

The Perils of our Prosperity

A S E R M O N

PREACHED IN THE

CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

SIMSBURY, CONN

ON

THANKSGIVING DAY

November 24th, 1853.

BY THE PASTOR,

SAMUEL T. RICHARDS

HARTFORD.

ELIHU GEER, STATIONER AND STEAM PRINTER

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REV. S. T. RICHARDS,

DEAR SIR :

The undersigned, having been appointed a Committee for that purpose by members of your congregation, in obedience to their instructions, as well as in accordance with our own feelings, take pleasure in conveying to you their high opinion of your late Thanksgiving Sermon,—as being highly interesting and instructive,—and respectfully request a copy for publication.

RICH'D BACON,
L. J. BARBER,
JOB CASE.

SIMSBURY, DEC. 1, 1853.

MESSRS. RICH'D BACON, L. J. BARBER AND JOB CASE,

GENTLEMEN ;

In the hope that the discourse, you are pleased to solicit for publication, may tend in some measure to arouse, if nothing more, a spirit of inquiry in some minds after the elements among us, which oppose the progress of the gospel, I submit it to your disposal.

SAM'L T. RICHARDS.

SIMSBURY, DEC. 5, 1853.

S E R M O N

“He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress. And Ephraim said, Yet I am become rich, I have found me out substance: in all my labors they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin. And I that am the Lord thy God from the land of Egypt will yet make thee to dwell in tabernacles, as in the days of the solemn feasts.” HOSEA, XII: 7, 8, 9.

THE time has been when, to the mass of the people in New England, a day of public thanksgiving had a very different significance from that which it seems to have at present. Even within the memory of some yet living, and much more still longer ago, such a day was regarded as one, on which the people were to assemble in their places of worship, with as much generality as on the Holy Sabbath. And though it has always been a time for family reunions and social festivities, these were once held subordinate to the higher claims of the day as one of united thanksgiving to God for his goodness. In our times a vast difference is observable. Though a few are still generally found in the sanctuary on these annual occasions, by far the greater portion, of even our most punctual Sabbath worshipers, appear to regard this as something entirely irrelevant of the day. They seem to look upon it as a time especially set apart, by the executive authorities, for the high purpose of enabling house-wives to make an unusual display of their culinary skill, and whole families to exhibit the impunity with which they can, at times, defy the demon of dyspepsia. We can, to be sure, congratulate ourselves on the spread of this time-honored custom, until now it is observed in, perhaps, quite a majority of the States of the Union. Yet we can not well free ourselves from the striking thought, that the spread did not commence until the

fact of family reunions, and social gatherings, and thanksgiving dinners, had assumed such a pre-eminence over the original design of the day. And it can not but occur to a thoughtful mind to inquire whether the merely secular aspect of these scenes of festivity has not exerted as great an influence, to say the least, in commending the custom to those who did not formerly observe it, as the religious sentiments of the people. We are by no means disposed, however, to quarrel with the custom of families coming together on these occasions, and uniting once more around the festive board. There is not only a beauty, there is also a profit in this. One of the most delightful aspects of this honored relic of the past is found in these very family gatherings, to which it gives rise. There is something appropriate in a family keeping up the old home feeling, and so long as there is a central homestead around which its sympathies may always meet, there is no surer way of doing this, than by having a season,—set and peculiar,—when those who have been scattered abroad can return to the scenes of their childhood, and beneath the paternal roof talk over the ways in which they, in their several walks, have been prospered during the year,—mingling their gratulations with thanksgiving to God for his mercies. It adds interest to the thing too, when all can feel that at one and the same time all the families of the neighborhood,—the commonwealth,—the country if it may be,—are engaged in the same particular way. But we can not avoid a feeling of sadness, when we find the mere secularity of the occasion becoming so big with interest in the eyes of the people, as to blot out the thought that the great thing, which, at such times, should engage all hearts, is a deep and pressing thankfulness to God for the mercies which may have crowned the year. We can not but lament, when it is forced upon us, that the decay of the devotional qualities of the day, and the inordinate growth of its merely sensual characteristics, are the things,—as they seem to be,—which commend it to the good-will and the practice of such portions of the country, as long have held aloof from it. For we can only regard it as of a piece with numerous other indications, which go to prove, that, not only the masses of the people in other parts of the land, but even the masses of the people in New England itself, have lost much of that spirit of true

