

ESCAPE FROM DANGER

A CAUSE FOR

NATIONAL THANKSGIVING:

A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED IN THE

STATE STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

ON

THURSDAY MORNING, DECEMBER 7, 1865.

BY

✓
REV. A. S. TWOMBLY,

PASTOR OF THE CHURCH.



ALBANY:

J. MUNSELL, 78 STATE STREET.

1865.

CORRESPONDENCE.

ALBANY, DEC. 7, 1865.

Rev. ALEXANDER S. TWOMBLY:

Dear Pastor: Believing that your discourse delivered this morning, so fitly commemorating this day of our national Thanksgiving, should have a larger auditory, and be placed on more enduring record, we respectfully solicit a copy for publication.

With high esteem, very truly, your friends,

THOMAS OLCOTT,	R. L. JOHNSON,
JAMES CRUIKSHANK,	W. J. WHITE,
C. H. ANTHONY,	E. J. MILLER,
E. P. WATERBURY,	J. H. McCLURE,
JEREMIAH AUSTIN, JR.,	ARTHUR BOTT,
J. L. SNOW,	JAMES M. HORTON,
C. S. CUTLER,	S. LUKE,
S. MUNSON,	W. R. BUSH,
FRED. W. MUNSON,	W. R. BUSH, JR.,
J. S. DELAVAN,	C. H. STRONG,
D. J. PRATT,	JAMES A. WHITNEY,
J. H. RICE,	E. COTRELL,
J. C. McCLURE,	W. WHITNEY,
JNO. G. MYERS,	I. P. S. BRIANT,
J. VANDERZEE,	GEO. C. BENEDICT.

ALBANY, DEC. 8, 1865.

To Messrs. OLCOTT, CRUIKSHANK, JOHNSON, WHITE and others:

Gentlemen: As it is impossible to refuse your request, without appearing to distrust your judgment and to underrate your courtesies, I send herewith the sermon you desire.

Very sincerely yours,

A. S. TWOMBLY.

DISCOURSE.

"Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance."—PSALMS, xxxi: 7.



NLY a year ago, in the autumnal and thanksgiving season of the year, the winds of war that covered our republic thick with clouds, were sighing on in their wild way among the southern pines; and through long nights the sea went moaning up and down the southern shore—

"On the torn turf; on grass and wood
Hung heavily the dew of blood;
And all the air was quick with pain,
With gusty sighs and tearful rain."

In spite of glimmerings of coming dawn, there was a brooding spirit of uncertainty that still darkened the horizon; there was a pensive sorrow in all hearts, for the angel of peace remained yet bound, with wings and wrists still pinioned to the earth.

Some of you, my hearers, came to this temple summoned to give praise, while inwardly, foreboding and

distress usurped the place of joy. Your sons, your husbands, were in the camp or on the field. Each breeze might bring a pitiless distress into your home. The crowning victory of the republic might leave the nation free, but you forever sick at heart. You joined in songs of praise — you may perhaps have aided the festivities accompanying the celebration of the day; but after all was over, with a heavy heart you sought the silence of your chamber, where in blended prayers and tears you laid a bleeding soul before your God.

The empty cup of your thanksgiving, drained with smiles because you would not sadden other souls, was afterward filled up with bitter tears, because you could not lose from sight those for whose life you feared.

Thus in spite of all its hopes and brightening expectation, this nation twelve months ago was still bleeding and disturbed.

But to-day, how changed! What glorious fulfillment of our hopes! What calmness in the sky! How grand the opening vistas of the coming years! The rock-like clouds that threatened to destroy, dissolved to-day in glory, float upon the sea, our harbingers of joy.

The turf is green again above the graves where sleep our slain. The bloody stream through the stockade is turned into a rivulet which beautifies the spot where lie our starved, and folded once more in his peaceful mantle, the warrior legislates where he has fought; the rebel sues for pardon in the mansion where he hoped to reign. Even the confederate chief's grey war

horse snuffs in quietness the air of Lexington, Virginia, (not Arlington), bearing now no general to battle, but a scholar to the classic halls.

Across the continent, this republic like a robust athlete, resting from a vigorous but not exhaustive effort, now reposes in new consciousness of strength.

For its winter's sustenance, our Northern prairies have garnered in their treasures, heaps on heaps of wheat and corn. Our South, not trampling now upon four millions of humanity, but shaded by the southern palm and orange groves, the shelter of the free, now waits its next step onward. Our West, with iron sinews only partly formed, constructs a highway for it to Pacific shores; while our East, made strong by its great struggle against treason, weaves for this nation a new garment of prosperity, by sending back and forth more swiftly than before the busy shuttle of renewed commercial and industrial activity.

