

## Thanksgiving Sermon.

BY REV. W. P. WHITE.

"Every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it that it may bring forth more fruit."—John 15:2.

There are times when we feel it easier to be thankful than at others. The objects and causes for thankfulness are more apparent. We bow readily thereto the appropriateness of thanksgiving days. Executive's proclamation finds a cheerful response from our hearts—when there has been no losses and no privations, nothing to cross our desires and purposes. The clouds have not withheld their rain, mildew and blight have been warded off, and the crops have been rich and abundant. Labor has been in demand. There has been no suspension of work. Business interests have prospered. Investments have brought their gains. Plans for greater comfort and enjoyment have succeeded. No pestilence or calamity has stalked through the land, making homes desolate and plunging communities in grief. Friends and dear ones have been preserved. Ah! under such circumstances as these, what heart can refuse its anthem of praise to Him who ordereth all these things for its good? Let multitudes crowd the sanctuaries of the Great Giver and sing with joyful voice—

"Come thou fount of every blessing!  
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace;  
Streams of mercy never ceasing,  
Call for songs of loudest praise."

But rarely, if ever, can a land like ours rejoice, in all its parts, in such mercies as we have mentioned. Somewhere calamity has fallen. The sad finger of desolation has left its traces on community or village, east or west, or north or south. Betrayal of trust has brought financial ruin to many families. Adversity has over taken some. Death has snatched away dearly loved ones, and those afflicted find it hard to sing in other than minor strains.

No doubt there have been those who have questioned as they came up to this house to-day, whether the nation had much cause for thankfulness over the events of the year. Other have thought of their own losses, and trials and afflictions and have felt rather inclined to sadness than to joyfulness.

The question occurs whether it is proper, come what may, happen what will, to appoint and observe days of thanksgiving. We incline to answer the question affirmatively. We have always reason to be thankful to God. His providence always calls for gratitude and praise. Do we think we have been treated severely, our text suggests for this severity a merciful design. These sad things, hard things, adverse things, that have met us are often God's pruning knife fitting us for more usefulness, for higher glory and for a greater capacity for enjoyment. In the end our sorrow shall be turned into joy. We should be thankful that He deals with us for our own good, thankful that He spares not the medicine when it is needed, thankful that what of severity he sends is no worse and that we are not treated as we deserve.

The cruel, untimely taking off of a beloved chief magistrate will mark the present year as one of the most sorrowful in our national history. As says our Thanksgiving proclamation, "the nation still lies in the shadow of a great bereavement and the mourning which has filled our hearts still finds its sorrowful expression toward the God before whom we but lately bowed in grief and supplication." But is there no bright lining to that cloud? Have no rays of light issued from it? Can we find nothing to be thankful for in connection with it? Yea, verily. The purging has brought forth fruit. The knife has left the tree more seemly and vigorous.

The nation's attention has been turned to evils which were a reproach and a danger. The shot of the assassin was a formidable blow at that greed for the spoils of office that has exhibited itself so prominently in the last few years. No sooner was a new administration set up than a whole horde of vampires were be seiging the fount of power for places of trust. Unworthy, unprincipled, and incompetent men by scheming, importuning and threatening have possessed many of the offices in the gift of the nation. And often they brought the government into disgrace at home and abroad. How to arrest and abolish the evil has engaged the time and thought of our wisest statesmen. The indifference of the public and a perverted public sense would doubtless have allowed the perpetrators of national sins to

Another circumstance of the year that has occasioned inconvenience and loss has been the prevalence of drought. Our governor refers to it in his thanksgiving proclamation. In many sections the crops have been very scant. The pasture lands have dried up, the cattle have suffered and incomes been cut off. Walls loud and long have echoed from husbandmen throughout the land. The knife has been at work here and the purging has occasioned pain, yet how much mitigated in such a land as ours compared with other lands, and, in view of the possible results, what room is there for thankfulness also? It may lead to greater dependence on God. When nature is propitious and bountiful, men are apt to exclude God from its operations. In all ages this has been the consequence. "She did not know that I gave her corn," said the Lord, through Hosea the prophet to Israel. "Dost thou know the balancings of the clouds?" he asks. "Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles that can cause rain." "Behold therefore, I have stretched out my hand over thee and have diminished thine ordinary food." It was to teach them their dependence on the Divine for crops, and the lesson was valuable to them, and no less so will it be to the American people if they will profit by it. Does drought teach men to depend more on God? then may we be thankful for drought. It may also call many to repentance for sin, and many in this land need to repent for forgetfulness of God, neglect of His ordinances and desecration of His Sabbaths. They have been more interested in the success of their crops than in the success of His Word. And general calamity, as the diminishing of a nation's ordinary food has been termed, "the ringing of the great bell of Providence, summoning a whole nation to repent." If it even accomplishes a little in this direction in our nation there is some room for thanksgiving.