religion, which characterized the best days of our fathers. We do not hold, to be sure, that there is no evidence of sincere piety among us. We do not say that there is not now in the New England churches and elsewhere some who are just as true Christians,—who have just as much of the real martyr spirit as ever existed; but we do feel that the great change, which has taken place in the observance of this day, and other great changes, of which this is only a specimen, go to show,—what every one must be conscious of, whether he stop to search for the proof of it or not,—that regard for pure religion has not the hold upon our communities, which once it had,—and more than that,—that with multitudes who profess to be real Christians, there is not that sincere conscientiousness, which once marked the puritan character. While there are true Christians every where,—while we have churches established of various orders, all of them no doubt holding in their embrace much of the spirit of Christ,—the strength of religious principle in the public mind,—including not a little of the mind professedly sanctified,—is not up to that standard, which, for instance, amid the cold storms of winter, and in the pressing emergency of the pilgrim band, compelled the observance of that memorable Sabbath, on a desolate island, in the bay of Cape Cod. We are very confident that, without any assistance from a disposition to worship the by-gone, and depreciate the present, we are led to this conclusion simply by the absolute force of facts.

It becomes therefore an obvious duty, to inquire into the causes of this peculiar state of things. What influences are at work adulterating our piety, and are they such as to endanger the permanency of true religion among us? How may we know them, that we may strive intelligently to counteract them?

The moment we start in this direction, we are met by a certain class of men, who inform us that they can at once give us a solution of the problem. They accordingly tell us, we are partly correct and partly mistaken in our views of the present. Much of that which we look upon as utter worldliness, is in fact, deep religious feeling, in a different form from that which formerly appeared. This is our mistake. Then we are correct in feeling, that there is

very much of irreligion among certain portions of the people, and this is easily accounted for. The fact is,—they go on to say,—the world has lived beyond the age of puritanism, and it is impossible that the same aspects of religion should appear at present, that once were manifest. A few are becoming alive to this great fact, and in them religion is assuming its more befitting features, and their teaching is becoming more and more adapted to the wants of the age. But there are multitudes of religious instructors who still persist in forcing upon the people the same representations as of old, and the enlightened feeling of the present is revolted at them, and the consequence is,—just what we lament,—vast and increasing irreligion among great masses of men. Mind is at last freeing itself from the superstitious awe and morbid sensibilities of other ages; and now, in its healthier condition, it exhibits a natural and commendable repugnance to the inordinate demands, and fear-inspiring teachings of a superannuated system of religion. Until therefore these demands cease to be pressed, and these instructions are discontinued, and the more enlightened mode of presenting truth becomes general, we can only have the same things to lament, that cause our present grief.

In answer to all this we are constrained to say, we can not regard it as satisfactory. We are, indeed, fully aware that the world has grown far beyond the age of puritanism. This is just what we have been lamenting. We are perfectly acquainted with the repugnance of many minds, of the present day, to much that characterized the Puritans. There is a spirit abroad now, which finds fewer sources of more grateful amusement, than the occupation of ridiculing the habits and opinions of New England's ancestors. The very descendants even of the Pilgrims themselves, are sometimes found vying with others, in the noble work of edging on the world, to condemn the memory of their fathers. It is very true, also, that this spirit does exhibit a most wonderful repugnance to the teachings of such men as attempt to hold up, in all their plainness, the same truths which were preached, for instance, by Jonathan Edwards. But we can by no means admit that this repugnance arises from more enlightened views of religious truth, which these latter days have introduced. We can only regard it as con-

