERMON.

BY REV. SAMUEL J. NICCOLLS.

And in that day shall ye say, Praise the Lord, call upon His name, declare His doings among the people, make mention that His name is exalted.
—*Josiah 12: 14.*

Once more, by the grace of God, we are brought to the annual Pentecostal Feast of this Commonwealth, and now for the first time of the whole nation. We have passed through the toils and hopes of Spring; the hurried labors and unwonted trials of Summer; the more joyful, because unexpected, ingathering of Fall; and, at last, reached that melancholy season when the winds of Autumn to the accompaniment of rustling leaf, are singing the requiem, and the flying clouds are weaving the shroud of the dying year. But before we sit down in the repose of winter, and touch the treasured riches of garner and cellar, it becomes us to look up to the God of the rolling year, and offer our humble praises and thanksgiving to Him, whose providence shaped its eventful scenes, and whose hand so mercifully led us through them. The duty to which we are to-day called by both President and Governor, is not one arising from principles of human policy; but it is dictated alike by natural and revealed religion. It is the spontaneous prompting of every right heart viewing the mercies and deliverances of the past. There is no surer evidence of deep depravity and consequent nearness to destruction, either in the individual or the nation, than when the review of mercies received

fails to awaken a sense of gratitude and obligation. Ingratitude to God proclaims a base and treasonable heart, while those who are most loyal to Him have continually songs of praise on their lips. If then we have deplored ingratitude as one of our national sins, the setting apart of such a day as this for the first time in our history by the chief magistrate of the land, and its universal observance, is to be taken as the expression of a sentiment in the heart of the people which all should rejoice to see, and which true religion ever seeks to cultivate. In order to draw out and strengthen this feeling, the Lord God of Israel appointed in His ancient church the annual Pentecost, or Feast of Harvest, at which His people were to bring a certain portion of the harvest realized, and offer it as a token of gratitude to Him whose goodness had thus crowned the year. Not less reason have we to come into His house this day, and *Praise the Lord*. That we may do this, let us in our meditations heed the exhortation of the text; *Call upon*, or (as it is in the margin) *proclaim His name, declare His doings among the people, make mention that His name is exalted*. It is only by reviewing past mercies, as seen from the low standpoint of our unworthiness, that we shall be able to catch the keynote to a proper song of praise.

Beginning then, with our individual and social condition, with personal blessings, and blessings shared by us as a community, what abundant cause have we for gratitude! Earth has yielded her fruits lavishly, if not in one form, yet in another. As if foreseeing that her bounty in the grain harvest would be lost by the presence of an enemy among us, she kept it back only to bestow it in fuller measures of golden corn. Seed time and harvest, rain and dew, mantling vapors and hardening frosts, have not failed us. Common blessings these are, but how great, when we remember that it is of the *Lord's mercies we are not consumed!* Or if base cupidity should to-day mourn a few treasures snatched from her grasping hands, look further at the riches of our heirship! Around you are the glorious mountains, lifting up their tall forms until lost in the kindred blue of heaven, and

sending down to the suppliant plains below, their benisons of cooling breeze and crystal waters. Overhead bends a sky as soft and fair as that which looks down upon the faded splendor of Italy. The rich landscape spreads before you, brown with the vestiges of the past, or green with the promise of future harvest; while through field and woodland glimmers the silver network of creeks and rivulets, circulating life and freshness through the land. No drifting sands or empty water courses, mocking alike man and nature; no bleak frozen mountains, anon bursting with volcanic rage, or hurling down upon the smiling valley the remorseless glacier; no sterile fields or dwarfed forest confront us. All is rich, fruitful, and beneficent. Surely here is a reason for thanks to Him, "*who by wisdom made the heavens; that stretched out the earth above the waters.*" His, too, was the providence that cast our lot in such pleasant places and gave to us so goodly a heritage.