Then, too, such a calamity teaches at times patience, thrift, economy, truer sympathy—turns men's attention to other branches of labor—develops trade and commerce in new directions—may even open doors for Gospel truth. What blessed results followed the sending of Jacob's sons to Egypt to buy corn in the time of famine? It often leads men to feel their need of greater blessings. It is seen that they are not sure of earthly ones—that they all may be blasted by Nature's hardness—that something else than what is marketable must be possessed if they would be saved from disappointment. As God, by His dealings with Israel in the Wilderness taught them that there is a worse diminishing than that of ordinary food and a greater sin than the abusing of earthly blessings, so does he need to teach this nation of ours. It needs to be led to God as the Supreme good—to be made brave and hopeful, even while adversity is its lot, knowing that it has higher interests than temporal, and that they are safe—knowing that God reigns, and that while He is their Friend no calamity can overwhelm. The old prophet sang "Let the people praise Thee, O, God! let all the people praise Thee. Then shall the earth yield her increase and God, even our own God, shall bless us." The very best thing we can do when the earth is parched and crops are scant is to wait before God and lifting the voice of supplication to Him, praise Him for the knife that prunes, and the medicine that sickens, that it may heal.

Those destructive fires that have visited our brethren in their homes finds an allusion to, in the Executive's proclamation, appointing this day. They have certainly been disastrous to many families. Some have lost the gatherings of years. Houses, barns, and stock are gone. Fields and woods have been swept of their all. Many precious lives have perished in the flames. What is there in this you may ask to be thankful for? It afforded a special opportunity for sympathy and the exercise of charity. We can rejoice in the kindly, benevolent spirit that sought at once to send relief to the sufferers. All over the land there was a warm response to the appeal for help. Money and clothing went forward to rebuild their habitations and to feed and protect their bodies from the cold. While mourning their loss they can be thankful for the humanity and love that saved them from worse suffering. We can be thankful for our freedom from such a calamity and for the abundance which enabled us to succor the unfortunate. It is such a ministry and charity of section to section that binds more closely together the different parts of our common country and renders more compact and enduring the mighty union of individual States that compose it.

Does Michigan love Pennsylvania more for

perverted public sense would doubtless have allowed the perpetrators of national sins to work on had they not smitten down the head of the nation. The act of one of these intriguing, disappointed, revengeful office seekers has done more, we believe, in the direction of civil-service reform than years of planning and recommending of commissions and committees.

Then, again, it has opened the eyes of the nation to the danger we are in from that spirit of assassination prevailing so widely. The value of human life when it offends and wrongs or stands in the way of selfish plans, has been with many of no account. They appealed not to law for redress. They must take life with impunity and be applauded for it. And the character and reputation especially of public men it has been looked upon as proper to assail and slander and impugn and destroy. Many politicians and newspaper writers, who published charges against the late President without knowing them to be true, were as guilty of the spirit of assassination as the miserable man on trial for firing the fatal shot. We believe that the death of the President severely rebuked and will to a great extent check this spirit of lawless defamation and disregard for life and reputation, and we may well be thankful if the purging roots out an execrable thing from the body politic.

Again, the great bereavement that filled the land with mourning obliterated much political bitterness, brought the hearts of the people nearer together and was a powerful means of allaying sectional animosity and reconciling the different parts of the land. We are more one people than we were before. There is more love and less hate between parties and sections. Who can believe that such a reception as was accorded General Sherman at Atlanta, a week since, would have been possible before the death of President Garfield. How to blot out slavery and free the land from a reproach and a curse, was what perplexed and agitated multitudes a few years since. They would have stood aghast at the mention of a civil war with years of strife and blood and agony and woe. But God thus brought it about and after it was over millions rejoiced through their tears and heart aches and losses. That North and South might be reconciled has been the prayer of multitudes. That a beloved ruler should die by assassin's hands to effect it never entered their minds. But if through the orderings of an inscrutable Providence it should be accomplished in this way, ought we not to thank and praise Him even while mourning the cruel, unholy deed?