clusive evidence of a natural repugnance in the human heart, to real religion itself, which, in these days, displays itself boldly. We are fully persuaded, moreover, that were the preaching of the present time, to conform itself to the standard which some men would erect, the result would speedily be, instead of deep religious feeling in any form, a deep and still more extensive antipathy to all truly religious feeling, baptized, perhaps, into the name of piety, and sometimes wearing some of its habiliments. We do not believe that a studied transcendentalism, playing about the heads of men with beautiful tropes and figures and high representations of the sublime and the infinite, boundless love and the supreme good, a life of polite and polished ease here, and one of placidity hereafter, while all the terrors of the law and all future punishment, if not denied outright, are carefully concealed from view by a covering of unmeaning words, or by a lack of any reference to them whatever,—we do not believe that this is a fit substitute for the plain and simple language of New England teachings in years gone by, when the Bible, and not the philosophical systems of German sceptics, was the standard of belief and the source of instruction. Something of this kind might, to be sure, fall in very exactly with the innate propensities of men, and might be received without encountering any strong opposition from the unregenerate; but we have yet to learn in what way the Bible teaches that true religious principle can be implanted in the heart, by any course which keeps men quiet, by pandering to their native depravity; and we do hold that unless there is the real principle of religion in the heart; that principle which puts God and his holy law above everything else; that principle which is gained only through repentance and faith in Christ, wrought by the sanctification of the Spirit; it matters very little how full the soul may be of poetic sentimentalities, the man is still a sinner and still under condemnation.

And let it be remembered, it is this religious principle, which so pre-eminently marked the fathers of New England, and its inevitable fruits under all circumstances, that we have in mind, when we recommend Puritanism and lament its decline. We most certainly do not insist on the necessity of all its external peculiarities being maintained in our day. This indeed is something simply impos-

sible. The outward characteristics of truly christian men will always take shade and shape, in some manner, from the character of the times in which they live. Religious principle will develop external habits varying somewhat with the peculiarities of the age ; and we, therefore, are not to look for precisely the same external features in religious men, in an age that differs entirely from one in which they originally appeared. In the first age of puritanism, it was marked with certain peculiarities, which were natural enough then, but which would not be now. The rigor of Puritan strictness, the uncouthness of Puritan manners, the spirit of Puritan intolerance, were only the natural result of omnipotent religious principle taking possession of men's hearts and moulding them in those times. We know what the age was. We well know that religion had lost all its sanctity, and society had become deformed with the foulest vices. Whatever law of God did not square with the vicious habits of the people, was incontinently trampled under foot, and the Church connived at it, and administered the ordinances to the vilest transgressors and to their children. In the midst of this corruption, the Puritans arose, imbued with the spirit of true religion, and at once entered a determined protest against all this iniquity in both church and state. They saw the utter inconsistency of true godliness with present practices, and they could not be silent. But the moment they began to give their testimony against the evils of the age, they were met with the most inveterate opposition. The firmer they stood, the stronger grew the opposition, until, at length, it took the shape of direct persecution. Ridicule was heaped upon their piety. Prohibition was laid upon their acts of worship. Punishment followed their efforts to serve God truly. Abuse at home finally forced them into a dreary exile ; and all this was the work of a corrupt government in league with a more corrupt religion. It was consequently impossible that the external features, developed by deep religious principle struggling under such forces, should not be, in some degree, just what these features of the Puritans became. It is most natural that their hatred of the sins, which to them were so palpable and so heinous, should lead them, in some respects, into what we may now regard even as extremes. The smooth and

polished manners of the ungodly courtiers by whom they were persecuted, would of course be repudiated, and no wonder if a strange uncouthness should intervene. The licentious havoc made with the decalogue would be entirely suppressed in themselves, and no wonder if an unusual, even a levitical strictness should follow. The levity and license of ungodly professors of religion would be ignored, and no wonder if a face of peculiar seriousness should be assumed. The profane and often cruel amusements of the day would be condemned, and no wonder if a stern protest should be entered against almost every species of amusement. In short we see nothing strange in the external manners of the puritan fathers. We simply perceive the natural result of a true religious principle, training men under the light and opposing forces of a very corrupt age. We, consequently, are very far from recognizing these peculiarities as legitimate subjects of mere ridicule ; and we can not very highly honor the religious discernment of those who so esteem them. We rather regard them as things which testify to the reality of our fathers' religion, but which we are not to copy while we are to maintain their principle, leading us to their high recognition of God and his demands upon us, their undeviating regard for the truths and all the truths of the gospel, and which will fasten upon us such external characteristics as are in keeping with our surroundings.

