

## Thanksgiving Address.

November 24th, 1898.

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TEXT:—Psalm 67:5, "Let the people praise thee, O God; Let all the people praise thee."

The observance of a national Thanksgiving Day, with appropriate religious services, is a custom well worthy of our support and sympathy. While on the one hand no one believes less than I that thanksgiving can be called forth at any word of mouth from our authorities, for thanksgiving to be real must be spontaneous, yet on the other hand there is wisdom in the setting apart of a day, when the people as a whole may direct their thoughts to both the individual and the national blessings, and may return thanks to Almighty God therefore. The Bible continually calls us to thanksgiving and praise.

"Enter into his gates with thanksgiving,  
And into his courts with praise,  
For the Lord is good; his mercy is forever,  
And his faithfulness unto all generations."

And again—

"Let the people praise thee, O God;  
Let all the people praise thee."

Accordingly let us look upon the proclamation of our authorities to set apart this day for special thanksgiving, as only another way in which God bids us to lift our hearts to him anew with praise and rejoicing. And shall we not let our thought, today, go beyond even the national causes for gratitude to God, but into the wide-world and seek for causes which should impel the hearts of men everywhere to praise God and give thanks?

But when we think of the things to be thankful for our thought usually turns to what are called the blessings of life—meaning thereby, the material or temporal blessings—like abundance of harvests, or successful investment of funds, or the fortunate result of the employment of our brain or muscle. In other words we think of the things that make life easy and pleasant and comfortable, the things that enrich our homes or minister to the delight of our hearts, and these certainly are among God's good gifts to our life. But not all of us have been blessed in this way. Some of us have seen, perhaps, the fondest of our hopes dashed to the ground. Some loved one, on whom we were leaning, death has snatched away, or sickness laid by. Or it may be that some business venture has failed to return satisfactory results. Possibly now for a twelve-month above the door of earthly ambitions has been written the word of Job's complaint, "But trouble cometh." To both classes alike, to the worldly prospering one, on the one hand, and on the other to the man to whom adversity has come, should this day of thanksgiving be a boon, and because of its national character, should divert our thoughts from self to the nation, and indeed to the world. Any man is fortunate, blessed of God, to whom God has granted just those experiences and conditions which permit him to make the most and the best of himself. The same thing is true of a nation and of the world, and when we consider the opportunities of this kind which have been put into the hands of men, this very year we are led to give devout thanks for the gracious blessings of the all wise God and Father.

(1). But first of all we are reminded that the thanksgiving day among the colonies of England on these northern shores, and from whom we have received the custom, was essentially a home-day—a day when parents and grandparents, children and grand-children, uncles aunts and cousins, all, met about one board and partook of the abundance, greater or less, which God had given in the harvests of field and orchard. It emphasized the home-life. Let us thank God today for the home-life, for the family circle, and if that circle has been broken, let us think of the absent one only to thank God, that in by-gone days, there was the larger circle than today; and especially let us thank God that there is in our hearts the hope which comes through Jesus, that in the life beyond the grave the circle may be renewed, and then—may no face be missing! Let us, too, let the memories of other days, of boyhood, of girlhood, shed their halo around us as with hearts, grateful and joyous, we gather about our tables, spread with the good things of God's bounty, and thank God that the instinct for a home-life was so strong in our fathers and mothers, that the home has been preserved for us with its purity and precious influence.

(2). Then in addition to the direction already given to our thought I wish, secondly, to ask you to consider with me the movements of a more or less world-wide aspect, which have been of a world-wide significance, and in which the Dominion has played an important part.

(3). The first of these movements is the movement towards reform.

This is not saying that in past years there has been no such movement toward reform, but that while in former years such movement was largely local or national, the movement, this year, has been more distinctly of an inter-national character, or when local and national in some respects, nevertheless of an inter-national significance. Probably your thought already has anticipated mine, and you are recalling certain reform impulses of the year. Let me however mention several and I can hardly do more than mention them.