There are other things to be thankful for in connection with this sad event. How little did it disturb the order of government? How patiently and self-sacrificingly the people bore it? What absence of violence and disorder. Instead of other conspiracies, or rebellion or retaliation that might have been expected and would have been the result in foreign lands, the nation behaved like a sufferer. God turned the passions of the people into prayers and tears. We became a praying nation. God came to be recognized and besought as we would have thought it impossible before the event. As death robbed us of our ruler, another, by the provisions of the constitution took his place and took up the work of government where he had left it and the nation transferred its confidence for the time to him. What a testimony to the strength of the Republic—to the moderation and patriotism of its citizens. Again, behold the benefit to home life, to Christian truth and purity that has resulted from that national calamity. It has been well said that the Christian home is the corner-stone of modern civilization—the best fruit that Christianity has yielded the earth; and the sure foundation of this republic, if it have sure foundation, is the purity of the family relation. The wounding of the President lifted the curtain that hid a lovely and beautiful family life. There was no pause in it, no bewilderment. It went on as before. There was patient and loving continuance of duty to the end. That wife and mother's character will be embalmed in the hearts of millions. The memory of that scene of domestic love shall be to this nation of priceless value. It may even be claimed that home life has gained more than public life by the death of Garfield. But, in the uplifting of the home life, the life of the nation is uplifted. The Christian character of the martyr chieftain became manifest also to the world. It was seen how a public man could be a sincere disciple of Jesus Christ. How in the confession of his faith and discharge of his duty he could walk fearlessly amongst those who Gallo-like cared for none of these things. All nations, classes and creeds were forced to pay honor to a Christian hero. The world beheld the possibilities and the dignities inherent in simple manhood. For had not this sublime and noble character who held the sceptre of this great republic risen from the lowest station and the humblest lineage to his exalted position. No other aids had been accorded to him than are offered to the millions of American boys. Ah, has not the nation enough to justify it in observing Thanksgiving day, even while remembering and looking upon an event that shrouds in mourning the one hundred and fifth year of its independence. Is it not the better for the affliction? Might not the calamity have been far worse? Shall not the land bring forth more and better fruit by reason of it? If so, we ought to be thankful to-day in view of all this?

Does Michigan love Pennsylvania more for the help that was sent her? Has the Keystone laid the Lake State under renewed obligations to welcome and kindly care for and aid our sons and daughters who may emigrate thither? Then have we something to be thankful for to-day even in the forest fires of the passing year. They deepened sympathy, they called out charity, they awakened love. They bound sections together. They opened up avenues for hospitality and cordial assistance to new homes in that rapidly growing West.

Once more have our homes been visited with affliction during the past year. Have we been robbed of joys much valued. Are empty chairs seen in our households and loved faces missed from our circle? Are there those whose sudden removal the church mourns? Yet still can we be thankful. We know that God did it. His mercy and goodness may be above our comprehension, yet they are no less mercy and goodness. These taken from us still live if united to Christ. They possess all the consciousness of the living and much more. We dwell in the suburbs of the eternal city. They are in the kingly metropolis. We are under clouds. They dwell in a radiance for which this earth has no parallel. Like the dew drops that sometimes glisten here on a summer morning, they have been drawn up by the sun of heaven to shine in that bow which surrounds the throne of the eternal. We sorrow not as those that are without hope, and for this we may well be very thankful. Then, too, are we not the better for our adversity and affliction? Have they not weakened our interest in this world and taught us to look more toward the heavenly? Have not our desires risen into nobler flight and mounting upward do they not seek for satisfaction to a greater extent in one who is "the way, the truth and the life?" If so, then we may bless God to-day for our own personal sorrows. God has chosen the passing season to make his love manifest. As the old prophet, to add to the miracle, first caused water in abundance to be poured on the wood and sacrifice, and then brought fire from heaven by his prayer to lick it up, so, has it been aptly said, does God pour out the flood of affliction upon His children and then kindles that inward joy in their bosoms which licks up all their sorrow. It is not impossible to be thankful through our tears to sing—"Praise God from whom all blessings flow," while homes stand desolate and the community is in mourning and woe and desolation are written upon many countenances.

We might have fared far worse. We received not one-half what our sinfulness and unfaithfulness deserved. The sorrow and loss may work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. The gem shall shine more brightly through the friction endured in its polishing. You will see, my friends, that I have said nothing about such causes for thankfulness as the absence of pestilence and prevailing disease, the revival and remarkable activity of commerce and trade, the healthiness of finance, the growth of our country and the development of its mineral and agricultural resources, the onward progress of education, the liberty, enjoyment and triumph of a pure religious profession, and worship, the increased liberality shown in the dissemination of the truth—all these with others will readily occur to you as causes for thankfulness. My aim has rather been to make you grateful even while remembering the sad and trying events of the year—to lift up your voices in praise to Him who cut and pruned for your greater good and happiness in life's journey and for the sake of your eternal triumph when life's journey is ended. To-day then let us offer our—

"Thanks for the darkness that reveals  
Night's starry dowry;  
And for the sable cloud that heals  
Each fevered flower;  
And for the rushing storm that peals  
Our weakness and His power.

Thanks for the sickness and the grief  
That none may flee;  
For loved ones now around  
The crystal sea;  
And for the weariness of heart  
That only rests in Thee.

Thanks for His own thrice-blessed word  
And Sabbath rest;  
Thanks for the hope of glory stored  
In mansions blest;  
And for the Spirit's comfort poured  
Into the trembling breast.

Thanks, more than thanks to Him ascend  
Who died to win  
Our life, and every trophy rend  
From death and sin;  
Till when the thanks of earth shall end  
The thanks of heaven begin.

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N. B.—Special attention given to diseases of children and skin diseases. June 17-81.