

## Our Contributors.

### Thanksgiving Sermon.

BY PROF. W. G. JORDAN, D.D.

Righteousness exalteth a nation ;  
Sin is a reproach to any people.

Prov. xiv 34.

Piety and patriotism are two things that go well together ; love of country is all the purer and sweeter when it is linked to love of God. These two experiences were blended in the religious life of the Hebrew people. The book of psalms shows us that even under the dim revelation, and elaborate ceremonial of those days it was possible for men of simple faith to attain to deep spiritual experience. Though forms of faith and worship differ, the Holy Spirit's dealings with man's inmost life are very similar. In some of the prophets also we find a partial recognition of that deep truth concerning personal responsibility and individual faith, which was afterwards to be so fully and clearly developed in the teaching of the Apostle Paul. But in the religious life of Israel, the family, the tribe and the nation were regarded as bound into a living unity by a common obligation to that God who had redeemed them, and who watched over them with unsleeping care. Their national life had its origin in God's purpose, in their days of real power their national policy was shaped by the will of God. To such a people there was little need to declare the truth that religion ought to be the most powerful influence in a nation's life, and that God must be publicly and solemnly recognized. Such truth and duty they acknowledged as a part of their common citizenship, although, like other people they often lived far below that noble creed which gave them inspiration in their most heroic hours. Since the days when Hebrew prophets uttered those deep fiery words, which the world will not willingly let die, and Hebrew poets sung those songs which still re-echo in our sanctuaries, there have been many changes in the conditions of society, and many conflicts concerning the relationship of Church and State. We cannot now trace the history of these social changes, or enter into the details of these great controversies. We are bound, however, to express our belief that religion must ever hold a high place in the life of any nation which is to attain to pure and abiding strength. We accept this as a great truth which will live, though men may hold conflicting opinions about Church and State, and though here and there particular forms of church government may be shattered.

On this Thanksgiving Day we give public thanks to God for the mercies of another year. What we do now, both formally and fervently, many of us have already done in the shrine of our own spirits, and in the quiet worship of our own homes. Now, then, through Jesus Christ our Saviour, and as a part of the Canadian people, we render thanks for the peace and prosperity of another year. Famine, pestilence and war have not made sad havoc within our border. In these days we are in danger of taking this as a matter of course, but our imagination is dull and our gratitude is dead if on this day we do not realize how much we owe to the merciful care of the Almighty. As we think of the brave, godly men who for conscience sake, crossed the ocean and

did such great things on this continent in days gone by, as we remember the hardy men who have come to this land from pious homes across the sea, we are a degenerate people if we do not raise the psalm of thanksgiving, praising God that the lines are fallen to us in pleasant places and he has given to us a goodly heritage. Our presence here shows that we are agreed in this, but let me point out that behind the public thanksgiving there lies this belief that religion should be a real force in the nation's life. Our little town is a type of many scattered throughout the length and breadth of this land. Every week the six churches open their doors to many devout worshippers, many earnest seekers after God. In other places also in our town faithful men and women meet for Christian worship and work. A very fair proportion of these are children, who, during the week are studying this world's science and literature, are gathered in the Sabbath school to hear the word of God. We regard this as ministering through the blessing of God to the deeper life of the nation, nourishing continually a nobler morality and stimulating a sweeter social purity.

There are those at the present day who prefer to be able to build a strong morality and a kindly righteousness upon a scientific or aesthetic basis, apart altogether from belief in God or trust in Jesus Christ. Fortunately that experiment can not be tried very well in this land. When some scientific men wished to show that life might come spontaneously from things not alive, one difficulty in making the experiment was that it was almost impossible to get air in which there is no life. God is so rich that he has filled the air we breathe and the dust upon which we tread with living germs. When by mighty heat these men had destroyed all pre-existing life, life did not spring forth spontaneously to disturb the reign of death. So far the law still holds, life from life, linking all finite creatures to the eternal life of God. It would be difficult for moral philosophers to find a place in the heart of Christian civilization altogether free from those gracious spiritual influences which radiate from the cross of Christ. Theorists who think they can build up all needful forms of personal goodness and social morality without prayer to God and love for Christ, would perhaps do well to try their experiment in some places where they would not be able to borrow so much from Christian teaching and the example of the living Christ. Not in vain has the Bible, during many centuries demanded the submission of the soul to God, and called society to manifold forms of righteousness. We would not try the experiment of suspending worship even for one day, for we know that out of it there comes the purest stimulus to a life of goodness.

*Righteousness.* This is one of the great words of Scripture. It is constantly recurring in various forms. It describes the character of God who rules in righteousness, who vindicates His laws and faithfully keeps His promises. It describes the life of the godly man who meditates upon the perfect law, who dwells

by the refreshing streams of grace and brings forth the never failing fruits of simple goodness. It describes the state of the nation where loyalty to God cleanses the home from impurity, the church from hypocrisy, and society from dishonesty. In speaking of righteousness, then, we are speaking of that of which God's word constantly speaks. There are many themes upon which Revelation is silent, or speaks with great reserve. Upon such subjects we may well meditate in silence and wait for fuller light, but open the book at any page and you will find precepts and promises which call men to righteousness of life. Upon this subject the inspired teachers from the beginning to the end spend their marvellous stores of energy and wonderful wealth of illustration. One of the greatest literary critics of this century tells us that the Old Testament represents God as being "a power, not of ourselves, making for righteousness." We reply that God is not an energy or a stream of tendency. He is a living, thoughtful, loving Person brooding with sympathetic care over the life of men. But the critic has struck the key note of Old Testament teaching. There is one aim running through all its variety of command and promise, of biography and history, of prophecy and psalm, that is righteousness in thought and action. In the home peaceful purity ; in the market, straight forward honesty ; in the judgment hall, justice. This is not taught in any vague, sentimental way. We cannot get lost in philosophical abstractions or poetic fancies. The laws of Heaven are brought to bear upon the life of earth with terrible directness. Our sins are dealt with in detail and we feel that the eye of God is looking upon the corrupt ways of men. Nowhere else do we meet with such mighty denunciations of that lustfulness which steals the fairest bloom from human life, of that grasping greed which grinds the face of the poor, of that tyrannical passion which forgets all human obligations in its feverish thirst for gain, of that hollow hypocrisy which robs religion of its inspiration and reduces to a helpless mockery. Nowhere else do we find such glowing descriptions of the robust health, the calm peace, the buoyant hopefulness, the unfading joy which come to the people who by God given strength walk in righteous ways.

"Righteousness exalteth a nation, sin is a reproach to any people." All history is a living commentary on this text. We owe a debt of gratitude to the historian who consecrates busy days and laborious nights in writing for us the rise and fall of some great empire. In ponderous volumes he embodies for our use the results of years of patient research. He revives for us the dead past, presenting it to us with learned accuracy and with dramatic force. Truth is stranger than fiction, and all this manifold story of kings and courts, of vulgar mobs and noble heroes entrances us ; but we sum it all up in these words, righteousness exalteth a nation, sin is a reproach to any people ; the nation rose through its righteousness, its piety and patriotism, and fell through its corruption. The clash of outward foes may have hastened the final catastrophe, but these only obtained an easy victory when unrighteousness, distressing to men and hateful to God, had gradually robbed the nation of its power. The great Roman nation was