(1). First of all I would mention the impulse to better sanitary conditions. Perhaps the reform movement has been less distinct in this particular, than in the others that we shall speak of later. Other years have seen much work done in this line and great stimulus given thereto. The various large cities are always concerned with problems of sanitation. Regulations of quarantine gave the movement national and inter-national importance. But this year the needs of sanitation growing out of the famine and plague-stricken sections of India; the visit of Col. Warren, under appointment by the U. S. government, to Havana for the purpose of mapping out plans to renovate the sanitary conditions of that city, and his subsequent death from yellow fever, incurred while engaged at his work, together with a larger thought on the part of municipalities touching their responsibility for the public health, have given a special significance this year, to the movement of reform in the direction of sanitation.

(2). Secondly, I would mention the impulse of the reform movement touching the military life. Like a bolt from a clear sky came the rescript of the Czar, proposing to the nations of the earth a Peace Congress, for the purpose of discussing the question of disarmament—especially of the European nations. We are informed that it has been announced from St. Petersburg that the governments invited, including American, European and Asiatic, are to send three delegates each to this congress.

A moment's reflection on the number of men employed in military pursuits, or might be employed at short notice will convince one of the significance of this proposal. According to the Government Messenger, the official press-organ of the Russian government, Russia is the chief offender in the matter of over-arming, and of the great European powers Great Britain is the least. Russia's army in time of peace is more than a million strong. Mobilized it would number two and one-eighth millions. France comes next with a standing army of six hundred thousand and a war-footing—counting all reserves—of four millions. Great Britain's army is the smallest, numbering two hundred and twenty-two thousand men in peace and seven hundred and twenty thousand in time of war. The Messenger farther computes that throughout the world there are five and one quarter millions of men under arms, and that this number could be raised to forty-four and a quarter millions in case of war. Europe spends more than one billion dollars (£250,000,000) to maintain her armed peace. When we think of this enormous number of men taken from useful employment and instead of being producers of wealth are mere consumers thereof, and of this enormous sum of money spent by Europe alone to maintain her armies in the time of peace, something of the significance of the Czar's proposal begins to dawn upon us. And when we speculate about the wealth which might accrue to the world, if these five millions of men and more were to become producers, as well as consumers, of wealth, and reflect on the results in education, spread of the gospel, and in a thousand and one other ways, if that billion of dollars were diverted from its present channel, to commerce and the peaceful arts, we can not help the thought that the Czar's manifests is the most significant proposal for a decade, if not for the century.

What if, as some witty newspaper man has remarked, the Czar has not even succeeded in disarming suspicion! What if the Scotch preachers of the Dundee Presbytery—so the dispatches state—have actually voted down a resolution commending the avowed purpose of the rescript, and instead declared that Great Britain should increase her armament! The fact of the coming of the proposal, of its coming from the source it did, the fact of things proposed, things in the line of peace and human brotherhood, should be quite enough to lead every Christian heart to bow before God and give thanks for such a clear manifestation of the working of His Spirit among the affairs of men.

"Out of the warlike north  
Cometh the peace-note forth,  
O clarions sound it! bugles ring!  
Around the round earth let it swing,  
Till answers thee all the world, young Czar,  
With lips that know not war."

"Nothing so great, O Czar,  
Nothing has been so good  
As thy strong, sweet voice of brotherhood,  
Which marks the progress of Christian life  
With the thought, and word, and hope sublime  
To free the world from war!"

"Thy call, heroic Czar,  
Oh may the round world heed  
Responsive in spirit, word and deed!  
Till battle-banners, folded and furled,  
Blot from the brow of the beautiful world,  
The blood-red stains of war!"

"So may the century's sun  
In radiance go down;  
On its closing years thou hast placed a crown,  
In which is a dazzling jewel set,  
Whose luster the world will never forget,  
Whose light will never be done."

Moreover, the Czar's cry for peace finds an echo in the words of Kaiser William III, as he stood in the Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem, and declared that he

wished to sound the cry of "Peace on earth," and then renewed the vow of his ancestors, "I and my house will serve the Lord." Taking from these words all sentiment and the plain fact remains, that another of Europe's war-kings is on record as desiring peace. It is a somewhat curious situation which these two war-lords present, but nevertheless they have sounded a cry for peace and brotherhood, which—let us pray—will accomplish its mission of mercy, and the sooner, the better.

