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"Such a Time as This."

A SERMON

PREACHED IN

The First Presbyterian Church,

JERSEY CITY,

ON

Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 24, 1859,

BY

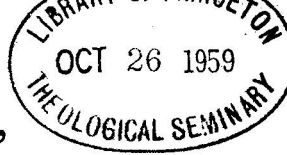
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D. H. RIDDLE,

PASTOR OF THE FIRST REFORMED DUTCH CHURCH.

[PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.]

JERSEY CITY:

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PREFACE.

THIS discourse was delivered, according to previous arrangement, at a Union Thanksgiving Service in the First Presbyterian Church of this city. The First Presbyterian, the Scotch Presbyterian, the Third Presbyterian, and the First Reformed Dutch Congregations, with their respective Pastors, united in this service. It has been requested for publication, in a very kind and courteous note, which conveyed the belief that it might be useful. It is published, not from any impression of its merit, but with a hope and prayer that it may do good, "at such a time as this."

D. H. RIDDLE.

JERSEY CITY, Dec. 5, 1859.

SERMON.

"WHO KNOWETH WHETHER THOU ART COME TO THE KINGDOM, FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS?"—ESTHER IV: 14.

WE are assembled to-day, Brethren and friends, in this sanctuary—as representatives of different congregations, and in common with twenty-seven different states of the Union, to pay our annual and united tribute of thanksgiving and praise to the bounteous Author of all our blessings. May He meet with us, and make our services profitable and to his glory, through Jesus Christ. We have chosen this passage—as suggesting some trains of thought, which may help us to a frame of heart befitting the occasion.

There are personal reasons, in my own case, for such a selection, rather than the ordinary topics of thanksgiving—for THESE, in my circumstances I fear, would be interwoven with too dark a thread to be suitable to most here assembled! God help the sorrowing among us to forget their selfish griefs, in helping others to thanksgiving!

The occasion of these words was interesting in a high degree. They are a part of the message of Mordecai, the Jew, to Hadasah or Esther, his beautiful relative and adopted daughter, who in the singular ordering of Providence had become Queen-Con-

sort of Ahasuerus, the monarch of Persia! He thus conveyed to her the idea, that God had placed her in that eminent position, to meet a solemn crisis in her country and nation. Her whole race, herself and her father's house, her Friend and Patron— a Parent to her when Father and Mother had been removed—were on the eve of extermination, through the vengeance of wicked Haman. "Who knoweth?" says Mordecai—"Whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" i. e. to meet this emergency, to be the honored instrument of deliverance to the chosen people and church of God, of which he had said by the Prophet, "Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it!" The principle involved in the passage, may be otherwise applied, however. May we not imagine the message of Mordecai to his adopted child, to be sent by our everlasting Father to our beloved Land?

A consideration of this analogy, may furnish us with motives of enlarged thanksgiving, and at the same time, awaken in us a deeper sense of our responsibilities:—"at such a time as *this!*" To render the analogy complete, we must presuppose several things—(1) That in a certain sense, our country, like Hadassah, has "come to the Kingdom"—an eminent and influential position among the nations. And surely, without any special national vanity or self-glorification, this may be safely assumed.

(2) Again, we must presuppose, that this time or period, bears some analogy, to the time of Mordecai, Hadassah and Haman! "Such a time as this!" There was tremendous emphasis in these words, in the original circumstances. It was "a time" of special interest and awful crisis to that wonderful people; "a time" when the destinies of that nation and as identified with it, of the church of God, apparently depended on the caprice of an arbitrary individual and an irresponsible monarch! The balance of probabilities, to human view, was so nicely adjusted, that so small a circumstance as a slumberous or a wakeful night of Ahasuerus, might turn it one way or the other! "a time" when

a train of influences, concocted in malice and conducted with hellish energy, was hastening to a consummation; when either Mordecai or Haman must soon be hanged, the Jewish people decreed to extermination, be rescued or *lost* in a little while!

