

A CALL TO PRAISE

A S E R M O N

DELIVERED ON

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

N O V E M B E R 26, 1868.

B Y

C H A R L E S W A D S W O R T H

Pastor of Calvary Presbyterian Church, San Francisco.

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SERMON

"BLESS THE LORD, O MY SOUL."—Psalm ciii: 22.

WE have come into our sanctuary at the summons of the Chief Magistrates of our State and Nation, to render public thanksgiving unto God for his manifold mercies. Our text is appropriate to the occasion, in its connections suggestive, and as a climax remarkable. This beautiful psalm is a call upon all creatures to praise Jehovah. In the preceding verse David had exhorted the whole angelic hierarchy unitedly to praise Him. In the first clause of this verse, as if impatient of further special precept, he summons the whole universe at once to join in the anthem: "Bless the Lord, all his works, in all places of his dominion;" and yet, in the next sentence, as if there were something not included in that comprehensive category, he adds: "Bless the Lord, O my soul."

Now this strange climax is suggestive of important truth. There is a possibility, yea, there is a positive danger, of overlooking the individual in the universal. There are few evils more common than this ignorance of ourselves in our scrutiny of others. As Solomon expresses it: "A keeping of vineyards while neglecting our own;" as Paul puts it: "A preacher unto others while himself a castaway." And this is especially manifest in our public thanksgivings. We dwell in thought too much on universals, too little on particulars. In the *matter* of our praises, we think too little of our own special blessings amid God's general benefactions; and in the *manner* of our praises, we bless God too exclusively "by proxy"—by the utterances at the two ends of the sanctuary—the preacher's in the pulpit, the choir's

in the orchestra—while the whole body of the congregation, silent and meditative, indulges in repose. And this our text rebukes. It breaks in upon this call to universal praise, with an exhortation to individual praise. It insists, as the Bible does everywhere, on thankfulness; not as a jet of emotion, but a practical Christian grace; and bids us close all our broad public exhortations unto “all angels,” “all creatures in all places of his dominions,” with this particular injunction: “Praise the Lord, O my soul.”

Meanwhile, as the text specifies the *subject* of thanksgiving, i. e., the human soul that exercises it, so it designates the *object* of thanksgivings, i. e., the glorious Spirit that accepts it—the infinite Jehovah. Thankfulness is not simple joy for a gift, but as well gratitude unto the giver. The absorbing thought in a truly thankful heart is God, the great Benefactor. So let it be to-day. Let our first thought be of God—turning, as it were, away from his benefactions to himself; rejoicing, above all else, that we have such a God to approach in our sacrifices of thanksgiving—a personal, omnipotent, omnipresent Spirit, from whose hand of love come all our mercies, and who, in unerring wisdom, as he has created, so controls all the universe.

In the world's catholic theology “there are Lords many and Gods many.” The truth of a Supreme Being lies at the foundation of all religion; but the practical value of the truth depends upon the notion formed of Him, or the qualities ascribed to him; for, by a law of our nature, “we become like what we worship.” The gods of the old Northmen, such as Odin and Thor, were simply hero-kings, and their worship transformed the adoring man into a blood-thirsty monster. The deities of classic mythology were personified passions, and, in their adoration, Greek and Roman virtues are only beautified lusts. In the grand Egyptian temples were enshrined beasts, birds, creeping things, and, as a result of such idol-worship, the morality of that early civilization became simply brutal. I need not enlarge on this. It is an aphorism even of the Chinese priesthood: “Worship Buddha, and you will be transformed into Buddha.” And you have but to study the

moral character of this modern infidelity, which, instead of a personal God, glorifies an impersonal Nature, to perceive therein a reflex of the indolent, limited, practically unrighteous *THING* they ignorantly honor.