While nature thus smiles upon us, and in her constant beauty gives us cause for unceasing praise, we may see still greater reasons for thanksgiving in our *social, civil and religious* blessings. The peace, harmony, and security granted to the domestic and social circle, are all the richer from the fact that we live so near the borders of a State, where crime, in its proper fruits has broken up families, alienated friends, and filled communities with strife and bitterness. Living on the very shore of a sea of strife we have as yet escaped the full power of its storms. True, we are not ignorant of them. Well do we all remember how the hordes of treason came among us. Their banners, marked with the sacred symbol of the cross, as if they had "stolen the very livery of heaven to serve the devil in," flaunted the breeze; their shrill yells tore our free air; they swarmed upon our harvest fields; outraged the sanctity of our homes; pillaged our stores and warehouses, and rioted in our abundance. Those were sad days, when our country's banner could not float over us, and we were no longer lords of our own homes. But was it not more than repaid by the rapture of relief? Was not our humiliation avenged when we saw their bas-

tard banner trailed back in disastrous retreat? The very skies poured down their torrents as if to wash out every trace of their coming; the streams, as if in sympathy with us, gathered together the floods, pursued and fought against them in their courses; while the free soil sent forth unwonted foliage to cover their trail, and hide the wounds they had made; so that now we have scarce a sign that they were here, save where the grass grows ranker over their graves. The brief sufferings of those days, with our glorious deliverance, should add higher rapture to the songs of the present.

Nor must we, to-day, forget to record our gratitude for a good and stable Government, securing prosperity and protection to all alike. This is of God's ordaining among us. Law has maintained its just supremacy, and, while unusual demands deemed necessary for the times have been made by the authorities, all have patiently and cheerfully submitted. Thus order has been secured and the proper functions of society carried on unmolested. Our schools and colleges and seminaries of learning have been conducted as effectively as in past times of peace; nor have any of our great charitable and benevolent enterprises been crippled for want of means. In trade, if some avenues of enterprise have been closed by the war, new ones have been opened; and now every department is so thronged that labor cannot meet the calls capital makes at her busy hands.

But, above all these, there is a blessing of which we are all made partakers; a blessing which of itself can make the desert fair as a garden, and wanting which the loveliest spot of earth becomes hideous with sins; it is the glorious *gospel of the Son of God*. This is God's highest and best gift to man, and to-day, it should be our chief joy that we live in a land of Bibles, of Sabbaths, and Sanctuaries. *Happy is that people that in such a case; yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord.*

What has just been said with regard to us as a community, is true even in a larger degree of our State. The blessings we enjoy, have been multiplied throughout all her bor-

ders. Take all the elements of her present prosperity—material, intellectual, civil, social, and spiritual—and no former year of our history can claim great precedence over this. It would, at least, imply unspeakable ingratitude and blindness on the part of any son of Pennsylvania, to ask in doubt: "What cause has she for gratitude?" Thankful too, must every heart among us be for the proud position our State occupies in the present great struggle for national life. Among the first to rush to the rescue of the endangered nation, she has never, through the long years of the war, faltered a single moment in her devotion to the Union. With unstinted prodigality, she has given both men and money to the holy cause of law and just Government. The valor of her patriotic sons has, at least, secured the renown of the past, and while Independence Hall, Valley Forge, and Gettysburg—names that mark the birth-place, the trial, and the triumph of national life—remain dear to American hearts, none of us need blush to name our native State.

But we are called to-day to a broader survey of the providence of God. This is the Nations's Thanksgiving and to enter fully into it we must declare *the Lord's "doings among the people."*

No right-minded man can fail to see in any of the works of God, that which reflects praise to its Creator. The heavens and the earth, in their wonderful structure, "*proclaim His glory.*" We praise Him because we are "*fearfully and wonderfully made.*" But more especially do His moral works, His dealings with men, furnish us cause for adoring wonder and gratitude. Be they judgments or mercies, "*His doings among the people*" are always such as to excite the praises of His saints; they are eminently worthy of Him, whose wisdom devised, and whose power executes the wonders of providence. While then we recognize the fact that as a nation we are resting under one of His sore judgments; while there is a great shadow of darkness all over the land, we need not fear to look narrowly into it, lest song should die upon our lips, and humiliation take the place of thanksgiving.

ing. God, of old, led his people by the pillar of cloud, as well as by the pillar of fire; and still the darkness of suffering, as well as the brightness of prosperity, reveal His presence with the nations as they march to humanity's promised land. It is with prayerful caution that we should venture out on the "great deep" of God's judgment, where, with raging storm and boisterous waves, he eliminates good from evil and joy from suffering; yet the glimpses we there catch of "His doings" afford peculiar joy to faith. They enable us to step up to a higher stand-point, and see some foreshadowing of His great work in a fallen world.

