

H O M E

A

S E R M O N ,

DELIVERED ON

T H A N K S G I V I N G - D A Y

BY

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Pastor of the First Trinitarian Church, Medford.

B O S T O N :

PRESS OF T. R. MARVIN & SON, 42 CONGRESS ST.

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MEDFORD, MARCH 12, 1859.

THE proposition having been made to the Committee of Arrangements for the Fair, to be holden on the 30th instant, to invite our Pastor, Rev. E. P. MARVIN, to publish his Thanksgiving Sermon on Home—and likewise to sit for his Lithograph—we, the undersigned, cheerfully accede to the above proposition, and hereby request him to concur and accept the invitation, allowing us the privilege of a suitable number of copies of each for sale, during the above named evening.

MARY SEABURY,
JANE M. GREGG,
EMILY JACOBS,
MARY S. BISHOP,
THERESA DICKEY,
CLARISSA RING,
Committee.

MEDFORD, MARCH 15, 1859.

FEELING much interest in the proposed Fair, and under many obligations to the Ladies, in common with all the members of my Society, for their many tokens of kindness and sympathy, and their invaluable co-operation in my responsible work; and having entire confidence in the judgment and taste of the Committee, I am happy to comply with the above request, sincerely hoping that the result will meet the expectations and wishes of all that are interested in it.

E. P. MARVIN.

S E R M O N

PSALM LXVIII. 6.

GOD SETTETH THE SOLITARY IN FAMILIES.

WHAT is there more “solitary” and cheerless than the life of a confirmed old bachelor! Alexander Selkirk, walking alone on the wave-washed shore of Juan Fernandez, and sighing out his complaints where no human ear could hear, used to excite my boyish pity to the highest pitch.

“O solitude! where are the charms,
That sages have seen in thy face!
Better dwell in the midst of alarms,
Than reign in this horrible place!”

And yet there is a solitariness in the thickly-settled country, and in the crowded city, still more gloomy and depressing. Ah, to be homeless in society! To be jostled by the hurrying throng, each one absorbed in his own pursuits and friends, and yet to feel that among them all there is not a

vacant corner of the heart where you can imperishably record your name—no true heart-home for you—no blazing fireside of your own, inviting you to the loving, mystic circle of wife and children, relatives and friends—that is desolation!

Then, what theme is there more appropriate to a day of thanksgiving and praise than that first, primordial gift of God to man—his Eden Bower, his Family Home?

That "spot of earth, supremely blest,
A dearer, sweeter spot than all the rest ;
Where man, creation's tyrant, casts aside
His sword and sceptre, pageantry and pride,
While, in his softened looks, benignly blend
The sire, the son, the husband, brother, friend ;
Here woman reigns ; the mother, daughter, wife,
Strew with fresh flowers the narrow way of life !"

"And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden ; and there he put the man whom he had formed." "And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone : I will make him a help meet for him." "God setteth the solitary in families ;" and thus he creates Home, the centre of man's earthly joys. David had often been compelled to flee from his home, and hide himself in caves or dwell among the surrounding nations. A man of his social, sweet, and amiable disposition ; a lover of the harp and of songs ; with the capacity

for such pure, deep friendship as that of his with Jonathan ; capable of rendering his home the most attractive and endearing ; must have appreciated with sincerest gratitude the blessings of the domestic relation. It is not strange, therefore, that he should notice this when he comes before the Lord, to recount his benefits bestowed upon man. The text occurs in one of the Psalmist's most exultant enumerations of God's blessings upon his people.

The Psalm abounds in the grandest figures and highest strains of poetry, mingled with enthusiastic exhortations to glorify Jehovah for his manifold and wonderful mercies to the children of men. "Let the righteous be glad ; let them rejoice before God ; yea, let them *exceedingly* rejoice. Sing unto God, sing praise to his name : extol him that rideth upon the heavens by his name, Jah, and rejoice before him. A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation. God setteth the solitary in families : he bringeth out those that are bound with chains ; but the rebellious dwell in a dry land." "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels." "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive ; thou hast received gifts for men." "Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our

salvation." "Bless ye God in the congregations, even the Lord, from the fountain of Israel." "Sing unto God, ye kingdoms of the earth; O sing praises unto the Lord."

Thus the text, occurring in the midst of such earnest calls, and such warm entreaties to praise God for all his varied gifts, is seen to present a most fitting subject for a day of public thanksgiving.