Now, in contrast with all this, how transcendent is the Object of our worship! How glorious, if we would adore! How goodful, if we would imitate! Our God, our Jehovah, is a Being of all immaculate attributes—all pervading, controlling, sustaining energies. Not the infidel's deity, reposing in indolent majesty, but the omnioperative Spirit, whose energy is manifest in all natural phenomena; without whose cognizance—nay, without whose control—nothing happens unto his children—our Creator, our Benefactor, our Redeemer, our Father. And it should be our chief joy and thanksgiving to-day, that our sacrifices are rendered to such an object of worship; that we and our children are now assembled, neither by yonder Chinese altars, nor in yonder unbelievers' club-room; that we bow in dread adoration neither before the stuffed wolf-skin of the California Indian, nor the soulless, unsympathizing phantom of the California infidel; that we think not of all our numerous mercies to-day as the simple productions of nature—prodigal growth of our orchards and cornfields—but as the loving gifts of our Heavenly Father; and that our language of adoration in this Presence is not a song of foul license, nor the wail of despairing spirits rushing to annihilation, but an anthem of joyous thanksgiving, in unison with “all his angels,” “all creatures of his in all places of his dominion:” “Bless the Lord, bless Jehovah, bless the living God, O my soul.”

Thus our first thought should be of God, the great Giver; passing onward to consider, secondly, his wonderful gifts; and here rising at once to the height of the Psalmist's argument, and gathering all these gifts, as it were, into one. Let us—

First—Praise the Lord because he has prepared for us this wonderful world; for a goodly and glorious world it is. Some men complain of it; infidels deride it as a clumsy

malformation of chance, and some morose believers seem to think that Jehovah might have made it fairer and better; but the wiser "Sons of God shouted for joy" over it, as a very miracle of divine wisdom and power. And so it is everyway. Consider some of its beneficent aspects and uses to the children of men.

1. *As man's home or dwelling place*, and what a wonder of architecture it is—what foundations, walls, chambers, canopy. How matchless its economy in regard of these great desiderata—warmth, water, ventilation, light. What a heating apparatus, with conductors and registers, and softly tempered airs. What conveniences as to water—the great ocean-reservoir, the cloud-aqueducts, the river-conduits—yea, a distribution into all its chambers of hot and cold water by these mysterious oceanic currents. Then its ventilation wherein so many builders fail—how wonderfully is this done through these dynamics of the atmosphere, these tidal trade winds, these land breezes and sea breezes, now cooled by Polar ice-fields, now warmed by Tropic sands. Meantime its appointments for light are more expressive still of the Divine wisdom. Man fails in lighting satisfactorily for a single night any great temple; and a world illumined by human art would be only night rendered hideous by million of millions of glaring burners in every forest and field. But in God's hand one central solar lamp diffuses its tempered splendor for the day's labor, and innumerable softened lustres along the nocturnal canopy adapt it for repose. And thus every way, this house, builded in God's great city of worlds—in its architecture, its conveniences, its adornments—hath the seeming of a palace for a race of immortals, and well might the stars sing over it, and the great Architect pronounce it very good.

2. But then this planet is more than a man's home; more significantly still, *it is his school-house*, and, as such, most marvelously supplies all educational desiderata. Observe its situation—secluded (as a seminary should be always) from any constant, sensible intercourse with the heavenly metropolitan life. Note its scientific and philosophic apparatus; what a cabinet of minerals in these geologic cham-

bers, what a prodigal flora in its botanical gardens, what illustrations of physical science in air, light, ocean, the gravitation of mountains, the dynamics of the rivers, the optics of the skies. What a chemistry in these inorganic transmutations, and the processes and phenomena of this vegetable and animal life. What an orrery or planetarium revolves and sparkles in the sky, illustrating astronomy. Here are manifest adaptations and excitants to man's intellectual nature, rendering earth even a better school-house than it is a home; so that the man who limits the significance of life to its sensations and seeks in God's great building only banquet hall and dormitory, is like a foolish child degrading scientific apparatus into playthings, and prostitutes into an aimless palace-life that which God meant to be a glorious pupilage.