There is danger, indeed, always of magnifying the interest and importance of our own times, for many a presumed and predicted crisis has passed, and the world moves *on* still. But yet in all soberness, may we not ask—has the world ever seen "such a time as this?"—A time when so many elements, derived from occurrent events and concurrent lines of influence—the intimations of prophecy, the sagacious guesses of the thoughtful, the tone of solicitude in all countries, and the oracles of human opinion—all combine in one common *sentiment*? Beyond all question, the world was never before so near its End, whenever and however that *is to be*. If we grant there is to be *an End*, as well as expectation; a finale, as well as successive acts in "the mystery of God," then the scoff of an intensely atheistic age, that "all things are to continue as they were from the beginning of the creation," in ever recurring, never ending cycles of anticipation and disappointment, is neither true nor philosophical. "The signs of the times," the tendencies of things everywhere, the voice of prophecy, the wants of the world, the deep cry of our baffled race—"made subject to vanity, but in hope," all seem to unite in saying, "The end cometh!" The mighty God seems to be saying, "Once more—it is a little while, and I will shake the Heavens and the Earth, and the Sea, and the dry Land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come," and the hope of all ages shall be realized, "and I will fill *this House*," this desecrated temple of a world, so long the theatre of perversion and death—this Earth formed originally for my praise—"I will fill this House with glory saith the Lord of Hosts!"

"SUCH A TIME AS THIS." From every quarter: almost on every

breeze, whether men's minds are embued with the Spirit of Revelation, or saturated with the Spirit of the times; as they gather their omens from the unerring oracle, or from the facts of the case—the echo comes back: "Such a time as this." While reason and philosophy, and a materialized christianity, relying on "might and power," and human agencies, cast their horoscope of the world's future destiny, on one hand; faith and hope hear a voice from within the veil, saying—"Surely I come quickly," and respond—"Amen! Even so come, Lord Jesus!"

(3) It is pre-supposed once more, that Providence always has a *purpose*—in so ordering the concurrence of affairs, that individuals or nations come, at particular junctures, to occupy positions of influence. "Promotion cometh, neither from the East or West or South—God is the Judge, who setteth up one and putteth down another." This, is the beautiful and impressive lesson wrought into this story of Hadassah. It was recorded for the use of all ages. Like Joseph, and Daniel, Pharaoh and others of similar influence, God seemed to say to her—"for this purpose I have raised thee up," trained and disciplined thee, ordered all thy steps, from thy lonely orphanage, to the Throne—that thou, lone maiden, through these strange vicissitudes, stranger than fiction, shouldst "come to the Kingdom for such a time as this."

And, surely, this applies equally in other cases. God "orders the bounds of our habitation," and measures the amount of our influence for a purpose, whether recognized or not!" "Oh!" said the Saviour of a nation of old—"if thou hadst known; even thou, the things that make for thy peace, but now they are hid from thine eyes." So true is this, that in looking over history in the light of this thought, the vain wish almost rises in our minds, that nations could have seen their opportunities and privileges as we see them now. In many cases had the issues been anticipated by an inspired eye, and been thundered

out in trumpet tones, or pictured in graphic power,—as we see them, how different might have been their course, and their influence on the world's affairs! So! at a particular crisis, had one onward step been taken by Hannibal, Africa instead of Europe, might have triumphed, and Carthage and not Rome, been the world's mistress! So, had Napoleon, selected another General instead of Grouchy, he might have turned the tide at Waterloo in a different way, and with it the fate of the world! But, it was "hid from their eyes!" So, when we look back to "Epochal periods," in our personal history, if we had known or could have foreseen the result, how different that history and our fortunes might have been!

There is one general principle in regard to nations, which is distinctly revealed, for their instruction and guidance. It is this, "The kingdom and nation that will not serve Thee shall perish—Yea, all those kingdoms shall be destroyed." The salvation or destruction of nations, depends on their subserving God's purposes and the interest of his church, OR OTHERWISE. Just as the salvation or perdition of individuals depends on their identification with the Lord Jesus Christ! However lofty their position, or great their power otherwise, they are in God's sight, nothing, except as they are *thus* found his instruments, or obedient servants! Thus, God says to one of old—"Though Coniah the son of Jeconiah, were the signet on my right hand," a precious jewel beautiful to look upon, "yet," IF HE SIN, and despise his great mission, "yet, will I pluck thee thence." If individuals or nations, however privileged, will not recognize their responsibility and fulfil their dispensation, they must perish!"

"Who knoweth" but we, as a nation, "have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" May not God, have given *our country* a destiny and mission, shadowed forth in the story of this beautiful Jewish maiden, to exert some decisive influence, in hastening the purpose, which he purposed in Christ; to do

something in actualizing that dream of hope, which is not all a dream—when voices of gladness beginning here, on our ransomed Earth shall sing, “Crown him Lord of all”—a song that shall be caught up and echoed back from distant worlds, and then die away in the immensities of the universe, whispering as they cease, “Crown him Lord of all!”