In attempting, then, to "declare His doings among the people," or rather pointing to them as the stern logic of events has declared them, I would not hide that which is sad and painful. No! There are sorrows in the land we would not forget, but rather bear them to a Throne of Grace, and whisper them in the ear of a compassionate Savior. To-day there are mothers, whose hearts will be filled with anguish as they sit around the festal board because their brave boys are suffering privation in the camp, or starvation in the infamous dungeons of Richmond, or else, sleeping in nameless graves on the trampled battle-field, a thousand leagues from home. There are many little broods of orphans, clustering to their mother's side in sad loneliness, who to-day had romped upon the father's knee, and clasped his neck with their little arms, but for this war. There are lovely maidens, who to-day will seek some quiet place to weep because their true hearts still yearn for their gallant lovers slain. O War! War! With thy iron-shod hoof dripping with the gore of fond and true hearts, how cruel art thou in thy tender mercies! Nor do we forget the multitude of sufferers in the hospitals; the devastation, the violence, the expedition of treasure as well as blood; and the thousand nameless horrors that follow in the trail of war. But let us not misapply these. We are not to subtract our sorrows from our blessings and give thanks to God for the remainder. We must make the estimate from the low stand-point of our own unworthiness. Nor yet must we look at our sufferings

to the exclusion of our blessings, or attempt to make them an excuse for future failure in duty. It is natural for some men to be desponding, while others are constitutionally hopeful. It is not unusual to find of two men embarked in the same enterprise, one always counting how much he has expended in the adventure, while the other, assured of the propriety and ultimate success of the enterprise, is only concerned as to how much he has remaining to invest in it. So with regard to the struggle in which the Nation is engaged. There are those, some of them naturally disposed to look on the dark side, others again, for the time being so disposed from a slight taint of treason in their hearts, who are constantly looking at all that is unfavorable and, to their minds, of evil augury. Nor are events wanting, such as belong in common to all wars, for making a dark picture. But let us look at the other side. Is it not plain that while the land is torn by a rebellion, which, for magnitude and atrocity has no parallel in history; while vast debts are contracted, armies raised, navies created, and battles fought, on a scale and with a rapidity the world has never before witnessed, that all this is only developing the energies of the people? The exigencies of the war have created new and pressing demands, and these have drawn out the material resources of the country in such a manner as to fill us all with astonishment. Many prophesied want, financial ruin, and intense suffering among the laboring classes as results of the war. But instead of these we have plenty; never has trade been more active; while labor, instead of being a suppliant for employment, dictates its own terms. Everywhere there is thrift, abundance, and activity. Nor need we fear that all this is unreal; a feverish excitement produced by the unhealthy condition of the body politic. On the contrary, it is one of the sure methods of God's providence suddenly to develop great strength by placing men or nations in great extremities. Often it comes to pass that a man living quietly and carelessly in his lot, is suddenly brought under some sore trials; and then latent talents and energies worthy of an angel's arm, are developed. The

man wonders at himself; is a wonder to his friends. There is a wider range in his sympathies, a vigor and far-reaching grasp in his thoughts, a heaven-born energy throbbing in his heart; he cannot go back to what he once was. So it is with nations; and in confirmation, we point to history. No nation ever sacrificed or suffered more for principle than did the Dutch Republic, in its long and sanguinary struggle with Spain. Her nobles pawned their plate and mortgaged their estates, her citizens vied with each other in the number and costliness of their sacrifices for the cause of religious liberty and national life. Yet their sacrifices seemed only to measure their prosperity. "Notwithstanding the war," writes a well known historian,* "which had already been raging a terrible quarter of a century, without any interruption, population was increasing; property rapidly advancing in value; and labor in active demand. The war," he adds, "paid for itself." A cotemporary historian writes; "coming generations may see the fortifications erected at this epoch, the magnificent havens, the dock, and extensions of the cities; for, truly, the war had become a great benediction to the inhabitants." Strange language, but the future justified it. They constantly grew in wealth and power, until at last, they emerged from a war of eighty years, one of the richest and most prosperous nations in Europe. Their terrible trials had transformed the merchants and artisans and weavers of a dependant province, into the princes of trade, and the lords of commerce.