It is, therefore, no new gospel we want in these days, nor any mode of interpreting the one we have, that strips it of its plain and simple meaning. Nor is the fair and honest presentation of the truths, which once were held and preached with power, and which many still love, that drive men into irreligion. There are causes lying back of all this, which we wish to arrive at ; and indeed one of these causes is, we believe, the very remedy, some of the pretenders to more liberal and more correct views, propose, and attempt to apply. For our part we have no confidence in anything but the plain and simple gospel of Christ, as good men have received it and been led by it in all ages. There may be new modes of illustrating and enforcing truth discovered no doubt. There may be some improvements suggested from time to time, in the metaphysics of theology. The philological skill of biblical

interpreters may be increased; but the plain, fundamental truths of the gospel, in all their demands, promises and threatenings, will always remain the same, and must always be preached or religion dies absolutely. The question then recurs, what are the causes at work deteriorating our piety, and making it so difficult for the plain preaching of the whole truth to reach and affect the hearts of men?

In looking around for a correct answer, and keeping in mind the remarks already made, we naturally would fall upon some considerations on the effects produced upon us by the moral principles and religious observances of the old world which are imported in such profusion, in these days, by the immense immigration continually flooding our land. But as this is a matter better understood and probably more thought of than some other things, we design to pass it, with this brief allusion, and dwell more at length on some causes which lie still further back, and which are instrumental even, as it seems to us, in giving these agencies their vitiating power. To these causes we are naturally directed by the sentiment of our text.

Ephraim was blessed in a peculiar manner in the outset of his career as a tribe, and laid under peculiar obligations to God. He, at first, responded to these obligations with a spirit equal, at least, to the spirit of his brethren. But it was not long before his central position in the land, the fruitfulness of his territory, and his possession of the sacerdotal establishment, revealed to him the facilities within his reach for increasing his wealth, and his consequent power. These facilities he began to use, and use successfully. The further he advanced the more absorbed he became. The greater his success the more certain he seems to have become, that his great mission was to labor for wealth and power. This at last took possession of his whole soul, and so he passed on to the position, the prophet reveals to us. By this time he had gained a perfect self-reliance. He could devise means himself, without divine aid, and so long as they answered the end proposed, it mattered little what the means were. Success in accumulating riches commended almost any instrumentality,—even sanctified “balances of deceit,” and justified oppression. Greater light had fallen upon his eyes! He saw how

ridiculous were the scruples of other ages, and how needful it was to bless men with more liberal views of truth and duty!—God the while, stood above him, however, though he believed it not, and pronounced a woe upon him, which has been most fearfully fulfilled.

We thus are pointed, as we verily believe, to some of the most prolific causes of the evils which we lament, and leaving all others, which co-operate with them, unnoticed for the present, we propose to dwell on the thoughts here suggested, in the remainder of our discourse.

Ephraim's prosperity, it not being properly regarded, was the cause of his downfall. This it was that led him from one step to another until he could call good evil and evil good, commit high handed sin with great self-complacency, pass his hand over a brow of brass, and challenge a world to point to any iniquity in him. And we think there are indications, that the very things which we pretend to be thankful for on such days as this, are working to the deterioration of our piety. Our worldly prosperity as a nation, is eating away the substance of our religious principles.

It must be confessed that this land has been blessed in a peculiar manner since it was first settled, and especially since it gained a distinct nationality. There has been nothing else like it in the history of the world. We have been prospered in every direction, and our prosperity still continues. The wilderness of yesterday is teeming with busy life to-day. Where all was silent and uncultivated lately, there is now a waving harvest. Where there were only hundreds a few years ago, there are now swelling thousands. Where within the recollection of men not yet old, a few huts only were clustered together, there are now proud and populous cities. And as our territory and population have expanded, so our facilities for gaining wealth and power have increased, and so both have poured in upon us. Our granaries and our coffers are becoming constantly fuller. Our houses are becoming palaces. Our country is becoming the wide and busy theatre of successful worldly enterprise. Now, this were all well enough, if it were only fully borne in mind, that such a state of affairs carries with it vast danger to the morals of the land. But while this danger is often on the lips of men, it makes little impression on their hearts, and not being

sufficiently guarded against, it has already to a great extent become a danger realized.

Let us point out the workings of some of the instruments of our prosperity, and some of the results, by way of showing how, almost without our notice, they not only may, but do work against the interests of true religion among us.