On this gigantic people the whole earth looks to-day in wondering amazement. It was thought a stripling with crude notions of its independence; but having proved itself a man, kings see in it imperial might, though it disdains a crown. Empires think it insolent, yet fear it. The haughty nobles of the earth dare not provoke; while all down-trodden and disheartened sufferers stretch forth their hands from every quarter of the globe, for its protecting aid.

The tottering monarchy of Mexico sends words of diplomatic courtesy, lest with one blow, the armed

heel of this republic send the tyrant and usurper with a shattered crown, back to the shore whence he has come.

The Canadas likewise are agitated throughout all their provinces, if but a finger shake across the lakes its menace toward them; while a poor handful of its Irish sons stir to profoundest depths, the whole of Britain with terrific dreams of slaughter and invasion.

Proprietor of its expenditures as well as of its profits, this strange young stripling of a nation funds its debts with no security except its word; and Yankee-like, pockets the proceeds of a bargain with itself. Disdaining to borrow save as a favor to the foreign lender, it has but to levy taxes with one hand to pay the other, none the more impoverished for that. A Colorado for its well filled purse, as full and deep as its vast caves and streams, it promises a home to all who choose to come, and pays their passage over from the fatherland.

One year ago, these facts were looked on as in part fictitious. The distrustful feared, the hostile hoped they could not be confirmed. This year, peace proves our basis of prosperity secure.

As Ægeus foolishly threw himself from the acropolis when he saw the black, swollen sail of his son's ship, the preconcerted signal of defeat, so some few citizens of this republic have slain themselves politically too soon in prophesying its downfall.

Our Theseus is not dead! Our liberties have not yet perished!

The tragic past has shown that in our institutions is a germ of national existence, dependent on no single life, imperilled by no party, and permitting in emergency, a perfect concentration of authority.

Our president is slain, but the republic lives. He wields in time of war almost a king's supremacy, but when tranquility returns, he is once more a citizen, acknowledging the sovereignty of congress and the courts.

Our soldiers too, who it was feared would prove an element of danger to our liberties, return from camps and battle fields, to enter with alacrity upon the peaceful arts. And in such haste are they to don working clothes, that in some instances the unwarlike sons of toil are rudely pushed aside, to make room for the sprightlier and quicker-handed men of war. Generals originate new commercial enterprises, and seek in business to forget the bivouac. Instead of plotting new campaigns they plan new rail roads, or establish an express; while from the Federal rank and file blue capes and coats dot every northern harvest field, and make all farm yards of the land seem outposts of the old heroic hosts. They who said we were in peril from our army, asserted that these soldiers would become the tools of some ambitious man, by whom this government would be turned into a "one man power."

Those who saw in the extraordinary and arbitrary trust committed to the president the danger of usurped and violent authority, counted on the army as the rash,

unprincipled material to be used for partisan and greedy purposes; but how is it to-day? Reduced, from nearly a whole million, to eighty thousand men, the army has not only saved the nation by its warlike force, but as a nation, to this disbanded host we owe a *moral* victory as glorious as that achieved by bayonet and sword. These soldiers have become the most loyal, eager union men we have, and with but few exceptions they are our most peaceful citizens. The day of battle over, they have no impulse or ambition save to prove to the whole world, that what they fought to save, they know how to enjoy.

The burden of our national finances likewise, has not proved as was expected, heavier than our strength. In spite of some unavoidable mistakes, so careful have our chief men been, so wise have been the measures they have chosen, that the crisis is already past. The crash of credit and collapse of fortunes have as yet not come.

With a debt of nearly three thousand millions, bearing interest equal to the entire rent roll of Europe in the middle ages, there is not only no desire for its repudiation, but the most critical can see in its proportions nothing to alarm.

In the words of the comptroller of the currency: "It is believed that from a few sources a revenue can be raised sufficient to meet the interest on the public debt, pay the ordinary expenses of government, and contribute thirty millions of dollars annually to a

sinking fund that will pay the national debt in thirty-two years and a half."

Moreover, being funded for the benefit of those who must, as values increase, finally dispose of it, it actually distributes wealth instead of adding to financial complication.

But what are all these mere material deliverances compared with our escape from national disgrace and anarchy, for which we meet to-day to praise our God. It is not mainly that as individuals you and I are liable no longer to the dangers and distresses of a time of war. It is not chiefly that our possessions are confirmed and our financial stability as a nation strengthened; much less is it in consciousness of having vanquished a persistent enemy, that we should now exult. All these are sources of congratulation, but linked in more or less, as they must be, with that shrewd selfishness which brought us, as a people, where we were four years ago, they cannot be the truest causes of our joy.