Meanwhile, in its aspect of a school-room, these mental appliances are not its chief excellences. Its appointments for man's *moral* culture are still more wonderful. Its condition of seclusion from other worlds, and consequently of ignorance of the higher spiritual life that peoples the universe, compels the soul unto faith. Its great time-keeper—sun and stars, revolving along yon crystalline dial-plate and giving to these fleeting hours the significance of portions of eternity—excites the soul to diligence. Its whole process of man's self-development toward the good or the evil is a lesson of retribution. It is a school, in short, where not even a California Educational Board can separate religion from science; where, indeed, the chair of Theology is better filled and endowed than those of Philosophy or Belles-Lettres. Where science seems only rudimental to religion—all its appliances but manifestations of the wonderful thoughts of God. Where everything that the man-child meets in his task discourses precious ethics; the flowers teaching him humility, and the birds singing of faith; and every development, inorganic or vital, demonstrates the great fact of retribution; and all the tremendous processes going on around, urge to activity in well-doing; and above him the burning sun in his strength and the lamping stars in their splendor, all cry aloud like the apoc-

alyptic voice out of heaven, "Come up hither," till the winged spirit seems compelled to aspire and ascend.

We cannot enlarge here; but this simple glance at the manifold adjustment of this earth to the wants of our nature is enough to fill the heart with gratitude unto God, the great World-Builder. It is a fair world in itself, and a fitting world in its ministries. Its creation was in infinite love. Its arrangements and appointments are all in infinite wisdom. It is glorious in its origin and in its destiny. Over it all the angels praised God when it was made; and for it there comes to every man the text's inspired call: "Bless the Lord, all his works in all places of his dominion. Bless the Lord, O my soul."

But we are not to rest satisfied with this broad generalization. As we said at the outset, the point of the exhortation is unto individuals and specialties. So, turning still more homeward and heartward, we say—

Secondly—*Let us praise the Lord for our country.* And here I am not about to exercise, what I claim as a minister's right, the privilege of discoursing somewhat on political questions on these thanksgiving days. I waive that privilege now, for I cannot see any great questions at issue in present political controversies. To-day, then, we will let the star-spangled banner float undisturbed and the American eagle nestle, and leave Plymouth Rock alone in its glory. We are looking on our country from a Christian stand-point. From any other, extreme views are sure to be taken, and, instead of Christian gratitude, men will either glory or grumble.

Some men are disposed to grumble. To hear them, one would suppose Almighty God had a special controversy with the American nation. The grumbling politician cries: "Taxation, public debt, bribery, corruption, anarchy, ruin." The grumbling reformer cries: "O, our vices are digging the graves of our liberties. Our institutions have outlived those social virtues which at first created and can alone conserve them. Already are the clouds gathering, and the sea and waves roaring, and thunders uttering their voices,

and the great earthquake, by which we are to perish, shaking the nation." But, blessed be God, all this, repeated year after year for half a century, has proved a false alarm. There was not so much of a storm after all. The hail was not so heavy, nor the thunder so loud, nor the earthquake so destructive. The grand social edifice was not rocked into ruins; and our gallant eagle still soars in his pride of place. Even these political antagonisms which now divide and perplex us are only the subsiding waves of that old war-tempest which we have just weathered, and upon which the ship of state has come up to the wind again and goes on her way rejoicing.

Meanwhile, in antitheses to all this grumbling, there are men among us disposed unduly to glory. Listen to them, and one would suppose that this same American eagle were akin to the apocalyptic angel, and this western continent "the new earth whereon dwelleth righteousness." And these men err as widely as the others. Politically and socially, we have not attained unto perfection. Our beloved nationality is, like all nationalities, not a manufacture, but a growth. A grand germ it surely is. Nevertheless, as a germ it needs earnest culture about its roots, and a pruning knife among its branches, ere it fulfill the old prophetic vision of "a tree whose height reached heaven, and the sight thereof was unto the ends of the earth."

But to the eye of Christian philosophy this culture is going on. These political excitements we have just referred to are, in this aspect, no more than the strong winds amid the branches, causing the roots to shoot deeper and giving strength to the trunk. American practical politics, which, for the time, make us all actors and orators in regard to great questions and principles, are the true means and theatre of American development and discipline. They educate the popular mind to think, and excite the popular heart to feel. They bring men out of the selfish world of trade; they lift men up from the shallow world of fashion to the broader world and healthier airs of a great civil life, fitting them for the franchises and immunities of this grand American citizenship.