Or take the condition of England, during the long years she struggled for national existence on the bloody battle-fields of the Continent. Her public debt grew to enormous proportions; her commerce was swept from the sea; her loans were negotiated at fifty-three per cent., and paid in depreciated paper; her income tax was ten per cent., with an additional war tax. Yet she emerged from all this, not a crippled, exhausted, and bankrupt state, but the most powerful empire among the nations of Europe.

The same truth is illustrated in the early annals of our

* Motley.

own history. It would be easy to show, that we had long remained dependant upon the wealth and skill of the old world, had not the pressing necessities of seven years' war compelled us to develop our resources, and taught us our strength. Such has been God's method of drawing out the energy and material resources of the nations, and thus strengthening them for a higher mission in His service. It is not claimed that war is the best condition for the development of material greatness and resources: far from it. But it is a condition rendered necessary by our faithlessness to the higher privileges of peace. In times of peace, the inclination of society is toward luxury and effeminacy. Under their soft influence the sinews of manhood become relaxed; the natural virtues lose their vitality; the floodgates of vice and corruption are opened; and national life, in spite of its fair exterior, becomes sickly and diseased. Then war comes in merciful judgment. With its loud alarms it arouses men from their sinful sloth; its bloody sacrifices at least quicken the natural virtues; and while, with one mailed hand, it wields the sword and lays open the festering sores of society, with the other it applies its torch to the hoarded treasures of luxury. Thus suffering and want compel us to fulfill the obligations to which we were faithless in times of peace. War leaves us aroused, active and disenthralled.

But even suppose all this to be false. Grant, for a moment, that instead of developing latent talents and needed strength, this war is exhausting us; still we will not despair, but pointing to the wealth, the power, and the men remaining, thank God that we have still so much left to spend in the sacred cause of liberty and law. Better give all, to the last man and the last farthing, than turn back in our struggle. Better, a thousand times better, leave our fair fields and rich cities a mortgaged inheritance to mourning widows and orphans, than seek to live in a peace devoid of holy principle, or cherish the form of nationality saved by dishonor.

As the last, but not least cause for thanksgiving, let me declare to you God's "*doings among the people,*" in *eliminating great principles, and so, exalting the nation.*

"*When Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the*

world will learn righteousness," writes the Prophet Isaiah. The process is a simple and an effective one. It is this: Great principles are the decrees of God, working in human history. These, while men concern themselves with what appears on the surface of things, are working underneath all, shaping all things now in fearful retribution, now in just reward. They are rooted deep in the bosom of humanity, and no power save His who planted them and still gives them energy, can stay their working. These are the "higher laws" which move irresistibly on, sweeping away corrupt courts and cabinets, mocking the devices of men, the craft of rulers, and the compromises of statesmen. Now and then there are great epochs in human history, when, by some such judgment as God has now sent upon this land, these principles are laid bare. The false issues, the devices of mingled good and evil which men had set before themselves, are swept away. The mask is torn from the face of evil, and the false and true are plainly embattled against each other. First principles are exposed, not in their varried combinations, but by themselves. Delusion is no longer possible. The plain question is, "*If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, follow him.*" Men must choose right or wrong. Then it is that the people "*learn righteousness,*" for it is made plain to them how they may fall in with and fulfill the decrees of God. Such is the condition into which we are now brought by the providence of God. This war has laid bare the great principle that gave birth to the Nation, that animates its charter and breathes through its laws. It is the grand element of christian democracy; the corner stone of human rights; the key-note of the Declaration of Independence; the gospel doctrine, that all men are "created free and equal," and have "an inalienable right to liberty and the pursuit of happiness." This is one principle that is sweeping aside all false and petty party issues, and marshalling the nation into two contending armies. The struggle among us to-day, is the old one between civilization and barbarism, between free-thought and despotism, between liberty and slavery, that in ages past made the dykes and swamps of the Netherlands crimson with