Let us look at this point! Brethren, does not this idea receive illustration and confirmation, from God’s past providences with us as a people? We assume it as a principle, that any long course of marked discipline; a training, signalized by special interposition, both with individuals and nations, is with a view to some important ultimate purpose. None of those who believe that “not a sparrow falleth to the ground without our heavenly Father,” and that “the very hairs of our head are numbered,” can hesitate in regard to this principle for a moment. It is the philosophy of true greatness in all ages. It explains to us the life of Abraham and of Moses. It is the key to the inimitable story of Joseph.—It elucidates the marvellous vicissitudes of the “man after God’s own heart,” his ups and downs, his songs and sighings—“*Suspiria de profundis*,” “*Gloria in excelsis*.” It explicates the dark travailings of the soul of Luther in the monastery of Erfurth, and the early history of Cromwell, and of many an obscurer Luther and Cromwell—heroes only in the eyes of angels! Yea, it helps us to understand the greatest of all mysteries in time or eternity: we mean the mystery of godliness—God manifest in the flesh”!

Now what have been God’s providences with our country? May we not say with gratitude, “He hath not so dealt with any nation?” On the one hand, look at the facts of our *civil history*, happily so familiar that we can refer to them without extended detail! Was not the hand and purpose of God evident in the original materials of this nation? “Three nations of the old world,” as one says, “sifted that the finest of the wheat might be

planted here.” Is there not significancy in the fact, which a philosophical historian has recorded, “That the colonization of our country, denied to the pretences of greatness and the efforts of might, was reserved for persons whom the great and mighty despised for their insignificance, and persecuted for their integrity.” Daniel Webster asks, and so may we, “Who could wish that his country’s existence had otherwise begun? Who could wish for other emblazoning of his country’s heraldry, or other ornaments of her genealogy, than to be able to say, that her first existence was with intelligence; her first breath, the inspiration of liberty; her first principle, the truth of divine religion.” Was it not of God, that the “original statesmen of this nation, who gave character and direction to its early institutions, were gathered out of the effete organizations of the old world, to occupy with truth a virgin soil, where the weeds of error did not previously exist?” Was there not a guiding and controlling power, greater than our forefathers, that conducted simple-minded men, whose primary object was religious liberty, to the establishment of civil codes and political principles, of which the history of the world, at that time, furnishes no precedent?

Again: was not the hand of God in that train of events, which, against the most ingrained feelings of loyalty, resulted in throwing off the incubus of dependence on the mother country? Can any one read ever so often that familiar story, and not feel that a *mightier power* than even the giants of those days gave direction and unity amidst conflicting counsels, and prevented despair amidst the deepening gloom? Was not His hand in the choice of Washington as commander-in-chief. Was not the alliance of France, whatever political motives may be assigned for it, as marvellous and providential in fact as it was decisive in its results? And does not every youth, who first reads the eventful story of the Revolution, wonder how we could have ventured single-handed on such a contest, or stood so long, or at all, against

such fearful odds, until he is taught that "the Lord was on our side?" Did not the great Lord, "in whose hand are the hearts of kings, to turn them as the rivers of waters," influence the purpose of the monarch of France, and that paragon of chivalry, La Fayette, and others to come to the rescue in the dark hour of peril? Moreover, when the ill-compacted confederacy, which carried us through the revolutionary struggle, was likely to fall to pieces; when our commerce was annihilated; our treasury exhausted; our credit worthless; when jealousies and distrust were extending between the constituent portions of a people having no central bond of union: was there not a providence in the formation of the present constitution, with its checks and balances; its nice adjustment of centripetal and centrifugal tendencies, and its embodiment of compromises: a common platform, where the elements of contrariety, implicating conscience as well as political preferences, seemed to human sagacity invincible and yet were reconciled? Was there not, I say, a PROVIDENCE and a purpose in this? though men now so glibly flout at it, and profanely spit upon it! Yes! I do not hesitate to avow my faith, that the "generation of our fathers, who, out of distracted counsels, the keen jealousies of states, and a decaying nationality, by patience and good temper, as admirable as their wisdom, constructed the well-proportioned fabric of our federal system, were men aided by Him 'from whom all good thoughts and holy desires do proceed.'"