The laws of free nations are no more than "another name for the popular common sense and conscience," and their power and beneficence grow with any true, broad popular culture. The theory that men are for institutions, wherewith Solon tortured unto death, on his iron bed of Proustes, the old Grecian liberty, has given place among us to the law of all true civil life—that institutions are for men, to be modified and fashioned to the ever expanding human shape and stature. Neither our one Federal, nor our several State Constitutions, are as yet perfect. All alike do they need growth and culture, like great trees, downward in the roots, upward in the branches. The English Constitution has been found equal to all crises, just because it is the slow growth of ages; and, therefore, has been justly compared to "an old mansion, often repaired, with quaint additions and seven gables, all differently fashioned." Our own Constitution, on the contrary, which is the work of a life-time, may be compared to one of these California buildings, extemporized for the occasion, brilliant with new paint, showy with cornices, but in which every earthquake is sure to smash the crockery and frighten the children. What we want is growth; and, surely, we are growing—steadily and rapidly advancing to the fulfillment of the divine ideal. And thus, to a truly Christian faith, our nationality rises to-day—a consolidated commonwealth, stretching from ocean to ocean athwart this broad continent; a nation of freemen, self-governed, governed by simple *law*, without police or soldiery—a nation of five hundred millions of people, covering the land with great cities, and the sea with great fleets; first in arts and learning, and every true product of genius; and thus, even politically, a power before which the war-power of kings can be only as the Philistines to Samson; but, above all, religiously God's almoner of salvation unto all people; the light of the benighted; the refuge of the oppressed; the home of the exile; the hope of the lost. So to the Christian's eye it looks. This is the prerogative of American faith—to exult even from afar over our sure and sublime future; to behold the first spring of the eaglet to the air, that in circles of

such amazing swiftness and power is soaring to the sun; yea, to behold here the form of the apocalyptic angel, rising on heavenly pinions to bear abroad the everlasting Gospel of "peace on earth and good will unto men, and glory to God in the highest." And, therefore, our thanksgiving for a land like this should be in the very spirit of the inspired exhortation: "He hath not dealt so with any people. Praise Him in the sanctuary. Praise Him in the firmament of His power. Praise the Lord all ye His angels that excel in strength." "Praise the Lord, O my soul!"

Meanwhile, this exhortation should be still further limited and specialized; therefore let us—

Thirdly—*Praise the Lord for our State.* We are here not merely as Americans, but as Californians, and as such should to-day be especially thankful. And here, too, there is need of that Christian circumspection which finds truth between extremes. California reproduces, on her own account, the two great national types of life—men who glory, and men who grumble.

1. We have *grumblers* among us. Men and women who have come here expecting to find English agriculture, Parisian social life, and New England piety, in a land where even now the wild bear roams unmolested, and where only twenty years ago the wilder Indian lighted his torch, like Diogenes, at noon-day, looking for a man. And as our men and manners do not please them, so nothing pleases them. Our grapes are too sweet and our strawberries too sour; our fish are without flavor, and our coal is sulphurous; our flora is inodorous, and our fauna is tough. We have many negative inferiorities, and as many positive monstrosities. "O these summer winds and fogs; these deluging winter rains; these terrible, terrible earthquakes!" Now we are not disposed to underrate our misfortunes, nor ignore our deficiencies. California is not the old Paradise—certainly not Paradise before the tempter entered it. But we are disposed to recognize our peculiar blessings, and looking on the bright side even of our clouds, to perceive the good that is in the evil. Without these summer winds and win-

ter rains our State would be a Sahara, and our city a lazaretto. Surely his honor the Mayor and our Board of Supervisors ought to join the general thanksgiving, that our streets are cleaned once a year and ventilated every evening. Our earthquakes are, indeed, serious realities, and yet, even with them, are our property and our lives safer than theirs whose exposure is to the havoc and devastation of the old Atlantic elements; indeed, if we only profit by them as we should. If they teach us to build dwellings which any respectable New England snow-storm would be ashamed *not* to crush and scatter into kindling wood; if they persuade us to leave our water-fronts where Jehovah appointed them, and not to erect "balloon" warehouses on a pasty domain stolen from the play-ground of Leviathan; above all, if they frighten our young married folks out of these mammoth caravansaries into the proprieties of separate homes, and our old unmarried folks into a better and brighter life than this miserable monasticism of furnished rooms and restaurants; in short, if these comparatively harmless disturbances teach us a little practical common sense, then the Californians of the next generation will, retrospectively, find in these very earthquakes new matter of thanksgiving.

