National Republican
SATURDAY MORNING ..... NOVEMBER 20, 1869.

Thanksgiving Day.

HOW IT WAS OBSERVED.

INTERESTING CHURCH SERVICES.

WESLEY CHAPEL.

Eloquent Discourse by Rev. B. Peyton Brown.

At Wesley Chapel, on Thanksgiving Day, Rev. B. Peyton Brown delivered the following eloquent discourse:

"In 1632, Boston was but a village. The Colonists were then suffering their heaviest trials. Food was exceedingly scarce, and prospects of a famine became daily more evident. On a bright afternoon in February, Governor Winthrop walked forth to visit some fields; he came suddenly upon a child weeping bitterly. What ails thee, my little girl" said the Governor. "I am so hungry," was the reply. A voice called from an upper window: "Come in my child." He, looking up, saw at the window the emaciated form of the suffering mother. His heart was touched. He walked on, devising means for the relief of his suffering people. A public meeting was proposed and called. It met at Parson Stilbrook's. A hunting expedition, though fraught with danger and toil in the wilderness, was resolved upon. But who will go, was the question; who has strength of heart and limb for the work! We can compel no one; who will go! "I will," said an old man by the name of Mason, "I will wander far into the wilderness; God will be with me, and perhaps give me game to bring back; if not I can lie down to my last sleep in the forest as well as here. I have no family to mourn my loss; I know where my wife and children are." With a wave of his hand towards the grave-yard, for thereafter lay, he sat down. Noble old man; such are the real heroes of earth—who sacrifice themselves for the good of others. Instantly a score said "I will go." It was arranged they should start on the next day but one, and that day should be observed as a day of fasting and prayer by all the people for the success of the expedition. The day was passed; night calmly reposed upon the sleeping city; morning is dawning upon Boston. John Mason, full of a noble purpose, is the first to walk in the open air. He looks toward the ocean; quick his eye dilates, his cheek flushes, he shouts "a ship," "a ship," "the ship is coming;" men, women and children rush into the streets, tears of joy are flowing, food has come. The fleet arrives, the people are saved. The proclamation of the governor is changed; and instead of spending the day as one of "fasting and prayer," it was recommended that all should unite in "Thanksgiving to God." And thus, in Boston, under these impressive circumstances, was observed the first Thanksgiving Day of our Pilgrim Fathers, as the "annals" of New England inform us.*

*Prior to this occasion there had been days of rejoicing observed by many of the people, but none by official proclamation, and the general observance as to be worthy designated as a Thanksgiving Day.

With them this service was no idle form or hollow ceremony; they felt profoundly grateful. God had brought them deliverance in the day of extremity; saved them in the hour of peril.

Subsequent to this period it has been the custom of our rulers to appoint days of thanksgiving for the national blessings of Providence and grace, or the direct interposition of Almighty God for our deliverance from special and particular trouble—a custom which all devout hearts will not only approve but observe with devotion and gratitude.

On the 14th day of December, 1777, nearly 92 years ago, when our fathers had achieved success over Burgoyne, a day of "thanksgiving" was observed by order of Congress. When this "proclamation" reached Washington he was on his march to Valley Forge, but he halted his whole army and gave stringent orders that the day be observed as a day of thanksgiving to God. Such was the spirit and faith and practice of our fathers. For do not many issue proclamations in our day who never observe them?

It is not my purpose, however, to trace the history of special "thanksgiving days." My text leads my thoughts into another channel, viz: The duty of a daily, constant praise and thanksgiving to God. "I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth."

The constant habit of grateful acknowledgment to God for the daily manifestations of his grace and the blessings of his providence is the duty of man. Indeed, it is impossible for one to be truly grateful only on special occasions. Gratitude to God is a habit of the man. It is an emotion of the heart which grace must awaken and habit cultivate and develop.

David did not bless the Lord with his lips; his praise was not formal and cold. "Bless the Lord, O, my soul, and all within me, bless his holy name." "Bless the Lord, O, my soul, and forget not all" or any of "his benefits" "who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases."

Many who are willing to set apart one day in the year for thanksgiving, who even come to church on such occasions to hear the minister descant upon the special mercies and peculiar blessings of the past; to harangue upon the material greatness of our country, or discuss the state and national questions of the day—may be entertained and interested, and, should the interpretation given of Providence chance to favor their peculiar view of these questions—never, perhaps, spend a moment in prayerful meditation upon the goodness and mercy of Almighty God vouchsafed to them in the daily blessings of his grace and providence. What avail the forms, the services of such? It is nothing worth in the sight of heaven. "God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