God has done better things than these for us whereof we now are glad. Our deliverance has been from perils which, had not His arm averted them, would have destroyed not only our material prosperity, but despoiled us of a holier crown.

It is in the grand principles now vindicated; in the immense advance our land has taken towards the true republican idea, and in the guarantees, made and sealed in blood, for an enlarged and strengthened liberty, that we are bidden by our magistrates chiefly to

rejoice. We have learned that submission to authority is better than mere independence; that law means liberty and harmony, while license is but anarchy and crime.

Thus is this day of praise, originally intended as a harvest festival, changed into the most glorious festivity the world has ever known! It sounds the bugle note of all the generations at the very summit of their righteous aspiration! It lifts triumphant shouts of freedom to the skies, because the standard of the Lord is planted within realms held till this epoch by the principalities of sin!

Give thanks then first of all, that God has vindicated by the struggles and the conquest of the last four years the true invincibility of human rights, supported by the loyalty of those, taught in the exercise of inalienable freedom to obey and love the law.

To have lost every name and vestige of commercial power; by some mismanagement to have been burdened with a debt beyond our power to cancel or sustain; to be involved in complicated questions of diplomacy (that web with which the other nations of the earth would gladly have entangled us, were we enfeebled by our civil strife); to be to-day downspirited, poor and distressed in all the outward conditions of our national existence; all this would be as nothing to the loss of our high moral prestige and integrity which as a nation we sustain on this thanksgiving day before the world. Another year would have brought corn

and wine into our treasure houses, had they been utterly despoiled. Upon the very graves of buried riches would have grown fresh harvests of abundant wealth. Young life, such as this people has, could not be crushed by any adventitious loss of treasure; but had our honor left us, had we bartered our integrity away, well might the world have put on sackcloth for us, and the angel of our destiny have draped her wings in weeds of woe.

Thank God then, first of all, that he has saved us from submitting to disunion! Thank Him that he has kept us back from purchasing our peace at such a price!

There have been times within the last four years when some great miracle seemed all that could prevent us from this fate. Men held their breath for fear it might be so. The dumb earth seemed to sympathize in our distress—frogs croaked most dismally over the expected downfall—the serpent's hiss came shrilly to our ears, and birds of darkness screeched and flapped their wings between the night that shrouded all our hopes and God's bright day beyond.

It was the twilight of our struggle, with the whole atmosphere made heavy with forebodings of our doom.

And it was not imaginary, this peril of our people's honor.

When we think how slight a cause has sent whole nations on a downward course; as we remember what an easy thing it has been to dethrone the reason of a mighty people, and by the human voice precipitate

them all, as in the French revolution, upon their ruin; when we contemplate the chances that, so far as human eye could see, stood for and against our unanimity in carrying on the war, and strengthening the executive; when we recall the opposition men of talent and apparent probity raised against the government, in clamoring for peace; above all as we look at the strange elements and differing nationalities that compose our people, does it not seem God's own work in saving us from this surrender of our national integrity, our nation's life?

Without a moment's warning, this great organism of a mighty nationality, with its historic monuments and records, its constitution framed by the heroic dead, with all its grand development in riches, learning and religion, might have fallen to the earth dismembered and destroyed.

To our human vision, the least turn in public sentiment, a single untoward event might have brought on this miserable catastrophe. As the slightest change of atmosphere, or the vibrations caused by whispers, may detach the ice-crag from its Alpine height, to hurl it on the vales below, so might the South have fallen from the Union, an avalanche of woe.

Thanks then to God! that He, whose hand holds frost and snow, and regulates all influences, material and spiritual; thanks be to Him, that what seemed treachery has proved to be salvation! It was His own wise way, by subjecting north and south to the severest, structural ordeal, to bind us in consolidated

bands, more firmly than the mountain, ribbed with granite, holds all parts in one.

He lengthened out the war, till in its closing there should be perpetual peace! He brings it to an end that south and north may on this day, rejoice together in a reunited land!

A Brownlow may declare that peace has come two years too soon, for there are always men at hand, when God rides in his chariot of deliverance, to seize from him the reins, and drive according to their better judgment. But who, of all wise-hearted patriots, is not content to see to-day salvation from the Lord?

Who does not hail this peace as His deliverance, coming at the period most suited for the good of the whole land?