Certainly, taking all things together, the most unreasonable and unconscionable of grumblers is a Californian grumbler. Meanwhile it must be confessed—

2. That we have among us Californians who *glory*. Happy as is our present, and bright as seems our future, yet we have not the genii of the Aladdin lamp to achieve for us impracticable miracles, and yet we are projecting work for the whole legion. We have town-lots enough, outlined and in market, to afford the whole population of the three great emporiums of the world sites for grand dwellings. We are forgetting that the law of city-growth is not that of mushrooms—that London was a town of considerable importance in the reign of the Roman Nero; that Julius Caesar found Paris a capital city in his old Gallic conquests; that New York is the very New Amsterdam, wherein Dutchmen gloried two hundred years ago. We do not consider

that great cities are the creatures, and not the creators of states; that gold mines and railroads cannot furnish the elements of the highest social prosperity. If these sand hills were all as richly metalliferous as the White Pine mountains, still wheat fields would be better for us. And even if the entire commerce of the Indies were to pass the Golden Gate, it must pass only on exodus to the Oriental Canaan. But then it will not even enter. Obviously, over our Pacific railroads can be transported only the most precious forms of merchandise. Along God's great water-course, shortened through the Isthmus, must forever pass the aggregate of the world's common and coarser commerce. The future growth of our city depends on men for agriculture and capital for manufactures, and railroads and mines will not furnish either. Though we are unquestionably a marvelous people, yet we have not the rod of Moses, and we cannot work miracles. The Olympian Jupiter has not come down upon our Sierras. The Titanic skeleton that Professor Whitney's fancy discovered in the gold drift of 36,000 years ago is, in fact, only the skull of a rickety Digger Indian, whose flesh was eaten by a bear of the last generation. And, while it is proper, and even scriptural, for "our sons and our daughters to prophesy, and our young men to see visions, and our old men to dream dreams," it is still, perhaps, safest to dismiss from our minds the pleasing illusion that yonder iron road is, in our day, to bring New York over the Sierras that it may be a suburb of San Francisco, or that along it even now the New Jerusalem is coming down out of Heaven, and will "switch off" into Oakland.

And yet, even in the reckonings of sound reason, as Californians and San Franciscans we have abundant ground of thanksgiving. If true to ourselves, we are here, as in the world's future centre, laying the foundations of an immense commercial, intellectual and religious prosperity. San Francisco is to be the great commercial emporium, at least of this coast. And when a noble group of Pacific States shall encircle her as a nucleus, all alive with a busy population, and rich in all agricultural and manufacturing wealth, she will be the New York or London of the Occident.

Meanwhile morally, or as regards her intellectual and religious character, her future is surely hopeful. The fears, felt very widely, occasionally expressed, of the effeminating effects of our delicious climate upon physical and mental vigor are, surely, not justified, nay, are forever dispelled, by the specimens of strong-limbed, red-blooded, graceful, vigorous manhood and womanhood into which children born in California are already developing. In this regard, "Young California" can be, ought to be, a splendid human creature, combining, in matchless composite, northern firmness and southern fire; oriental repose with occidental vigor; the Italian verdure of human nature bright and fair over its Alpine granite; its taste exquisite as this azure firmament; its genius imperial as yonder gigantic mountain and these blue Pacific seas.

Nor, if true to ourselves, are our fears better founded in regard of our moral and religious future. The present popular infidelity, over which the Christian heart sickens, is no more than a short-lived fungus born of the reeking scum which mighty tides of immigration always cast upon the shore. With the noble band of California pioneers who entered yonder Golden Gate, inspired by ancestral piety, to establish schools, build churches, and organize charities—thus laying broad and deep on these shores the foundations of a genuine Christian civilization—there came the whole motly herd of outlaws and outcasts of the old social life, and they have multiplied and increased and done after their kind, until the air reeks with the breath of their blasphemy. But this current and flippant infidelity is no more an exponent of California moral life than the mushrooms of your kennels are emblems of your magnificent cedars. When yonder iron thoroughfare shall have brought us into contact and vital sympathy with Eastern Christendom all this pretentious and pitiful unbelief will pass away, as the stunted and pigmy wolves that twenty years ago raced and howled on these sand hills have given place to these troops of beloved children, who, to-day, keep joyous thanksgiving in our streets and homes.