How much of this form of gratitude—and is it not more, real infidelity—lurks in the hearts of men! Many who have faith in their creeds, cherish much of infidelity in their nature, and it crops out in their words and lives continually. Even McCauley, a Christian by profession, in the smooth periods of his great history of England, has exposed the defective weakness of his faith at the questions of divine providence. He has just been describing the landing of William, Prince of Orange, in England, after his most eventful voyage to that island, and the changes of weather which had insured the success of the enterprise, and thus proceeds: "The weather had indeed served the Protest cause as well that some men of more piety than judgment fully believed the ordinary laws of nature to have been suspended for the special protection of liberty and religion of England. Exactly hundred years before, they said, the invincible by man, had been scattered by the wrath of God. Civil freedom and the reformed religion were again in jeopardy, and again the evident elements had fought for the good cause. As soon as the landing had been effected public thanks were returned for the special protection accorded to the enterprise. The troops, taught to regard themselves as favorites of heaven, were inspired with new courage." Mark the sneer of this historian at the faith of these earnest men in the superintending providence of God—that Jehovah could and did employ even the elements to aid in accomplishing his plans among men.

Here, unconsciously it may be, McCauley goes further than the infidel Strauss, who in one of his arguments against the reality of miracles held this language:

"Jesus is said on one occasion to have fed five thousand persons miraculously, but did every day supplies the wants of unnumbered myriads.

"Jesus is said to have given sight to the blind, and even life to the dead; but sensation and vitality are the daily gifts of God to the world in cases past all reckoning." Here even this infidel admits the direct agency of God in the affairs of daily life.

What is our faith, feeling and experience upon this point? In our creeds we admit the divine presence and agency in our daily life; yet how strangely do facts in our history contradict this theory. What self-glorification, egotism we feel when we have achieved anything of note in science, art, mechanics, politics, theology, or in any vocation of life. We did it, and like Herod, we will allow men to render us all the glory. We forget that God is the reason we exist, cased with the light by which we were able to see came from Almighty God, who gave life and form to our thoughts, and enabled us to bring them into maturity and manhood.

In looking back upon the events which have befallen us, how much we attribute to the arm of flesh, and how little honor give to God.

My wisdom, my strength extricated me from this misfortune; my foresight and penetration saved me from a second; my might and courage carried me through a third.

Thus we feel and speak constantly. But whoever sits down and considers life's history in the least religious sense—the amazing turns in his favor, sometimes in the most unpromising cases, the many personal deliverances which have preserved him, the manner in which he has passed through difficulties—but must feel that God has preserved him, that he has been kept by a higher power than he could direct by wisdom which he did not possess.

David spoke justly when he said, "Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion and a bear and took a lamb out of the flock; and I went out after him and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth; and when he arose against me, I caught him by the beard and smote him and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear, and this uncircumcised Philistine will be as one of them." Now mark the source of his confidence: "For the Lord, who delivered me out of the paw of the bear, he will also deliver me out of his hand." God was his strength.

Again, this infidelity of heart, distrust of God, crops out in the confidence we repose in our arms for the defense of our country. Regardless of the teachings of history, we rely on our armies and navies, and forget that God is the God of battles, and that "vain is the help of man."

It is nothing worth in the sight of heaven. "God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

How much of this form of gratitude—and is it not more, real infidelity—lurks in the hearts of men! Many who have faith in their creeds, exclude him from the government of human affairs because he does proper to employ secondary causes in working out his great designs under the sun. Such men, this form of infidelity had no place in the hearts of our Pilgrim Fathers as they observed their first thanksgiving day. They regarded the arrival of the ship in time to save their lives as the direct interposition of God—by whose tides and winds she had been brought safely into port. Who doubts it? I do not. "God reigns, let the earth be silent."

Could we exercise the simple yet sublime "faith in God" that looks right up to him as our father—the giver of all our comforts, our shield against danger, our constant and sufficient portion—what joy we would enkindle in our hearts! What burning zeal would mark our devotion! "How humbly and upright would we walk with God," and what a blessed influence exert for His cause among our fellows.

Do we really feel in our hearts that God is present and controls in the affairs of daily life? For this conviction lies at the foundation of all real gratitude or thanksgiving.

Come, let us look into our hearts and examine our faith to-day, for some times men who are scarcely aware of it, who have God in their creeds, cherish much of infidelity in their nature, and it crops out in their words and lives continually. Even McCauley, a Christian by profession, in the smooth periods of his great history of England, has exposed the defective weakness of his faith at the questions of divine providence. He has just been describing the landing of William, Prince of Orange, in England, after his most eventful voyage to that island, and the changes of weather which had insured the success of the enterprise, and thus proceeds: "The weather had indeed served the Protest cause as well that some men of more piety than judgment fully believed the ordinary laws of nature to have been suspended for the special protection of liberty and religion of England. Exactly hundred years before, they said, the 'armada' invincible by man, had been scattered by the wrath of God. Civil freedom and the reformed religion were again in jeopardy, and again the evident elements had fought for the good cause. As soon as the landing had been effected public thanks were returned for the special protection accorded to the enterprise. The troops, taught to regard themselves as favorites of heaven, were inspired with new courage." Mark the sneer of this historian at the faith of these earnest men in the superintending providence of God—that Jehovah could and did employ even the elements to aid in accomplishing his plans among men.

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