Some have complained because the speedy downfall and collapse of the confederacy leave southerners with so much to be thankful for. Some cannot rest because the reconstruction of the Union promises such restitution of old privileges to hands so lately in rebellion. They almost accept the sentiment of Anacharsis Clootz, who proclaimed in the French assembly that the republican principle ought to prevail throughout the earth, even if it cost the life of every member of the human race. We behold the south impoverished and suffering, but far from the verge of ruin, if we may judge from the great number of those seeking pardon and exemption, under the \$20,000 clause; and notwithstanding their appeals for money to the north,

it will take but a few years to bring that section back to all its former influence, commercial, political and social. In all this, we acknowledge there is peril to the land; and to avert it the executive forgiveness ought not, we confess, to imply in every case immediate political reinstatement. Much has been done by southrons which involves strong probability that it might be repeated should the opportunity be furnished, and as yet, but very little proof is given that all hostility of heart is laid aside.

The Union has been proved organic, but not absolutely invulnerable. There are still dangers to be guarded against; and all the past warns us to take precautionary measures equal to any possibility of future peril.

Secession has proved itself a mortal foe to the republic. We have brought up a young lion and allowed a goat to nurse him, and in due time he has strangled the goat; but the lion also being in the throes of dissolution, need we, like barbarian hordes, surround with frantic demonstrations the majestic beast we have destroyed, and to relieve our terror or to vent our rage, abuse him dying? Shall we, Americans, reënact the scene in Homer, where the Greeks, crowding about the dead body of Hector and marveling at his stature, inflicted each a spear wound in revenge on the terrific corpse?*

We must have all-sufficient safeguard that principles

Iliad, xxii, 396.

of true republicanism be never more imperiled; but do we gain this guarantee by showing a republic cruel as a monarchy, and as afraid of clemency as tyrants are? Do we not the rather prove republican institutions a success, by evidence before all nations, that even traitors are not feared; and that our safety as a people rests upon the power of a republic to reconcile its foes? Has not our recent struggle proved that the beneficence of institutions like our own, makes of enough citizens defenders of the land, to keep it as within a wall of fire?

Old Cromwell and his narrow-minded iconoclasts thought it advisable and necessary not only to destroy the armies which opposed their policy, but to break every marble effigy and statue, and efface all traces of the old *regime*. We have no mind to follow such short-sighted policy. As true republicans we have no need to treat our former enemies in such rude way. We can afford to reinstate them, as soon as they show signs of outward loyalty. Our institutions will allow this to be done, before these wayward members grow more hostile and so hate the whole idea of a fraternal peace.

Let then the cannon that have hailed the wheeling into line of Alabama on the amendment question, be the signal for declaring amity and peace.

Let no intolerance, under the guise of philanthropy, make hostile to each other the southern white men and the black. It cannot be a Christian purpose which

would now, distrusting all professions of returning loyalty, thrust measures on the South against their will, which some states at the North repudiate.

To be sure the government, through its assembled congress, now has the power to set its own terms of admission to political authority and privilege, but is it not the genius of republican ideas, to lean to leniency and to rest their safety on higher grounds than force.

Let us then confront the perils that remain, by charging our triumphant cannon with the salvos of our welcome, thus convincing our late foe that we mean union not in name alone but in affinities of heart. What, moreover, are our vaunted institutions worth, if, now in time of victory, we cannot entrust them to a North which has so nobly served them, and to a South, redeemed from slavery and its attendant heresies?

The peril from slavery, that cause of every danger, being over, God has delivered us from this, to save us from all other woes that must have followed its continuance; and to-day the South rejoices also in deliverance. In spite of some who still hate labor and the laborer; in spite of aristocratic tendencies still lurking in the southern blood, there is thanksgiving now throughout the South for their release.

As the proprietor of a mansion, in the seams and stones of which a vine had grown for generations, till the whole fabric threatened to fall down about his ears, would welcome even an earthquake, which, without destroying him, should happily destroy his cause of

fear, and leave him free to reconstruct upon a sounder basis, so does the South rejoice to-day in its deliverance from this curse.

What we are to do then, is to aid them in their reconstruction, not to keep them sitting on the ruins which suggest their former opulence. They are with us to feel the benefit of abolition, not by making the old vine (which, under another name and in another direction, still must grow upon their soil), a root of bitterness, but by showing them how it may ornament and strengthen the renewed establishment they hope to rear.