To begin with, then, look at what we have just spoken of—our growing cities. They are indeed objects of wonder to all beholders. The progress of those already planted and the rise of new ones every year, are things, the like of which has been seen in no other land, or any other age of the world. But there is something more than mere matter of astonishment in this phenomenon. There is danger in it also. The rise and progress of cities is a sure indication of the rise and progress of the commercial spirit among a people. Commerce is that which creates cities, and as they arise, they become the centers of trade. In this light they are viewed on all hands. Their great business is felt to be the business, of attending to the pecuniary interests of the people. And it follows, as we all know, that the city is the place to which we look instinctively for great money operations. In the city large fortunes are to be made. By the cities are great enterprizes to be achieved. Whatever is necessary to facilitate trade, advance the interest of commerce, stimulate the golden aspirations of men,—this, it is the legitimate business of cities to furnish. But all this being true, any one can see that there is great danger of the city coming under the control of the god of this world, Mammon. We do not say it certainly must descend to such a presidency, but there is an absolute certainty of such a result, where there is not the utmost effort to prevent it. And let this once become the fact, and of course the interests of true religion must suffer. “Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.” As the devotees of this worldly genius are taught that wealth and its pleasures are everything, we shall soon find in full play, all the peculiar precepts and all the customs, all the arts and all the engineering, which are necessary to the great work of “hasting to be rich.” Men will soon learn to decide upon the claims of conscience by studying the ledger, and upon the rules of moral obligation, by scanning the price current. Thus riches may be speedily

accumulated too; but as they thus are gained, we shall not fail to see arising, manners and customs, morals and amusements which are in perfect keeping with such modes of gaining the means of self-indulgence. And now, we cannot deny that to a much greater degree than our pride might prompt us to admit, this very subserviency to Mammon does exist, at the present days, in our large and growing cities. Though there may still remain much of the conservatism of true religion in these great centers, yet it must be confessed that the prevailing influence in all the cities of the land, is the influence of dollars and cents. Money making is the business of our commercial emporiums; and the spirit of trade, as no one can deny, is largely tinctured with the doctrine,—that prime doctrine of Mammon,—that “all is fair in trade.” There are moral codes in numerous counting houses in our land, which ignore the decalogue utterly. There are habits of driving bargains daily practiced in all our centers of trade, which put to defiance both the laws of God and common honesty. And we are greatly mistaken if the evil is not on the increase, and the land daily becoming a greater sufferer in consequence.

For, be it remembered, the influence of wrong principles in a city by no means affects the city alone. Let the center become corrupt, and the evil will spread from center to circumference. We by no means appreciate the interest the country has in the maintenance of the pure principles of the gospel in our cities. They exert a much wider and more powerful influence than we are often aware of. They are in fact, in a large sense, the controlling elements in the land. The cities give us our laws. They place our rulers over us, and govern us while we think nothing of it. We instinctively look to the city, to see what are the political movements which we are to meet with our concurrence. We unite on platforms invented and secretly moulded in cities, and adapted to the spirit of trade and commerce. And thus our political interests are in the hands of the cities, and we are sometimes led or driven by them, into the adoption of principles or measures, or both, which are subversive of all righteousness.

But this is only part of the influence, cities exert in the land. There are other ways in which they affect us. They are the points,

for example, towards which our enterprising young men bend their steps, and the country is, in its every part, linked to the city, by representatives of almost all its families being there. They of course adopt the habits and principles of those around them. If they are Christians, they, for the most part, become just like the mass of Christians among whom they live; and if they are worldly men they do not ordinarily rise much above the same class, with whom they deal and have social intercourse. Hence come back constant streams of influence upon our rural districts, with a facility nothing else could give, and we find the country gradually, but surely, passing through a transformation from its former simplicity of habit and feeling, to the gaudiness and glare of fashion's less innocent manners and customs.

Then moreover as the city is the place in which a part of the family may hope to make the largest fortune in the shortest time, so it is the place where the little or large fortunes, accumulated in the hands of those who remain at home, may generally be most advantageously invested. As a consequence this is frequently done. And here are new links to chain the rural districts to the central point, and give the latter a peculiar influence over them. Sympathy with the business habits of the city, whether good or bad, the same subserviency to the claims of commerce, in short, the whole spirit of the city is transferred to our country homes, and set to work there as eagerly as elsewhere.