Yea! further, that "far more was gained for America, and through her for the world by the wisdom, virtue and moderation exhibited by her children, after the war of Independence, than by the valor that brought that war to its happy issue." And can we fail to recognize the source of those noble and magnanimous principles at that crisis? Did not He who inspired Bazaleel and Aholiab with the genius to construct the ark in the wilderness superintend and direct this noble structure, at once our glory and

the ark of our political safety? The general adoption of this constitution in the then-existing state of sentiment, too, has always seemed to me a singular interposition of providence—a result which is wonderful in proportion to accurate and detailed knowledge of the facts of the case. It is a singular and representative circumstance, that Patrick Henry, who set the ball of revolution in motion, in the Virginia house of burgesses by his memorable speech, when an "old man eloquent" spent his last energies of argument and eloquence in opposing the adoption of the Federal Constitution. While we gladly recognize the human agency of such men as Madison and Hamilton, in producing this result, we must remember, that it is one of God's prerogatives, "to make men of one mind in a house" or a nation, the author of concord not confusion and division. "Such wisdom," this last, "is earthly, sensual, devilish." Since that period too, there have been many instances of special interposition in the civil history of our country, all of which seem to betoken God's intention, in regard to her, that, like the bush of Moses, burning but not consumed—we have some great mission to accomplish, that we "have come to the kingdom at such a time as this."

Every pious man and genuine patriot on a day of general thanksgiving, especially amidst the heart-burnings and jealousies of this period—should recall and gratefully recognize the hand of God, in hitherto keeping us a united people—notwithstanding the plans and efforts, and predictions and perils of the contrary; that the same spirit of compromise, in which our government originated, and by which alone, it could have been settled on its present basis, has thus far prevailed, to preserve the Union, once so sacred, now so lightly esteemed! I well remember, so do many of you, that once, in the very crisis; when our prospects looked peculiarly dark, it pleased God to take away the very incarnation of the spirit of disunion—the Coryphæus of secession—and that the mantle of his almost magic power has not

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fallen since on any of his imitators or admirers! I thank God, for one, this day, that men were then and since found, amidst all the obloquy of such a position, willing to maintain the ground that the preservation of this union of ours, is a greater mission, than any other of an earthly or temporal nature that can be imagined!

Does not all this look as if God were saying "destroy it not," by division and dissolution—"for a blessing is in it?" Cut not down this vine, planted by the hand of Providence; watered by tears, enriched by blood, strengthened by sunshine and storm; heretofore shielded by almighty power, and now spreading her boughs from ocean to ocean—one stock of many branches, one nation of many States! Tear not away one of these beautiful branches, whether it spread to the rugged North or sunny South, throws its shade into the broad Atlantic, or from the shores of Golden California into the Pacific! "One, and indivisible, united and inseparable" let it flourish, till "the smell thereof shall be like Lebanon," to the Ends of the Earth! and to the latest age of time.

On the other hand, in our religious history every pious heart can find abundant confirmation of our idea, that God has a purpose to accomplish by our country. On this point how many significant facts rise up to view, at once appropriate to a day of Thanksgiving, and indicative of God's merciful designs. If the hand of God can be traced, and ought to be recognized in the original stamina of our country, civilly considered, how much more in the religious principles they brought with them here?

"Liberty to worship God," after all, was the primary motive of the exiles from the Old World, who founded these Colonies. A pure faith, and scriptural worship, according to the light they had or "might attain unto," was more precious to them than political independence or any commercial advantage whatever. It was "the incorruptible seed that liveth and abideth forever,"

which scorching fires and long oppression could not kill, that they prized above all price and bore with them, as better than all wealth, to this wilderness. "Their mission," they avowed, "was not to found an Empire, but nobler still, to plant gospel institutions and perpetuate the scriptural system of Christian Churches." "They looked up to the broad heavens where dwelt their Covenant God, and in prayer they resolved to build him a house of worship—a Bethel—wherever under those heavens, like Jacob of old, they rested in their pilgrimage." Like Æneas, of old, they might have said, through various vicissitudes and trials we are seeking a quiet resting place pointed out by Providence.

And has not the hand of Providence been as truly visible ever since in our religious history? When, for example, piety began to decay, and formalism was creeping over the churches, was it not God who raised up instruments of counteraction? There was a time when a good man said, "Religion is dying out, as to the being of it, by the general failure of conversions;" and another, "If the begun apostacy proceeds as fast in the next thirty years as in the past, churches will have to be gathered out of churches." But just then God raised up Jonathan Edwards as the advocate and instrument of revivals unprecedented since the Pentecost—outpourings of the spirit so glorious that Dr. Watts did not hesitate to call them "the renewal of Gideon's fleece." Yes! as really as Washington for our civil emancipation, Edwards was the God-send for the religious prosperity of America,—though he was repudiated by his own congregation and his name cast out as evil by his own generation.