And with these two fears dispelled, surely, as our present is bright, so our future is unbounded.

Shut in by these grand Sierras to these blue Pacific seas, sheltered as by adamantine bulwarks from the thousand special evils of yonder dear old States—their thunder and lightning; their east winds and consumptions; their snows and sun-strokes; their mushroom noblesse and monstrous sea serpents; their uncertain climate and more uncertain currency—sheltered, in short, from that Alp-like climax of mortal ills, which, like the mercury of their thermometers, ranges from the twenty degrees below nothing to the whole hundred above. And, meanwhile, shut into a land where soil, climate, atmosphere—each a marvel in itself—combine in phenomena absolutely miraculous; with clusters heavier than Eschol's; and fruits more abundant than Arcadia's; and flowers more wondrously fair than Paestum's or Sharon's; where the winter fields are carpeted with emerald of three-ply, and the summer heavens glow as with lustres flung back from the pinnacles of the city whose foundations are of precious stones; here a city, not yet twenty years old, with a population as large and architecture surpassing all that Paris could show after a thousand years of progress, and all around, spreading away in matchless loveliness, these valleys, where our merchant-princes even now delight to plant gardens like Eden, and to build palaces to embosom a new social life, and enshrine coming types of art fairer than the Greek—we, by occupation, and our children by birth, possessed of such an inheritance, surely a joyous thanksgiving becomes us to-day. And if the dwellers in other lands obey the exhortation "Praise the Lord all his creatures in all places of his dominion," then, louder and more loving, should our cry be: "Bless the Lord, O my soul."

But, beyond all these common blessings, does the text's exhortation extend. Let us, therefore—

Fourthly—*Bless the Lord for our special individual blessings.* And here, of course, each man must be his own preacher. Mine is not the golden key to enter the sanctuary of every home and heart and point out special mercies. But quite certain I am that every one of us finds reason in

past and present experience for fervent thanksgiving. We have, doubtless, our particular trials. It would be strange, nay, it would be disastrous, if we had not; for our life on earth is not a citizenship, but a pilgrimage, and—

“The path of sorrow, and that path alone
Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown.”

And we should perceive God's hidden purpose of love even in our sorest afflictions, and know that he who, in a right spirit, opens home and heart to great sorrows, only like the trustful apostle, “entertains angels unawares.” Meanwhile, let our trials be many and large as they may, honestly reckoned, our blessings greatly outnumber them. And we have only most cursorily to review the long catalogue—all our bodily blessings, intellectual blessings, family blessings, civil blessings, business blessings, moral blessings, religious blessings—yea, even, and perhaps, best of all, our disciplinary and sanctifying blessings; all our multifarious and marvelous experience of good at the hand of our Heavenly Father, who has filled for us with bright forms the whole immeasurable space between non-existence and Heaven—and then surely our grateful voices will be loud in thanksgiving, and we shall sit in these seats and go forth to our homes with bright eyes and smiling faces, glad of the present, trustful for the future. If stormy winds wail around ruined fortunes, nevertheless so attuning our hearts to the very blast that they give forth strains soft and sweet as *Æolian*s; or, if clouds lie heavily along the horizon, still beholding how in faith's blessed sunshine their borders are fringed with silver and golden light. And we shall sit at bright firesides and at festive boards, and share in childhood's sports and friendship's gentle ministries, fully blessed with the beatitude God accords us to-day, and trustful of God's grace that he will take care of us on the morrow. And our exhortation will not be merely unto others in view of their seeming greater good. “Bless the Lord all ye creatures in all places of his dominion.” But, as if placed each one in his own pulpit to preach a sermon to himself, we shall cry more earnestly: “Bless the Lord, O my soul!”