Again, in France the military has had a set-back, of a different kind to be sure yet a very significant one. I refer to the opening of the Dreyfus case in the Court of Cassation, or the highest court of appeal in France. Whatever may result, the fact of the reopening in a civil court and the circumstances which have rendered such a procedure possible, make a distinct gain for justice and for civil process of law against military court-martial and authority.

(3). Thirdly, I would call your attention to the impulse the reform-movement has given political matters. We have only to mention Cuba, and the Philippines to remember that several millions of our brothers have made distinct gains in political freedom. But among the most astounding events of the year have been the attempted political reforms in China—in sluggish conservative China. By a series of imperial edicts the emperor sought to bring his empire into line with the march of the 19th century; but they were of such a revolutionary character, that the emperor was forced from his throne and the wheels of progress were turned back. But it is not the result that astonishes us, but the attempt itself and that there should be even an idea of making the attempt. The spirit of reform is abroad in China and we shall yet hear of marvellous things done in the celestial empire.

(4). Fourthly, I would call your attention to the impulse of the reform-movement touching temperance. At this point I would like to refer to the recent Plebiscite taken in the Dominion. From one or two points of view it was rather discouraging. We are informed that of the one million two hundred thousand voters of Canada, only five hundred and fifty thousand registered at the polls—less than half as you see. Of this number the majority for prohibition will not exceed twenty thousand. The most discouraging feature is not the loss of the battle, but the fact that six hundred thousand voters did not go to the polls at all; and that if every vote cast had been for prohibition the stay-at-home voters would have defeated the movement. Upon them is the responsibility for the defeat.

But on the other hand the movement itself has many encouraging features for us. The fact the people were asked to express an opinion in the matter was a distinct gain for temperance legislation. And then there is the additional fact that, because of the agitation of the matter, the people have been more or less educated in matters of temperance. In other words the movement was a distinct gain for temperance education. It shows us, too, that the matter of the saloon will not down until the saloon is down, and that the spirit of temperance reform has come to stay and will stay until our homes and our children are protected from the curse of rum. The mere matter of defeat counts for little alongside the new impulse towards temperance. Reform-movements move slowly, but sooner or later righteousness in matters of temperance is bound to come and I for one thank God that the Canadians as a people have inaugurated the movement for national prohibition.

(5). The second movement, of which I wish to speak, is the movement towards larger brotherhood.

The Czar's rescript of which we have already spoken was in this direction. In the United States the movement of the fraternal spirit has welded together the north and the south, the east and the west as they have not been welded together since the civil war. The temperance movement in Canada, to which I have just referred, was another expression of this fraternal spirit. Apart from these, however, there have been two concrete illustrations of the movement that I wish to mention.

(1). There has been an added impulse towards church union. This impulse has manifested itself in the United States and also in Canada. Let me call your attention especially to the impulse in Canada. While movements in this direction have occurred in past years in the Dominion, yet during this year the impulse towards church union has been given fresh impetus. The meetings held recently for the purpose of promoting church union among the evangelical churches of Canada have been characterized as significant in three ways, "First, the enthusiasm; secondly, the presence of notable men; and thirdly, the clear setting forth of the principles which must underlie any effective union." All this is full of hope for our Christianity. For there is a Christian unity without Christian uniformity much larger and more Christian than has yet been attained by our churches. We have wasted too much energy telling people why we are Baptist, or Methodist, or Presbyterian and too little, why we are Christian. I understand that a Baptist pulpit offers the opportunity to preach Christ, and that a Methodist pulpit and Presbyterian pulpit give the same opportunity; that it is the business of these pulpits to bombard the strongholds of Satan, not to fire red-hot shell at one another. With all my heart I wish that there might be a union of the evangelical churches of these Maritime Provinces, so that there should be inter-denominational comity in the matter of establishing new churches on new fields.