If, then, we add to all this, the all powerful influence of a city press, whose tone is generally in accordance with city interests and morals, and call to mind other obvious influences arising from the agricultural intercourse between town and country, it is not difficult to see that in proportion as these centers become corrupt, the whole land must suffer. And we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that we are suffering this very day from the unbounded influence, which our cities, swayed as they already are, to so great an extent, by the omnipotence of dollars, are exerting upon us. If there was a healthy religion, raising God above everything, making his law the rule of moral, *political*, commercial and all action, ruling supreme in all our cities, and especially in the hearts of the higher classes, (for it is a mistake to suppose the moral depravity of

the city is confined to its purlieus,) we would not have so much to lament either there or elsewhere.

It is not at all unnatural to have the mind directed from these views, to another agency, which the growth of cities, and expanding trade and the demands for large capitals are sure to call forth, and which may become the means of undermining moral principle in men, and even of impairing the piety of true Christians,—and this is the agency of corporate bodies.

No one, we presume, can doubt the utility of these agents. A great and prosperous country, such as ours, cannot advance without them. Where there are such systems of internal improvement, and such outlays of capital, necessary to conduct successfully our manufacturing, mining and other large interests, the private fortunes of individuals are not to be relied upon. Capital must be added to capital, and man linked to man to guide the employment of the enlarged means. There must be banks, and insurance companies, and other joint stock companies; just as there must be large expenditures, and great manufactories, and extended rail roads and canals. And it is certainly possible to conduct these things in accordance with strict religious principles. But, as things are, the moment these agencies become common, and become sources of wealth, there is a danger arising from them, which no man, who looks at them with any attention, can well fail to observe. So long as we can rest responsibility on the individual, and make him feel that he will be held to a strict account for all his deeds, both among men and under the divine government, we have a wonderful hold upon him. And this thing is to a great extent possible so long as each one acts for himself, in all his relations to Mammon, as well as other relations. While the man has no means of accumulating property save through his personal efforts, whose nature he knows the world is passing constant judgment upon, he will, whether christian or not, be apt to use considerable carefulness. But allow men to throw off direct responsibility; let them stand back and have second causes, as it were, working between them and the actual results which fill their coffers, and we at once have the field of peculiar temptation in full view. Corporations are the very things to enable them to do this. Men are banded together; their

acts are legalized by statutes, and they, now, are permitted to act, not each one for himself, but as one overgrown, *impersonal* man. Responsibility rests no where in particular, that is, on no one more particularly than another. The members of the company are, probably, scattered far and wide, are personal strangers to each other, have no consultation about each other's responsibility,—they simply stand back and let the machine work. It is not strange, that the result often reveals a remarkable want of principle, in the body. Measures are entered upon and carried out successfully, which multitudes of the members of the company would not dare to attempt individually and alone, and each one excuses himself for participation in the iniquity by the extremely satisfactory plea, that he alone cannot control the conduct of the entire corporation. It assists very greatly to relieve men, in such relations, from a soreness of conscience on some occasions, to reflect, that the company is governed by a set of officers, who, it is to be supposed, are better acquainted with what is expedient and proper, than any one else can be. Therefore, without any inquiry as to who is to blame, if the control of the institution is given to ungodly men, or inquiry, as to whether they are ungodly men or not, or any thought of these commands of religion, "Have no fellowship with the works of darkness," "come ye out from among them,"—without any thing of all this, it is deemed safe to go on without personal trouble, so long as large dividends are coming in, and the mass of wealth in hand is thereby increased.

An illustration of the danger to the moral principles of the land, including New England, from such sources, may be seen in the example of many of our rail-roads. And to have something definite to look at, just for a moment regard a road which, running from a neighboring State into our own, unites with other roads, and with them, forms a line of communication between New York and Boston. This road is first established in the recognition of that New England regard for the Sabbath, which has not yet wholly died away. It is successful. Men every where become stock-holders, and they find it profitable. But presently the ungodly spirit of commerce—that spirit, which in the centers of trade so often bids defiance to the God who has given the means of prosperity, begins to