Moreover, Thanksgiving-day is peculiarly a HOME day. It is then that parents love to gather their children and grand-children, however scattered abroad the rest of the year, into the dear old home. It is on this day that men and women feel themselves children again, and though oceans and continents may have separated them, they instinctively turn with longing hearts and hastening feet to the old, familiar spot, with its loaded tables, and its cheerful, or sometimes cypress-shaded altar; ever singing as they come thronging back by land and sea,

"HOME, SWEET HOME;
Be it ever so lowly,
There's no place like home."

It is there that they recount to each other, with tongues unloosed, and "eloquent ears," all that has befallen them while separated; again and again recurring to early days; living over again the past,

as if childhood's spell were upon them. Now they join to celebrate with glad voices in full chorus,

"The old oaken bucket that hung in the well:"

And

"Every loved spot which their infancy knew:"

Or, with subdued voice and tearful eye, they mark the vacant seats of the dear absent ones, and are touchingly reminded how their old numbers diminish, and their hallowed circle narrows, from year to year. O, these are precious moments, in which time seems to quicken his speed to bring the dreaded parting, the tender separation, which each one feels may prove a long and final separation on earth.

You who gather so easily and so regularly around the paternal board, may not be able to appreciate the heart-yearnings of those who are far separated from home and kindred; or whose home may have been utterly desolated, its last link broken; rendering Thanksgiving-day, so bright and joyous to many, to them, (though stored with precious memories which time and distance can never obliterate,) yet "the loneliest and saddest day of all the live-long year."

And yet, as invited in the proclamation that calls us together, we will all remember that "this day is specially consecrated to rational, social joys, as

the '*Family Festival*.' While we "bow with mingled gratitude and penitence before the God of nations, as for so many generations our Fathers have done before us," we will "let this, its annual return, bind closer the parental and fraternal ties that linger with pleasant associations around each home;" we will "let the memories of the past, blending with the pleasures of this festive anniversary, give rise to fresh aspirations and manly resolves, which shall live in the deeds of the future."

Let us first notice the emphatic declaration of the text, *that it is God that hath given us the family institution, with all the resultant blessings of Home.*

The family institution is not at all of *human* devising. Man did not originate it. No philosopher, studying deeply into man's nature and wants, ever first planned and recommended it. Society did not feel the need of it, and so fall naturally into it. This is sufficiently evident from the fact, that, though the institution was originally given to man in general, and has been imperfectly handed down from generation to generation, and some notion of it spread abroad to nearly all tribes of men, yet no nation or society enjoys it in its purity, and in its essential elements of organization and happiness, except those who have the *Bible*, and regard it as the inspired Word of God, the highest source of

moral light, and the ultimate standard of obligation.

Among all the heathen tribes, we know they have not anything worthy of the name of Family. Woman is degraded to servitude and infamy. Their homes are equally the homes of their beasts; its winning charms are lost, and its sacred ties dissolved. Its affectionate tones, its kind sympathy, its sacred obligations and duties, are overborne by selfishness and passion.

The French nation,—its national religion forbidding the Bible to the people,—has no word answering to Home in its language; hence follow naturally their notorious profligacy of character, and their suicides, which are far more numerous in Paris, than in any other city in the world.

Even the German word for home refers only to *country*, and has in its meaning no reference to the family, and the endearing ties represented by the English word Home.

That English *Translation*, giving the Bible a controlling influence as in *Puritan* character,—it is this that has made the Englishman's home what it is,—his castle, the crown of his glory, and the shrine of his heart.

Nor is the family the creature of *government*, any more than of society, since it is never found originating or instituting it; but only allowing

and protecting it by laws such as the religious sentiments of the people demand.

Philosophers and governments were utterly incapable of planning and instituting this complete little world of affection, confidence, harmony, order, contentment, kind attentions, and that matchless, indescribable complement of home joy and peace, which need leave no aching void in all the vast soul of man. It is the model of the school, the church and the government. It is the centre of gravitation for the planets of society, without which they would fly from their orbits and bring society into speedy and irrecoverable chaos. Truly, "One of the holiest sanctuaries on earth is home. The family altar is more venerable than any altar in the cathedral. The education of the soul for eternity begins by the fire-side. The principle of love, which is to be carried through the universe, is first unfolded in the family."