Then again, can any believer in God's providence fail to recognize his ordering in the mission of Whitfield, and his influence on the piety of the land and age? After flashing light as from a thunder cloud, throughout England, Wales and Scotland, he came here, as he says, "with a burden of the Lord on his soul," and flamed with evangelical zeal, unparalleled since apostolic

days, from Georgia to New England. "His preaching was like putting fire to tinder," one says—"like life from the dead"—and when he returned he left the mantle of his zeal on the Tenents, Blairs and others, who were enabled to raise again the standard of evangelical godliness and transmit it down to us! Was not the hand of God as visible too in sending John Wesley to this land, and transmitting Methodism in embryo to this soil,—“as a grain of mustard seed” at first, but destined to become one of “the largest of trees”—where the birds of Heaven sing amongst its boughs, and thence in myriads take their flight shouting hallelujahs as they rise, to nestle forever in the branches of the tree of life? So we might say of Roger Williams, the Baptist, “who understood liberty of conscience even better than the Puritans?” But “time would fail me to speak” of subsequent interpositions, all of the same character! “They are known and read of all men.” Was not the Bible Society, that parent of so many blessed children of benevolence,—of God? And the various associations for domestic missions and training young men for the ministry, to meet the bewildering expansion of our country, and carry evangelization with the widening waves of population? And the Sunday School, and the Tract Society and its system of colportage? And, still more directly may we not trace to God and see his purpose in the numerous and blessed revivals of later times—and in that wide spread influence which He has now given, as the blessed fruit and compensation for antecedent commercial tribulations—this Pentecost,—an influence, which, beginning here has kindled up old Ireland, and is now spreading over England and Scotland. But I must pause.

Yes! it does seem to me, that take what view you will of God's dealings with us, whether we look at our civil or religious history, whether we regard God's hand in our origin, growth, past deliverances or present blessings, he has been training us for something great and good! The history of providence with

our country, has a voice which if interpreted aright says—“Who KNOWETH whether thou hast come to the kingdom at such a time as this?”

And oh! shall all this culture and kindness be in vain? Shall our country, after all, not know the things that make for her peace and glory? Shall the glorious privilege of impressing her character and institutions, on the world, like a signet in the right hand of the Almighty, be lost, by her own failure to appreciate and respond to her responsibilities and obligations? by reason of discord, jealousies, divisions and ruin? Shall sectional animosities, the prevalence of foreign elements of irreligion and insubordination, corruption in office, venality and profligacy in high places realize the predictions of our enemies and blast the hopes of our friends over the earth? Shall such a glorious destiny be frustrated by our own sins and follies? Shall our youth be allowed to abandon hope for the Republic by reason of its failures to conserve public morals, and reward true merit and reprobate crime in the distribution of its prizes? By silence or connivance, shall intemperance be allowed to blight the brightest genius of our country, and carry the gifted and glorious to an untimely and dishonored grave along with “lewd fellows of the baser sort?” Shall Sabbath breaking loose the anchorage that binds the nation to the throne of God and render us ripe for judgment? Shall “the man of sin” prevail here at last? Shall “perverse disputings” about the rights of one portion of our population, one comparatively so small too, alienate all hearts from each other,—the hearts of brethren whose fathers fought together and suffered together, in the dark and stormy day of our common country's peril, and cemented by blood and treasure, a union they fervently prayed and fondly hoped to be perpetual? Shall our country be hanged, after all, on a gallows higher than Haman's, and thus be held up to the contempt and execration of mankind? And, amidst all that is sad and sorrowful in our fall, shall we

have the poignant anguish of feeling that we gave ourselves the fatal blow? Oh! God! of our fathers! "Lord God of Elijah," we hope and pray and trust not!

My friends, our best thanksgiving to God, to-day, will be the solemn and prayerful purpose on the part of each of us, to do and suffer all we can or may, to avert such a catastrophe and to meet our high and ennobling responsibilities, "at such a time as this." Remember, each one of us has some influence and should exert it at this crisis. If you have a tongue to speak, or a pen to write, or a heart to pray, or money to bestow, use each and all for your country, your whole country and her salvation! We call upon all—men who have power from position or talent: women, who can diffuse a softening influence over society and a calming power over human passions. We call upon patriots by the love of a common country, and upon christians, for the honor and glory of a common God and Redeemer, who has guided and guarded and honored and exalted us, to do their duty,—their whole duty "at such a time as this," and God prosper the right.

AMEN.