gore; that baptized old England and Scotland with their best blood, and still later awoke with its thunders the echoes of the New World. We call it a "struggle for national existence," a "war for the Union;" but why? *Because the very principle that brought us into national existence and moulded the Union, is at stake.* I know there are some so blind, or else so perverse, that they cannot see this as yet. They look at it as a war between sections and prejudices, stirred up by faction on either side, and to be settled by some judicious compromise. But have they never read history? Do they not know that it has always been the fate of republics to contain two parties, one democratic, the other aristocratic; and that these sooner or later war against each other? Or will they not believe the avowed intentions of the traitors themselves, who seek the destruction of the republic, and seal their words with strong blows? They openly proclaim that they have built up their so-called Confederacy upon "the new theory that capital should own labor;" which, after all, is as old as the time of the Pharaohs. Listen to the language of their leading journal:* "The establishment of the Confederacy is verily, a distinct reaction against the whole course of the mistaken civilization of the age. For Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, we have deliberately substituted Slavery, Subordination and Government. There are slave races born to serve; there are master races born to govern." What, I ask, in the name of truth and righteousness, is there to compromise between this and the declaration of our fathers? Nothing. Here are two hostile principles standing face to face; they will meet, but it is in a death struggle. When the war began, the heart of the North, if beating faintly, still beating true to the principles of the Revolution, intuitively recognized this; and the people were not long in deciding. They felt that the blow struck at the Union was struck at that which the Union enshrined. Thieves do not steal the casket without having designs on the jewels. The stab was meant for Cæsar, not for Cæsar's vestment.

* *Richmond Enquirer, May 28th.*

Now, it is a law of our moral life, that just so soon as we come into living contact with great principles, they make us partakers of their greatness; they quicken, ennoble and purify us; as with men, so with nations. We all remember the great awakening which followed when the nation was brought, thus closely, and without any other issue, into contact with its ancient and immortal principle of life. The people rose as one man under the mighty inspiration; party trammels were broken asunder; the fire of Revolutionary days was rekindled in their hearts; and shouting the old battle-cry of freedom, they seized the sword and rushed with one accord to the conflict. For three years of mingled success and disaster, of terrible sacrifice and suffering, the nation has steadily held fast to this principle, and we can already mark the fruits. What lofty heroism has been displayed, alike on the battle-field, where the brave have so willingly died; in the hospitals, where the sufferers bear their wounds with such patience; and in quiet homesteads, where pale-faced martyrs sit chained to the stake called "waiting!" What ennobling changes have taken place in the social and political condition of the country, elevating its standard of humanity, purifying its patriotism, and making the aims of its parties broader and grander! Mutual suffering has brought us into closer sympathy one with another, and led all classes to feel that brotherhood so essential to the life of christian democracy. This is God's work, and though the method has been severe, let us thank Him for it. Let us thank Him for the brave soldiers who have laid down their lives, or still live for their country's good; for mothers and sisters, whose warm loving hearts and busy hands have alleviated so much the horrors of war; for all the zeal, devotion and energy with which He has inspired men, and arrayed on the side of holy principle to save our country.

But there is another matter, nearly related to what has just been said, which we must not overlook. *God has, in His dealings with the Slavery question, so laid bare the great principles involved in it, that to day we are compelled to take sides*

for or against it. We cannot avoid it, however much we would desire it. It is no longer a question what the South would like, or what the North would grant, but what God requires. Notice for a moment "*His doings among the people*" with reference to this vexatious question. When our Constitution was adopted, the subject of slavery was a matter of grave importance; it seemed an anomaly in a free government, and was dreaded as the fruitful cause of future dissensions. All looked upon it, however, as an evil gradually to be extinguished, and most heartily did the fathers of the constitution wish the land were rid of it.* But it was not removed, for it is not God's method to nip evil in the bud. He permits it to grow to its own destruction. He suffers it to develop all its powers, and so, from its very opposition, makes the progress of truth the more thorough and permanent. At first it was an evil tolerated and apologized for on the ground of insufficient labor; then defended because of the inferiority of the race; then on account of the profitableness of its toil in the cane and cotton fields; and finally, when thus secure of protection, because appealing to the selfish principles of human nature, it grew arrogant, and claimed divine authority for its accursed life. Laws must be moulded for its protection. National authority must come forward to avenge its insults and satisfy its insatiable demands. It could brook no frown and bear no affront from public opinion. The pulpit that opposed it was "political," the press that denounced it "incendiary," the man who did not believe in it "a black-hearted abolitionist." I know some will even deny this, and pretend to say that the North has apostatized from the principles of the Constitution, not the South. Agitators at the North have been constantly encroaching on Southern rights, or in other words "slavery." Agitators! Disturbers of the public peace! How came men who dared proclaim their belief in the broadest doctrine of Human Rights, to be agitators in a land whose great charter asserts it in perfection, if there has been no departure from the teachings of our fathers? Are they