No, no; it is God that setteth the solitary in families. He planned our pleasant homes. In all the arrangements of this world, he kept in mind and secured for us all our home blessings and joys. He knew how comfortless and forlorn this world would be without them. Without the retirement, the soothing rest from irritable care, conflict, and disappointment, how cheerless would business life become; and how great a drudgery would labor and

study be. Well knowing our natures, and loving to cheer us and render our life happy, he kindly, and of set purpose, wrought and arranged all the relations and all the little endearments of home. All that oneness of interest—that sympathy—those mutual joys over success, and healing ministrations in sickness and despondence.

A noble and doting father once planned a beautiful home for the sure comfort and delight of his daughter. He began when she was but a child to arrange the grounds, and to plant those trees which are of slowest growth. Watching the developments of her mind and taste from year to year, he selected those fruits and ornamental shrubs and plants which he knew would give her most delight. Year after year he toiled and denied himself, keeping his plan steadily in view, that he might omit nothing which would be of profit or delight to her in future years, when he knew his head would be laid "low in the ground from all his toils." He read books of art, traveled far to visit model mansions, and at great pains and expense, sent to foreign lands for the choicest productions of nature and industry, that in all her future varying states and moods, he might shield her from pain and want, and, if possible, make every hour and circumstance, even the most minute, and commonly unthought of, minister to her happiness.

At last, as this much loved and happy daughter, whose every wish has been gratified, is blooming into womanhood, the father dies, and is carried to slumber in his dreamless bed. Now she begins to feel the need of a house of her own, and to appreciate the provident care of that father. As she enters that well-provided house, passing from apartment to apartment, and says to herself, all this, nothing lacking, nothing omitted, all this, and that, and this, was planned for years of life for her—must not her heart swell with gratitude to her father! And yet, at first, she cannot appreciate the value and the well-planned comforts of that home as she will in after years. As she walks in that embowered garden after years have rolled away, and her life is mellowed by advancing years, and changed in its necessities, she finds that even now, her circumstances have all been provided for. The fragrance and forms of the very flowers that bloom around her are those that she admires most. As she pauses to taste the rich fruits, she remembers with new force, that when these aged trees were young, and she was but a child, her father studied out and planted, with his own careful hand, the fruits which are now most grateful to her taste; and she exclaims, What a *dear* father I had! How he *loved me*, every leaf and fruit and tree bears witness. O I am but

just beginning to see how deeply I am indebted to him, and how much of gratitude I owe to him!

My hearers, with an infinitely greater love and richer wisdom has our Heavenly Father planned, cultivated, and guarded through many years, even from the beginning, these our homes. “He setteth the solitary in families.” Every year’s experience, as our wants multiply, and as changes make us feel more and more our dependence upon each other, but develops the provident goodness of God to us. Think of the shelter from a cold and heartless world; the immunity from sickness and sorrow; all the sunny joys and blessed moments for which you are indebted to your home; and remember how emphatically God is the giver! Let the language of your soul to-day be,

“When all thy mercies, O my God,
My rising soul surveys,
Transported with the view, I’m lost
In wonder, love, and praise.”

But perhaps you would be reminded, *how* it is that God has created home and all its blessings for us.

I reply, first of all by adapting our natures, in our creation, for the relations of home. We are created with manifest dependence upon a small circle of familiar and intimate friends; a circle of varying childhood and mature years; experience of

life in different shades and different temperaments, mingled with the prattle of innocency; a little world of culture, experience and wisdom. The heart of the child yearns instinctively for the approbation and blessing of age—and the heart of age yearns as instinctively for the cheerful voice and ardent hope of childhood and youth. This creative adaptation of mind and heart for home was not sufficient of itself to secure it, in man's apostate condition; and so, home was positively instituted in the Bible. And yet there are such evident traces of this adaptation of native capacities, even in our fallen state, that the hand and design of God are not to be mistaken.

While man remained in innocency, such was his ungratified love, a deep fountain in the soul, such his solitary and unblest condition, that, even in Eden, we are told, it was not good for man to be alone. Moreover, when adaptation was seen to be insufficient, God, by positive statute, created home for us, by instituting *marriage* as its essential foundation. It is God's decree, and not that of any government, that a young man, at the proper time, and under ordinary circumstances, shall no longer cling to his mother's side—but shall go out from his father's home, and, seeking a wife by the faithful and reasonable instincts of affection, shall institute a home of his own. In this way only can

he do his part towards the maintenance of society and government; for society and government are organized by, and built upon, the homes of the people.