For the emancipated likewise, this is a glad day. They have suffered and still suffer, but with government pledged to care for them, and God their helper, we believe they too have passed the perils which in former years hung over them. It is not possible that God has brought this people out of Egypt to destroy them from the earth. If they rebel and worship idols, He will punish them. In the wilderness before them, ere their promised land be reached, they may encounter many trials. But they are God's people; He has brought them through the Red sea that devoured Pharaoh's host, and he will surely see that they, or at least their children, find the New Jerusalem towards which they fondly look. It is ours to see that we act not the part of Canaanites toward them, and be consumed before the sword of God.

Let us rejoice that no such fate seems now to frown upon us. With dispositions softened by our trials, our

animosities subdued by mutual courage in the strife, with passions kindled by outrageous cruelty upon our prisoners, but appeased by legal execution of the instrument of crime, while the arch criminal awaits his trial also and his doom; and with our prayers ascending for the future good of all this people, well may we accept this day of peace with shouts and jubilant delight.

The choicest wine of the Moselle (they tell us) is derived from grapes grown from the earth men carry on their shoulders high up to cliffs on which the sunset lingers last.

And even thus, from hardest labor, and severest toil, comes choicest vintage when the work is done.

Press then into full beakers, grapes from vines of victory which brave hearts planted, when above the clouds of Lookout mountain they sought sunshine for the land through their success!

Drink from the vines that crown the hills of Gettysburg; that run along the walls enclosing fields made ever fruitful by the soil encrimsoned with the noblest blood!

The vintage time has come; the harvest day of better things than corn and wine, is here! It is the land's great jubilee of praise!

But say you who have lost friends, that clouds hang over you, so that you cannot sing! Say you that this deliverance, purchased at such cost of dear ones, is too dearly bought. Then we respect your sorrow! Your

grief is ours, for by it we have reason to rejoice; the cup of glad deliverance which we drink to-day has the pale red of sacrifice within it, though in mantling light and joy it also shines. We wait to mingle tears of sympathy with yours; and yet

“What hopes, what faith engird us round;
What songs of cheer to heaven resound,
While tears fall on the hallowed ground
Where sleep our boys!
What prayers that peace may yet abound,
Each heart employs!”

If there be sadness blended with our praise to-day, it shall but serve, like the willow and the cypress in a sunlit landscape, to give rich tone of color and true depth of soul to the emotion of the day.

If we must mourn for our beloved chief and friend, whose tragic death this year made treason's triumph perfect, only to complete his fame and treason's overthrow, we may rejoice that God has given a successor, not merely to his office but to the same integrity of will and loyalty to freedom which make the name of Lincoln talismanic through the earth; for we must believe that from this greatest of all perils, an incompetent or unscrupulous chief magistrate, God has delivered us, in giving as our leader, one whose hand still firmly throttles the remaining Hydra-heads of treason, and extends the promise of protection to the freedmen of the land.

And if with his sanction, there must come before

us, as the price of perfect restoration of the Union, one more sad scene of public justice, making the wintry prospect still more bleak in the destruction of that leader who has been to us the incarnation of rebellion, we may well be thankful, that whatever the decision, it will come from calm, mature, deliberate thought, and not from hot revenge; only because

“The nation’s proper pride,
And God’s swift justice this demand —
That never more the regicide
Shall lift on high his reeking hand!”

Come then from every clime and coast of this vast continent; from frozen lakes and smooth savannas; from the golden hills of the Pacific; from the rude coasts where casts itself on high the Atlantic’s silvery foam; from fortresses now needless; from homes no longer friendless; — come thou nation of the Lord, and keep this day, the like of which the earth has never seen before!

Let songs of our deliverance encompass us; let the stars (the weeping Pleiades among them) sing for joy!

Let the earth spread flowers over the blood-stains on her breast, and give back golden harvests of integrity and greatness, for the brave lives which in the name of all that makes earth dear, surrendered to the sod! And let the heavens rejoice while earth is glad, since God hath visited his people and diffused abroad, we trust, perpetual peace!

The Spartans, to his temple chained their god of war when they desired rest, and hung the spoils of battle fields before him to appease his wrath.

The citizens of Athens took the wings from Victory their goddess, when they sought peace, and in the temple of the Wingless Victory, hard by the Propylæum, held her as the hostage of success.

To us, however, citizens of this republic, the same God is the God of War and God of Victory. To the Almighty One, we bring our trophies and our spoils.

Let then our fervent prayers for mercy serve as chains preventive of His judgments, while at His feet we spread our offerings of praise. And let our vows and pledges of obedient love make the blest “Angel of His Presence” ever wingless, and His favor to this nation, constant evermore!