play its game with the new corporation and those now leagued with it, and as the result, and as if to test the moral principle of New England, a train of cars are suddenly sent hurling its ponderous length, from one end of these States to the other on the Sabbath. When a word of remonstrance is uttered against this unwonted innovation, the cry becomes long and loud from the one commercial center and the other, that, while the electric lines, with their instantaneous communications of thought, are running all over the land, and while all the facilities of intercommunication are such as to annihilate space, substituting for the measure of miles that of minutes, it is absolutely necessary that, once in two or three months, a few letters, which have just arrived from England, should be carried between New York and Boston on Sunday. And New England is reminded very condescendingly, that the age of puritanism is past, and she should not wish, or allow any unsightly remnants of that antiquated barbarism, to deform her beauty longer. Then, when the thing has been tried long enough to feel the pulse of community, a great concession is made! The cars for passengers are removed, and the train is a mail train alone! And this is left to accustom the people to the sound of the steam whistle on God's holy day, and prepare the way for,—the end at which all this aims. And we must say the people seem to be remarkably docile under the tutelage. Yea, even Christian men can invest their money in these concerns, and feel that all is well. They would rather that engine and those cars would not run, to be sure, on God's holy day,—but,—ah, there it is,—they are not responsible. They are neither president nor directors, and they have no control over the Post Office department at Washington. Still it is true they are connected with a ^{system} ~~mode~~ of money making, which now insists on some men jeopardizing their souls, for the sake of a little larger dividend to each member of the company. There is no getting away from this. There are those cars, running on the Sabbath because *it pays* to carry the mail, and there are those employees whose Sabbath is turned into a mere secular season, and though they might be wicked enough to use it no better, if they were released from their toil on this day, still, on that account, the employers,—

aiders and abettors in their present sacrilege,—are not any the less guilty.

This is only a single illustration, showing how, even New England is coming under the influence of principles, which, as indicative of what they are still further capable, *deliberately annul the fourth commandment*. But this is not the only agent which is tempting her and the country at large. All over the land, we find the same utter disregard of the Sabbath, by rail-road corporations. And, what is more lamentable still, we find some of the worst of them countenanced, if not controlled, by men standing high in the church. Many of these roads declare large dividends, and not a few even of our New England church members are led to make large investments in them. So it happens, that were we to go through our various communities to-day, we should find multitudes, who would not dare to spend the Sabbath at work on their own farms, or in their own shops or warehouses, composedly holding in their hands the stock of those roads, which make large gains by a systematic disregard of God's law. They know that trains, and extra trains too, are running constantly, while they are praying in the sanctuary for the coming of Christ's kingdom! And they know that their capital is an agent assisting this thing along, because *it pays*. Still they thus employ their wealth, because they can stand aloof from the scene of transgression, and throw the responsibility on presidents and directors, and, it may be, some law of the land, which legalizes the iniquity. And here it is obvious to add,—in these days, it is apparently felt, and by good men too, that the sanction of a public statute at once strips away the guilt from what, without it, would be rank rebellion against the law of God. Just contrive to get conduct labeled, *political action*, and it is sanctified at once, and conscience may stay her reproaches. And that we are fast approaching the point, at which we may expect the passage of laws to suit the fancy of the most liberal minds, is not to be denied.

Now after men have been trained under such influences for some length of time,—after communities have thus been worked upon for years, how can individuals fail to grow less susceptible to moral

influences,—how can hearts fail to grow impatient of restraint in other directions,—how can the precepts of gospel casuistry fail to become irksome, and a religion fail to be demanded, which shall not insist on such peculiar strictness. And thus true religion is suffering among us.

Time forbids us to dwell to the extent we might upon one other result of our worldly prosperity, which lends its potent influence to impair the purity of our piety,—and that is the creation of a money-eyed aristocracy among us, who learn to look down with no little contempt on the lower classes.