It is not fair for a man, from selfish considerations, or from a mean, cold, and calculating prudence, to be carrying his little bachelor knapsack to this boarding-house and to that, with a heart rapidly drying up to dust and ashes, his habits and notions becoming unyielding and rough as cast iron, thus seeking to obtain the society, the comforts and joys of the homes of others. Nor in this way does he meet the evident design and written law of his Creator and Judge.

"Have ye not read, that He which made them at the beginning, made them male and female, and said, for this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh. Wherefore, they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

Says Dr. Wayland on this passage, "We are here taught that marriage, being an institution of God, is subject to his laws alone, and not to the laws of man. Hence the civil law is binding upon the conscience only in so far as it corresponds to the law of God."

Now it follows, that every law or institution of

God brings both positive and negative duties, and lays them solemnly upon all those to whom the law or institution is applicable.

Hence, since marriage is the divine constitution and foundation of the family and the home, whosoever breaks any of the laws of marriage, proves unfaithful to its vows; whosoever takes any course to defeat the ends of marriage, bringing it into neglect or disrepute, is, by just so much, sinning against all our homes, and robbing mankind of these heaven-sent and heaven-blest joys.

Again, notice how sacredly God has regulated and guarded both the marriage and family relations, in their purity and peace, by the solemn requirements and sanctions of his Holy Word! Since the family society is the origin of all civil society; and since it is there that children are to be mainly educated and prepared to become members of the commonwealth, it was of the utmost importance that the purity of marriage and the good order of home should be secured in the highest degree. For here, in our homes, are the great interests of man concentrated. All the struggles in the political world—all the care and energy of business life about which so much is heard, are after all but designed to guard more wisely and securely our *homes*, and to supply them with peace, plenty, and permanent joy. And, however untoward the outward and

stirring affairs of a people may go for a time, if our homes are still kept sacred in their design and influence, the nation will and must be safe and prosperous in the end.

But if the home institution becomes demoralized and powerless, for its deep-laid, inwrought, conservative functions, then in that sad hour, is the school, the church, and every social and civil institution on which a nation may rely, palsied and rendered utterly worthless. The pillars of society are undermined and broken; and the decaying superstructures of government and education fall into dilapidation, or crumble to pieces as in the republics of South America. Hence the repeated and solemn regulations and sanctions which God in the Scriptures throws around the marriage covenant, and the right ordering of the domestic household.

Purity and virtue, not only of conduct, but of thought and feeling, are required, on the peril of losing the favor of God and the glories of heaven. Children are sacredly bound to obey their parents in the Lord. Our Saviour, confirming the law, said, "For God commanded, saying, 'Honor thy father and thy mother; and he that curseth father or mother, let him die the death.'" Fathers are required not to "provoke their children to wrath, but to bring them up in the nurture and admoni-

tion of the Lord." Love, constant and unchangeable love, is enjoined upon husbands and wives towards each other as the basis, and the only allowable basis of the beginning and continuance of the marriage, and the family relations.

Thus carefully has God instituted, guarded, and preserved to us our HOMES, with all their resultant stores of quiet, but deep and perennial bliss. With more than a father's love and constant care, through all the long years, has he been rearing the mansion, arranging and furnishing the varied apartments, transplanting the trees of Paradise with their luscious fruits, and adorning the walks with flowers and shade—all, that we, his much loved children, may have here in our pilgrimage, a little, heavenly, domestic home for the heart.

Truly, "God setteth the solitary in families;" And for this as the *source* of, and channel for, all our other blessings, even the moral and religious, are we not loudly called upon to-day, to "sing unto God, sing praises to his name, and rejoice before him;" saying, "Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation."

I know the selfishness and wickedness of man may abuse every blessing, even the richest, and has often perverted home, poisoning all its springs of joy and blessedness, by the choice of companions

from the base motives of wealth, position in society, the show of external beauty, and vain adornment, or even sensual passion, and the most reckless disregard of reason and judgment.

Men of a scheming, groveling desire for wealth or aristocratic station, who have no high appreciation of affection, that priceless wealth of the heart, accompanied by a cultivated mind and good temper, (without all of which no home can be even tolerable;) or parents who make matches for their children from worldly or ambitious considerations—looking more at the setting than the jewel—the gilded, showy frame than the picture—such persons can make this paradise a very hell. And what wonder; since the serpent stole into Eden and blighted all its fruits and flowers.

