

which not a few good men are making still. Jacob says in brief: "If God will bless me and give me just what I desire, I will then build Him an altar, and give Him back a tenth." A selfish vow, as you can see, and one which Jacob would learn to amend when he passed from Bethel and reached Peniel where he saw the face of God. Contrast the "canny" caution of such a vow with the magnificent self-abandonment of Job when he cries: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him," and you see the difference between a man who thinks that the best possession in the world is the gift of God, and a man who thinks that the best possession in the world is God Himself.

I wonder if we took our selfishness out of our thanksgiving, how much some of us would have left. There are too many believers in what Emerson calls "a pistareen providence," which, when a man wants a loaf of bread, simply hands it over to him. Cicero tells us that the atheistic philosopher Diagoras, when visiting Samothrace, was taken into the temple there and asked to view the votive tablets which had been hung up by those escaped from shipwreck. "Canst thou any longer deny the providence of the gods," they asked him, "when thou seest all these acknowledgments of their power?" "Ah," replied Diagoras, "I should like to hear the testimony of those who lie buried beneath the waves." It was a harsh appeal, you may say, but it is one which must be heard before we are able to gauge the measure of true thanksgiving in human history.

Either God takes care of us all the time or He does not take care of us at all. It is utterly impossible to stop midway between these two conclusions, or to divide our life into two hemispheres one of which is illumined by the rays of divine sunshine, while the other lies in darkness. Providence is not a capricious thing which visits this man and leaves that one, or which comes and goes uncertainly. It is the breath of life, and in it we have our being wherever we are, or whatever the circumstances which surround us.

And besides, how ill fitted we are to determine what things, even on the selfish principle, demand the greatest thanksgiving. We are like little children, oftentimes quite unable to judge what is best for us, and needing the guidance and discipline of the Father's hand. We apportion the events of life into two classes of good and evil, but our division has no warrant in the word of God. There is no calamity but sin, and that is not a gift of the Father who is in