We have here a growing evil, which, taking its rise in our cities, as already intimated, is fast spreading over the land. It, to be sure, has not as yet assumed its worst features, for there are still to be found many of the rich who are among the first to honor man as man, and put themselves on a level with their equals in morals and intelligence, without reference to pecuniary standing. But it is a melancholy fact, that these are now the exceptions. The great tendency among the wealthy is to a proud exclusiveness,—to a state in which they, with their dollars, can form a rampart around themselves, across which, those blessed with limited means must not dare to intrude,—whether in search of social intercourse with them, or to controvert their opinions,—a state in which approach to them is possible to a poor man, only as he comes to sue for a favor, or to confess his obligations for favors already received. And that this tendency affects not only the hearts of sheer worldlings might easily be shown. We could point to churches, whose most prominent members, being extremely wealthy, do not even speak to their poorer brethren from one year's end to the other,—who do not even take pains to be acquainted with those who sit at the same communion table with them, celebrating the death of their common Lord,—and who, when they do know them, invariably pass them in the streets, as beneath their notice. Now, especially in such a land as this, such a state of things must be evil, and evil only. We have adopted the principle of man's inherent equality with man; and none hold to the principle with more tenacity, than those in the so-called lower walks of life. It is undoubtedly a correct principle. Men are born free and equal. All men. The grounds of their

equality are inherent, and distinctions are to be built on character and intelligence, and on nothing else. Nor are there to be any distinctions which elevate any class above the position of man in brotherhood with man,—ready and willing at all times to recognize the relationship, and to act upon it with the spirit of Christ. Let therefore any class in the community lay claim to immense superiority over others, simply on the ground of their riches,—let them grow repulsive, domineering, exclusive,—let them look down on the poorer with snperciliousness, and treat them as menial,—and that too, while the intelligence of the lower classes is, through the blessings of our common schools, equal, in the main, to that of the upper, and while their virtues are often far superior to those of the fashionable,—and there can not fail to be such friction and hard feelings on all sides, as tend to destroy the spirit of true godliness. Let this state of things exist in church and state, and the spirit of piety must suffer. The religion of Christ is the great leveler. There are no higher and lower seats around the cross. When men come within its shadow they must all bow together, and all equally low, before a common Lord and Father, and all rest there in the harmony of brethren. Whatever tends therefore to destroy this equality, tends in the same degree to destroy the spirit of true religion. There may be churches still, we are well aware, though there may be no equality among men; and they may be multiplied: but they will bear only a slight resemblance to the apostolic churches, or even to those of our fathers. They will be churches founded and sustained on the principle, that certain classes, simply because they can afford it, may, on the Sabbath, roll in coaches to gorgeous cathedrals, to loll on soft cushions, for an hour,—read hymns, and, perhaps, prayers, from costly bound books,—and listen to high sounding essays on beautiful abstractions,—while it is felt that a humble chapel in some humble locality, where the foot of fashion would not deign to tread, is abundantly sufficient for the accommodation of the worshiping poor. Be it remembered, we do not say we have already arrived at this pitch, in New England, or elsewhere, but we do say, this must be the result of the uninterrupted play of causes, which are at work among us, and have al-

ready effected enough, to show how much more disastrous the consummation of their work must be.

To these considerations others still might be added; but we have time, neither for this, nor to dwell at length on the suggestions already forced upon us, by the considerations already before us. We therefore only add a word in conclusion. We have assembled here to-day, for the avowed purpose of rendering thanks to God for his goodness. This is well. We have cause for thankfulness. But in the present aspect of affairs we must surely see, that we need with our thanksgiving to mingle fervent prayer, that our very prosperity itself may not be allowed to work our moral ruin. There is danger. We have already suffered from our prosperity. The Church is suffering. The whole land is suffering. Nothing will save us but the blessing of God, in renewing, strengthening, and maintaining the pure principles of our fathers' religion in the hearts of the Church, and in the hearts of all men. We can have hope,—we dare have hope, only as we see these principles holding sway every where. Just allow them to fall completely beneath the feet of men in general, in and out of the Church,—as they already have to a fearful extent,—and we are lost. All the talk of demagogues about “manifest destiny,” all the hopes of men for the world's elevation through us, all the formalities of a religion without life, will not save us. The kingdom of Christ, we know, will advance; but we are not to flatter ourselves that God is so dependent on our institutions for its progress, as to perpetuate our nation, when it has forsaken him utterly. When this happens, if it does, we shall rather be in the way of the coming kingdom, and as, in its progress, opposing nation after nation has been destroyed, we also shall then meet a fatal overthrow.

May God avert the catastrophe by turning “the hearts of the children to the fathers,” in a sincere love for the fathers' religion, and a sincere effort to maintain and perpetuate it, in all its strength and beauty!