Says Jeremy Taylor, "They that enter into the state of marriage, cast a die of the greatest contingency, and yet of the greatest interest in the world, next to the last throw for eternity. Life or death, felicity or a lasting sorrow, are in the power of marriage. A woman, indeed, ventures most, for she has no sanctuary to retire to from an evil husband; she must dwell upon her sorrow, and hatch the eggs which her own folly, or infelicity hath produced; and she is more under it because her tormentor hath a warrant of prerogative, and the woman may only complain to God, as subjects do

of tyrant princes. And though the man can run from many hours of his sadness, yet he must return to it again: and when he sits among his neighbors, he remembers the objection that is in his bosom, and he sighs deeply. The boys, and the pedlers, and the fruiterers, shall tell of this man when he is carried to his grave, that he lived and died a poor wretched person."

Says Isaac Watts,

"Two kindest souls alone must meet,
'Tis *friendship* makes the bondage sweet,
And *feeds* their mutual loves:
Bright Venus on her rolling throne
Is drawn by *gentlest birds alone*,
And cupids yoke the doves."

So precious and life-long are the interests at stake, that we all, like Steele in his Tatler, could devoutly wish for that matchless spear of Ithuriel, upon the touch of which Satan in any and every form must cast off his mask and unveil his real character.

Yet let us not be terrified into ruinous delay: God has not only provided for us homes of inestimable value, but has also given us a trusty test in the uncorrupted instincts of our nature. Let but a *pure* and chastened *love* rule the heart, while reason maintains her throne in the mind, with an humble and prayerful dependence on the Giver of

every good gift, and much of Paradise may be regained, even on earth.

But, I may be told of the increasing risk of sorrow, of the increasing bitterness of that sorrow, when sickness and separation come to the much-loved circle of home. I will not deny it. I know, I know full well, that the heavens may gather blackness over the habitation which holds the dearest earthly treasures of the soul. A tempest may suddenly break with all its fury upon the happy voyagers upon the sea of life. The bark may be shipwrecked, and unutterable anguish may seize the wretched survivors.

The home may be broken up by a slow and gradual process of agony to friends: the loved companions of our youth, the light of our eyes and the treasure of our souls, may pass within the vale: passing, passing, day by day, in our sight, and beyond our power and our prayers to retain: dear, innocent and helpless children may be torn from our hearts, and snatched away from our closest embrace, passing away by blighting pains which we cannot allay. O, these are sad farewells; they leave scars upon the heart forever!

But to suffer and to die, is part of our inheritance. And the home furnishes the best, and in many respects the only earthly, healing, soothing balm to wounded hearts. There only are to be

found the unselfish and ceaseless ministrations of loving hands. There only, through the long nights and weary weeks of sickness, may be found the untiring, uncomplaining, caressing angel attendants: Were there no homes, how much more desolate and unendurable would be the scene! Is there any thing more cheerless and chilling than sickness and death at a hotel, or a boarding-house, with no near relatives at hand—the mother gone before—the sisters scattered, or unknown, as they must be if not reared in home circles.

Besides to the survivors of an afflicted home, if it be, as it should, a Christian home, there are consolations, hopes, precious memories, and a rich, sanctifying, and ennobling experience, which could not otherwise be gained, and which are seen to be of infinite value to the world, in its subduing, softening, sympathizing influence. Rather than be desolate and solitary, is it not far better to have beloved children, and friends in heaven, to remember you and love you there, while waiting to welcome your coming; to feel that,

“ While on earth our steps are straying,
They are singing hymns above.”

“ When we asunder part,
It gives us inward pain;
But we shall still be joined in heart,
And hope to meet again.”

And “ this glorious hope ” does “ revive our courage by the way.”

Then, my hearers, when you retire to your happy homes, and to the joyous friendships and stores of delight which await you, remember to praise Him who setteth you in families, with a glad and thankful heart. While you forget not all his benefits, recognize with gratitude and with prayer about the home altar, this as among your highest and chief blessings: and may God spare your numbers, and keep you in families, to meet many years on this returning anniversary.

“ Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart, for God now accepteth thy works. Let thy garments be always white: and let thy head lack no ointment. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest, all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun; for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labor which thou takest under the sun.”

“ Love on, love on, the soul *must* have a shrine;
The rudest breast must find some hallowed spot;
The God who formed us left no spark divine
In him who dwells on earth yet ‘ *loveth not.* ’
Devotion’s links compose a sacred chain
Of holy brightness and unmeasured length;
The world, with selfish rust and wreckless stain,
May mar its beauty, but not touch its strength.”