Meanwhile, not even with this thought ends the text's specialization. Hitherto we have been thinking of our general and temporal mercies; and as the objects of our praise have been material, so, to a degree, at least, have been their subject and instruments. Our language has been: “Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in the firmament of his power. Praise him with the sound of the trumpet; praise him with the timbrel and dance. Praise him with stringed instruments and organs; praise him with loud cymbals. Praise him upon high-sounding cymbals.” And it is as if we had been saying each to himself: “God hath given me forms of beauty; bless the Lord, O my eyes.” “God hath ravished me with sounds of harmony; bless the Lord, O my ears.” “God hath led me along peaceful paths; bless the Lord, O my feet.” “God hath filled my home with love's ministries; bless the Lord, O my heart.” The measure and range of the hallelujah has been, to a degree, sublunary and sensuous. But just here at its close, inspired by the text, it should rise purely and grandly into the spiritual. “Bless the Lord, O my soul!”

The word “soul” is to be understood here in its best and truest sense. Not that *Psyche* of the Greek, that principle of animal life which the rich man addressed, when he said: “Soul, take thine ease—eat, drink, and be merry.” But that *Spirit*, that higher spiritual life, of which Paul was cognizant when in that rapture into Paradise he did not know “whether he was in the body or out of it”—that pure emanation from God in-breathed, inspiring the primitive man made in God's image—a principle which the Scripture everywhere distinguishes from the animal life, as allying man with the higher intelligences that people eternity—to this is the Psalmist's last appeal. And in addressing it, we cross at once the boundary of visible and sensuous things. We divest ourselves virtually, for the moment, of all that is merely animal, and are thrown, as purely spiritual beings, into purely spiritual conditions. We pass the threshold of the “earthly tabernacle.” We approach, we lift the veil, we enter the secret recesses of our own nature. We stand face to face with the essential human self-hood, the immor-

tal human soul—that last made, and most marvelous creature of God—which here, even in its infancy, rocked in its earthly cradle and wrapped in carnal swaddling-bands, works so widely and wondrously; which rules and reigns over nature, extends its survey over creation—yea, rises above all perishable things and dares to cast itself in adoring rapture on the very bosom of God; and which, at last, in its higher development, “clothed upon with the heavenly life and immortality,” shall go forth in transcendent ministries when yonder sun shall have burned out all his splendors and the stars have faded as the watch-fires of a night. To this mysterious and mighty creature of God, formed in his image, redeemed by his mediation—“this angel sitting on the bosom”—we are supposed now to come in the text’s grand climax, calling upon it last and loudest of all to join in thanksgiving. “O soul,” we cry, as if unto a reposeful and slumbering angel. “O soul, O winged and deathless spirit, bless thou the Lord.” Praise him for thy creation; praise him for thy marvelous being and powers. Praise him for thy miraculous redemption; praise him for thy all-glorious destiny. Praise him for all the mercies wherewith Jehovah hath rounded thy life and beautified thy great paths. For those spiritual benefactions, compared with which all things we have been considering, seem as vanity and nothing—these fair lands only as deserts—these beloved homes only as dungeons—this fair world, rounded into beauty, and hung amid the stars, only as a transient meteor vanishing into night. For a higher world beyond these waters and these graves, for a land which death shall never enter and night never darken, for a city that hath foundations, for a house of many mansions, for raiment white and glistening, for crowns set with unfading stars, for thrones of power whereon we shall reign over angels, for winged feet to walk all those ascending paths of knowledge and holiness and joy and love that loose themselves in Godhead; yea, for that very “partaking of the divine nature” which makes us one with the Incarnate, and so lifts us, as in privilege so in praise, forever above all “the angels that excel in strength,” and gives us a seat on God’s throne and a rest

on God’s bosom. O, thou soul! O, thou redeemed and immortal spirit, unto whom the divine gifts of love so immeasurably transcend all gifts unto angels; surely thine should be the loftiest place in creation’s choir, the loudest voice in creation’s anthem. And while the inspired voice cries: “Bless the Lord ye his angels that excel in strength, that do His commandments, hearkening to the voice of His word; bless ye the Lord all ye hosts, ye ministers of His that do His pleasure; bless the Lord all His works in all places of His dominion.” Yet with a louder voice and a stronger emphasis cries that voice in transcendent climax: “Bless the Lord, O MY SOUL!”