* Madison's Papers. Jefferson's Works and Hamilton's.

agitators because they have disturbed society with the truth? Then also was Christ one. "*I am come,*" He says, "*not to send peace but a sword;*" and so he preached the fatherhood of God and the world-wide brotherhood of man; doctrines that have gone out and torn empires into pieces, overturned thrones, banished kings, broke the fetters of slaves, filled tyrants with rage—shook the world and will shake it, until the false is overthrown and society every where remoulded by the great law of Love. But I appeal to facts to show that the South has gone astray from the spirit of our institutions. In politics, compare the well known statements of Washington and Jefferson, each lamenting and condemning slavery, with the public declaration of the Vice President of the so-called Confederacy, a declaration which was received by his auditors with "storms of applause." Mr. Stephens says "the prevailing ideas entertained by Jefferson and most of the leading statesmen at the time of the formation of the old Constitution were, that the enslavement of the African race was in violation of the laws of nature—that it was wrong in principle, socially, morally and politically. The general opinion of the men of that day was that somehow or other, in the order of Providence, it would be evanescent and pass away. Those ideas, however were fundamentally wrong. *Our new government is founded upon exactly opposite ideas.* It is the first in the world founded upon this great physical, philosophical and moral truth, that slavery is the natural and normal condition of the negro. This stone which was rejected by the first builders, is become the chief stone of the corner in our new edifice." Nor is corroborative testimony wanting. In ecclesiastical affairs, compare the action of the Synod of South Carolina, in 1819, with its rectified belief in 1860. In history, turn to our colonial records, and mark the efforts made by the colonies, Virginia and Alabama especially, to prevent the introduction of slavery, and compare them with their present unhallowed efforts to make it perpetual. This, then, has been the progress of slavery. From timid beginnings it grew to such a pitch of insolence that no moderate con-

cessions would satisfy it. What, then could Freedom do? Must she yield to its claims; fall back step by step from the border; quit these hills, endeared to her by the bones of her martyrs; cross the lakes and dwell a weeping exile under the cross of St. George? Rather than this, better speak the truth, though it "agitate" some. Better rush war-clad to the battle-field—a thousand times rather let her die there, grasping with one hand her broken blade, the other holding her starry banner, all crimson with her flowing blood, while her closing eyes still glare defiance to traitors, and proclaim her unconquered in death.

But mark how God is extricating us. In His great moral government, wrong always recoils upon itself and becomes its own executioner; so, the very arrogance this institution had engendered, led it to destruction. When the traitors of the South—men nursed by the milk and rocked by the hands of slaves—rose up and struck at the very life of our nationality, and openly proclaimed that they loved slavery before liberty, the nation no longer had any doubt as to the side it must take in the conflict. The "vexed question" could no longer be a matter for compromise; henceforth opposing armies became the representatives of two conflicting principles. Hesitatingly, but surely, the Nation placed herself on the side of justice and humanity, and the death knell of slavery was rung through the land. Thank God for this, "*His doings!*" There is progress here, and in the right direction. Three years ago there were slave-pens and auction blocks for the sale of men and women in the Capitol of the Nation; now, in their stead, there are camps of freedmen. Four years ago they hunted fugitives from bondage through the streets of our principal cities; now, through these same streets, march these same bondmen freed from their fetters and enlisted to fight the battles of the Union. All this the Nation would not reverse if it could.

Such, my friends, are some of the events of this great and memorable era. They have been shaped by no human hand. The Great Ruler of nations has led us; nor is it an

aimless movement, nor to our destruction. Confused as the surface of things may at times appear, underneath all work sure principles, which will bring order out of confusion. But they will work until all opposition is broken, and the materials are made plastic for the moulding. The good shall remain while the bad is ruined; and,

“The ashes of old evil shall feed the future’s golden grain.”

Such is our faith, and we have many material signs to strengthen it. The progress of our arms during the past year is such as to call for devout thankfulness on our part. While our victories have always been fruitful, our very reverses have brought to us wholesome lessons and needed training. Reviewing the progress of the war in the light of history, we have no cause for discouragement. On the contrary, in all the annals of the past, you will not find a war of such magnitude, and in which so large a number of battles have been fought, prosecuted with such uniform and permanent success. The great West is secure to us; whole States have been lately wrenched from the grasp of treason; armies planted in the very heart of the revolted section; the blockade along our immense coast, maintained with a strictness disastrous to our enemies; while all danger of foreign intervention has been effectually prevented. Never have we had a fairer prospect of speedily crushing the rebellion.

But, while we offer our thanks for all God’s mercies, and praise Him for “*His doings*,” we must not forget our duties. Great privileges create corresponding obligations. The blessings and sacrifices of the past, alike call us to the unfinished work before us; and for its completion we need every true heart and every strong arm. It is great, arduous, but not impossible. Were we opposing the eternal principles of right, which have at times created bloody revolutions in civil governments, we might well withdraw our armies in despair. To continue the war under such circumstances would be an insane attempt to reverse the course of history. But we are contending against a rebellion; and in it we meet, not the vitality and strength of principle, but the madness and desperation of wicked and deluded men.

Still to combat these successfully, we need all the mighty energies of the nation: above all we need the continued guidance of God, lest, like the blinded Sampson, in our giant strength we pull away the pillars whose removal involves alike the ruin of friend and foe. To Him let us send up our petitions, that he would guide us in the conflict, and in infinite mercy speedily lead us to peace. Needful as war may be to discipline the nations, it is far from being their best estate. The trials of earth may be necessary for the christian, but they furnish no reason to forbid his longing for the bliss of heaven. Most devoutly and earnestly then, may we pray for peace. But while we pray for it, let us not hesitate to work for it. We must do every thing—pray, give, work, fight for peace,—do any thing, save be false to principle and turn traitor to our country. To secure this consummation of our wishes, there is but one resource left us. The path of duty, if arduous and bloody, is plain: we must crush by force of arms the power that assails our Government. There is no difference of opinion among all true men on this point. Nor could it well be otherwise, since, as has been shown, God has brought us back to first principles. Men may err when there is a mingled play of good and evil; but all can know their duty, or must become traitors to themselves, when the naked truth stands before them. Surely then, fellow citizens, I need not urge you to the discharge of duty. With all the glories of the past and the privileges of the present at stake; with the hopes of freedom throughout the world, resting on your success, how could you be false to principle, or turn a deaf ear to your country’s call? How could you turn back to walk in the path of national dishonor and ruin, to be met at every step by the sad faces of war-made widows, who survive their sorrows only because their husbands died to save the country you abandon? How could you endure to hear the wail of orphans, whose best patrimony was the example of a patriotic father whose memory you dishonor? How could you bear to walk over a land sown thick with heroes’ graves, every one of which protested

against the dishonor your cowardice heaped upon it? We owe it to the dead that they shall sleep in the mighty Republic for whose glory they fell; we owe it to the living who have so bravely toiled and suffered, that they shall in the future enjoy the privileges and blessings of the government for which they have given so much.

Forward, then, with patience and courage in the path of duty, which is the path of progress! If the present is still overshadowed, the future is full of brightness and glory to faith, and thither we are all rushing. The text points to it, for it is an ascription of praise that shall come up from the future kingdom of the Messiah. Let us, therefore, stand faithfully in our lot, loyal to our God, loyal to our country, and exercising justice and mercy, one toward another, and toward all men. Then, if we are not among those who shall raise the shout of victory from the trampled and blood-stained earth—the scene of so many woes and conflicts, but then of final triumph—we shall be among that great cloud of witnesses who look down from the battlements of heaven to watch the strife of earth. We, too, shall catch the echoes of the shout as it rises up from redeemed nations, and mingling our voices with the hymnings of angels around the Throne, join in the great Thanksgiving Song of the universe: “*The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of Our Lord and of His Christ. Hallelujah! for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth.*” Amen. Let all the People say, Amen.